

Reducing possum numbers in the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Forest

Important information – Proposed 1080 possum control operation

Greater Wellington and Wellington Water Limited propose to undertake an aerial possum control operation in the Wainuiomata Regional Park and the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area, using the pesticide, sodium fluoroacetate (1080). We are proposing to carry out the operation during suitable weather conditions from Late April 2025 onwards.

Area

The operational area covers approximately 7,200 hectares, located in the Remutaka Ranges, east of Wainuiomata (See map attached). The area includes the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area, where no public access is permitted and Wainuiomata Regional Park.

All land within the proposed operational area is owned by Greater Wellington. Most of it is managed as a source of water for treatment and supply to Wellington, Porirua, Lower Hutt and Upper Hutt cities.

OSPRI NZ had approval to undertake an aerial 1080 operation in this area in 2024. However, this operation did not proceed due to unsuitable weather conditions.

Why are we doing it?

Our Key Native Ecosystem (KNE) programme identifies and protects some of the most significant natural sites in the region, helping to ensure natural habitats are healthy and able to support our native plants and animals. The Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area and Wainuiomata Regional Park make up one of our most important KNE sites. Most of the area's forest is largely unchanged since Europeans arrived in New Zealand and it includes the largest and most pristine area of lowland forest in the lower North Island. The area is a significant habitat for native bird species such as tītipounamu (rifleman), kākārīki, pōpokatea (whitehead), koekoeā (long-tailed cuckoo) and kiwi.

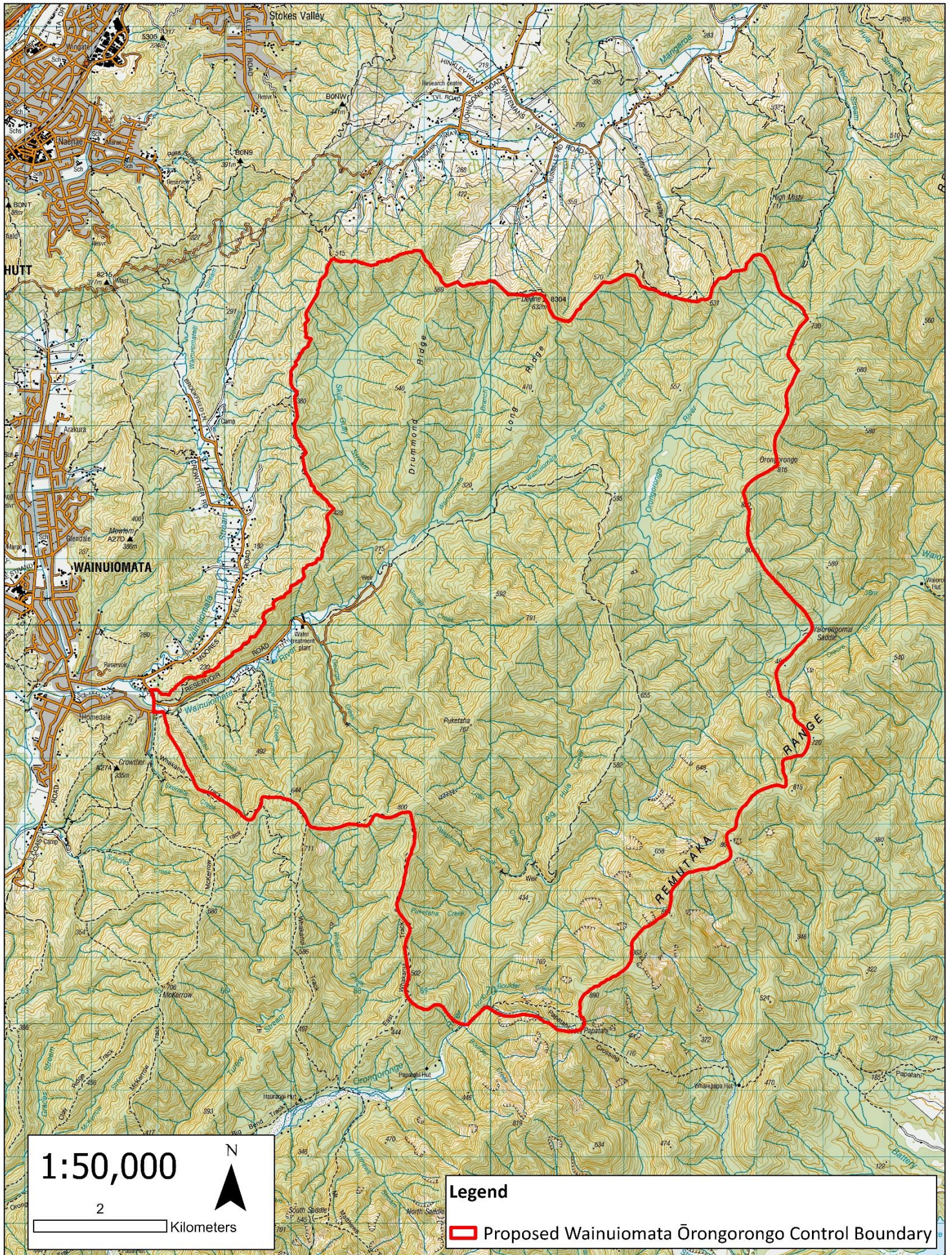
We need to protect this area from possums to preserve its distinctive forest and ensure the long-term survival of the native species that depend on it.

