

# Wainuiomata-Ōrongorongo WCA Forest Restoration Project



**The Wainuiomata-Ōrongorongo Water Collection Area (WCA) is one of the region's main water supply catchments. It includes a special area of lowland native rainforest. Greater Wellington manages the forest to protect native plants and wildlife and the quality of drinking water. To restore the forest, we're embarking on an ambitious project to remove feral deer, pigs and goats from the WCA, and keep them out.**

## Area

The Wainuiomata-Ōrongorongo WCA is 7,400 hectares of native forest in the headwaters of the two rivers. It has been managed as a public water supply catchment for over 100 years. It includes some of the best native rainforest in the North Island. The forest was never logged because it was set aside early as a public water supply. Most other lowland rainforest in the region was logged for timber and cleared for farming.

The water collection area is closed to the public except for limited special events.

Greater Wellington manages the forest to protect drinking water quality and to protect the special values of the forest itself. Possums and introduced predators are controlled and the area is home to native birds including tītīpounamu/rifleman and kākāriki/yellow crowned parakeet. North Island brown kiwi live in the forest, having made their own way there from their release site in Remutaka Forest Park.

Greater Wellington has controlled feral deer, pigs and goats in the catchments for decades but has previously lacked the resources to attempt eradication. Because the area is surrounded by other forest land where control is limited, new animals are always moving into the area. In the 2023-2034 Long-term Plan, money was set aside to allow us to better protect this precious forest.

## Why is it being done?

Despite being protected for water supply, the forest of the Wainuiomata-Ōrongorongo WCA has been suffering the impacts of feral deer, pigs and goats for decades.

The plants that feral deer and goats like to eat are missing from the forest understory. The big trees in the canopy are healthy but beneath them the forest floor is almost bare, so there is less vegetation to slow runoff during storms. When a

big tree dies and falls, the seedlings of trees that could fill the gap are eaten instead. Besides that, the plants that are missing are the kind that provide fruit and flowers for native wildlife.

Feral pigs turn over the ground as they search for grubs and worms. This stops native seedlings from growing and means that when it rains there is more sediment in the water. Pigs eat invertebrates and the eggs of ground-nesting birds, including kiwi.

Feral deer, pigs and goats carry and spread giardia and other water-borne diseases that threaten human health.

This project will allow the forest to return to its natural state, with a thick, healthy understory that includes all the plant species that should be present. Helping the forest to recover will help native birds and other wildlife to flourish. Water quality will improve, reducing risks to human health.

## Control methods

Greater Wellington will attempt to remove feral deer, pigs and goats from the forest completely and keep them out. This is an ambitious project with few mainland precedents.