Another key objective of possum control in the Water Collection Area is to preserve raw water quality and minimise the extent of water treatment necessary.

Healthy terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems have a positive impact on water quality. This means that managing the key threats to our native biodiversity also manages those associated with our water quality. Possums threaten both of these and therefore need to be managed. If the health of the forest is allowed to degrade, it will eventually impact the catchment's ability to provide healthy fresh water for our communities.

We propose to control possums across the area to ensure that their numbers remain low for as long as possible. Currently, the best tool we have for this is aerially sown 1080 baits. This method has the additional benefit of controlling rats and stoats. Rats will die when they consume possum baits, while stoats will be killed when they consume the carcasses of poisoned rats and possums. A reduction in these introduced predators will further protect native plants and birds, especially prior to spring bird fledging.





Wainuiomata Ōrongorongo proposed possum control boundary

Map displayed in NZGD 2000 New Zealand Transverse Mercator

Planning and permissions

If the proposed operation proceeds, it will be subject to strict safety, quality-assurance and monitoring requirements. Helicopters will be equipped with Global Positioning System (GPS) navigational technology to ensure the bait is accurately placed within agreed operational areas and identified 'exclusion zones' are avoided.

The use of 1080 requires consent from the Medical Officer of Health. It also must comply with the Hazardous Substances & New Organisms Act, the Resource Management Act and the Health and Safety at Work Act.

We will engage with our mana whenua partners to gain feedback on the proposed operation. We will seek to understand iwi priorities and values associated with the operational area and the positive or negative impacts that the operation might have on these. Feedback received from iwi will form part of the application that is reviewed by the Medical Officer of Health.

Proposed Control method

First, non-toxic tan-coloured "pre-feed" cereal pellets would be sown by helicopter within the operational area. This gives possums a taste for the bait, encouraging them to eat the toxic pellets once they are sown. The pre-feeding process increases possum searching and feeding behaviour, increasing control effectiveness.

About five to ten days after the non-toxic pellets are sown, helicopters would sow cereal pellets containing the pesticide sodium fluoroacetate (1080). 1080 pellets are 20mm in diameter, are cinnamon lured and coloured green to make them unattractive to birds.

Each pellet contains 0.15% of 1080 and will be applied at a rate of 2kg per hectare. That's the equivalent of less than one small laundry powder box of pellets per rugby-field-sized area.

Why have we proposed this method?

Aerial control is particularly suited for this operation given the size and nature of the area that we need to treat. Aerial control is a highly effective, cost-efficient and safe method of controlling mammalian pests, particularly possums, rats and stoats. Although we often use ground control methods, the rugged nature of this forested terrain, and lack of access and track networks, makes ground control methods unfeasible. Previous aerial 1080 possum control operations have been completed in the proposed area five times between 1999 and 2019.

In June 2011, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment strongly endorsed the continued use of 1080 in New Zealand.



Pre-feed pellets



1080 pellets

Who will be affected?

If the proposed operation proceeds, we will need to close the operational area to all recreational users for two days following the 1080 application so main tracks can be cleared of 1080 pellets. Following this, walking and tramping will be permitted in approved areas if precautions on the poison warning signs are followed.

The operation will have further effects on certain activities:

People with dogs - will be advised to stay clear of the area until all baits have become non-toxic and possum carcasses have decomposed. Decomposition is climate dependant but is expected to take approximately six months following the 1080 application.

Hunters – there is an annual ballot to undertake hunting within the forest every April, the 2025 ballot will be revised if baiting is to occur in late April. No hunting access is available in the forest at any other time during the year.

Adjoining landowners and graziers – all adjoining landowners will be notified of the operation. Boundary fences need to be secure so that livestock cannot enter the operational area. Neighbouring properties will receive further notifications before the application of prefeed and 1080 baits.

Interested parties - Information sheets and operational maps will be provided to all known local interested parties, including:

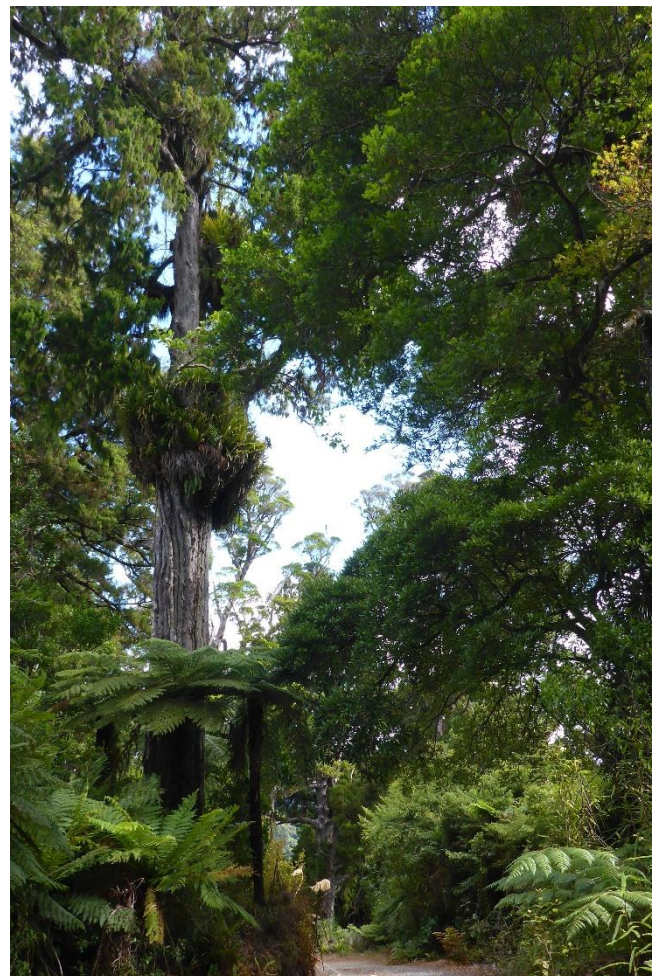
- User groups (including hunting clubs, tramping clubs, Forest and Bird, and Wellington Botanical Society)
- Schools and early childhood centres
- Police, medical centres and veterinary clinics
- District and City Councils.

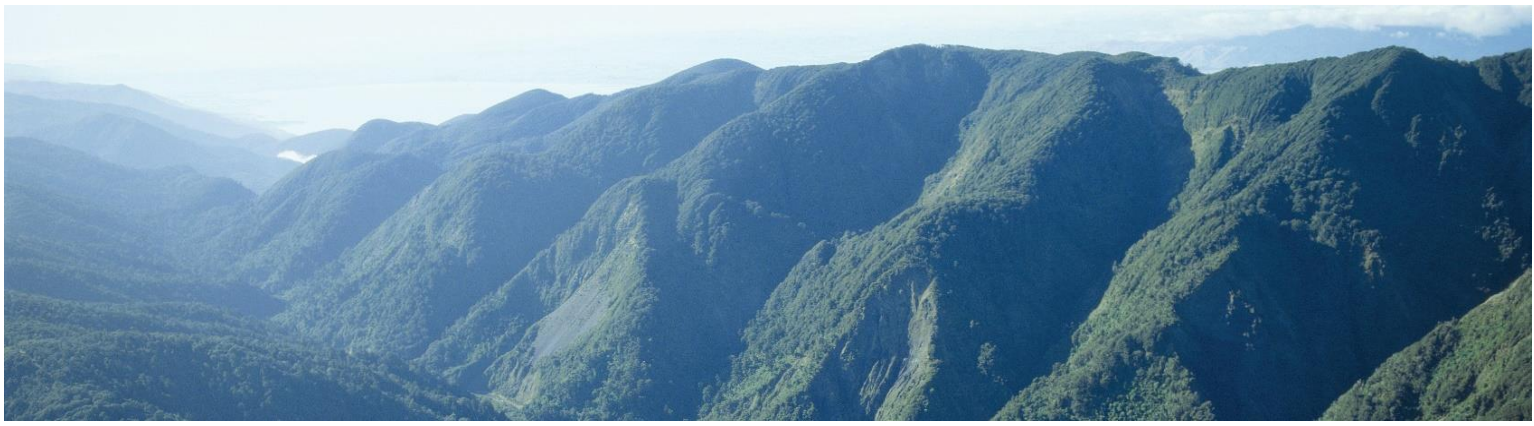
We will put up warning signs and information boards before the operation starts. These will remain in place until poison residues are no longer present.

We will issue statements and updates to the media, including local newspapers. We will also provide detailed information on our website – www.gw.govt.nz/1080ops

Safe drinking water

Local health authorities apply strict conditions to aerial operations so that drinking water supplies are not contaminated. 1080 is an organic, water-soluble and biodegradable substance that is readily broken down by bacteria and other micro-organisms in the environment. Safety has been confirmed by tests on several thousand water samples taken after aerial 1080 operations over many years.





KEY INFORMATION

The proposed operation presents no risk to human or pet health as long as these precautions are followed:

- If entering the operational area, follow the advice on warning signs at all main access points.
- Do not handle any bait or allow children to wander unsupervised in the area.
- Do not bring dogs into the operational area. Dogs are particularly susceptible to 1080. They must not be allowed access to bait or poisoned carcasses, which remain toxic to dogs until they have fully decomposed.
- Treat the area outside the operation boundary with care as well as possums may consume 1080 baits and die outside of the operational boundary.
- Avoid taking deer for consumption within a two km radius of the operational area and avoid taking pigs for a five km radius, as recommended by The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). MPI also advise that hunting should cease in an area for four months following 1080 baiting.

We will be monitoring the breakdown of toxic baits and possum carcasses, and when these have decomposed, the poison warning signs will be officially removed, and the public will be able to resume normal activities in the area.

We'll also put a notice up on our website – www.gw.govt.nz/1080ops when this occurs

Consultation Feedback

We're interested to receive your comments on this proposal, either supportive or providing detail where you consider operation changes should be made.

Please send all feedback to the Senior Advisor Supply, Greater Wellington Regional Council by 12th March 2025

Anton Jones - Senior Advisor Supply, Pest Animals
Greater Wellington Regional Council
1056 Fergusson Drive
Upper Hutt 5140
Or email: Anton.Jones@gw.govt.nz

Further information:

Find out more about 1080 - <https://predatorfreenz.org/toolkits/trapping-baiting-toolkit/bush-large-areas/1080-an-overview/>

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/pests-and-threats/methods-of-control/1080/>

www.gw.govt.nz | 0800 496 734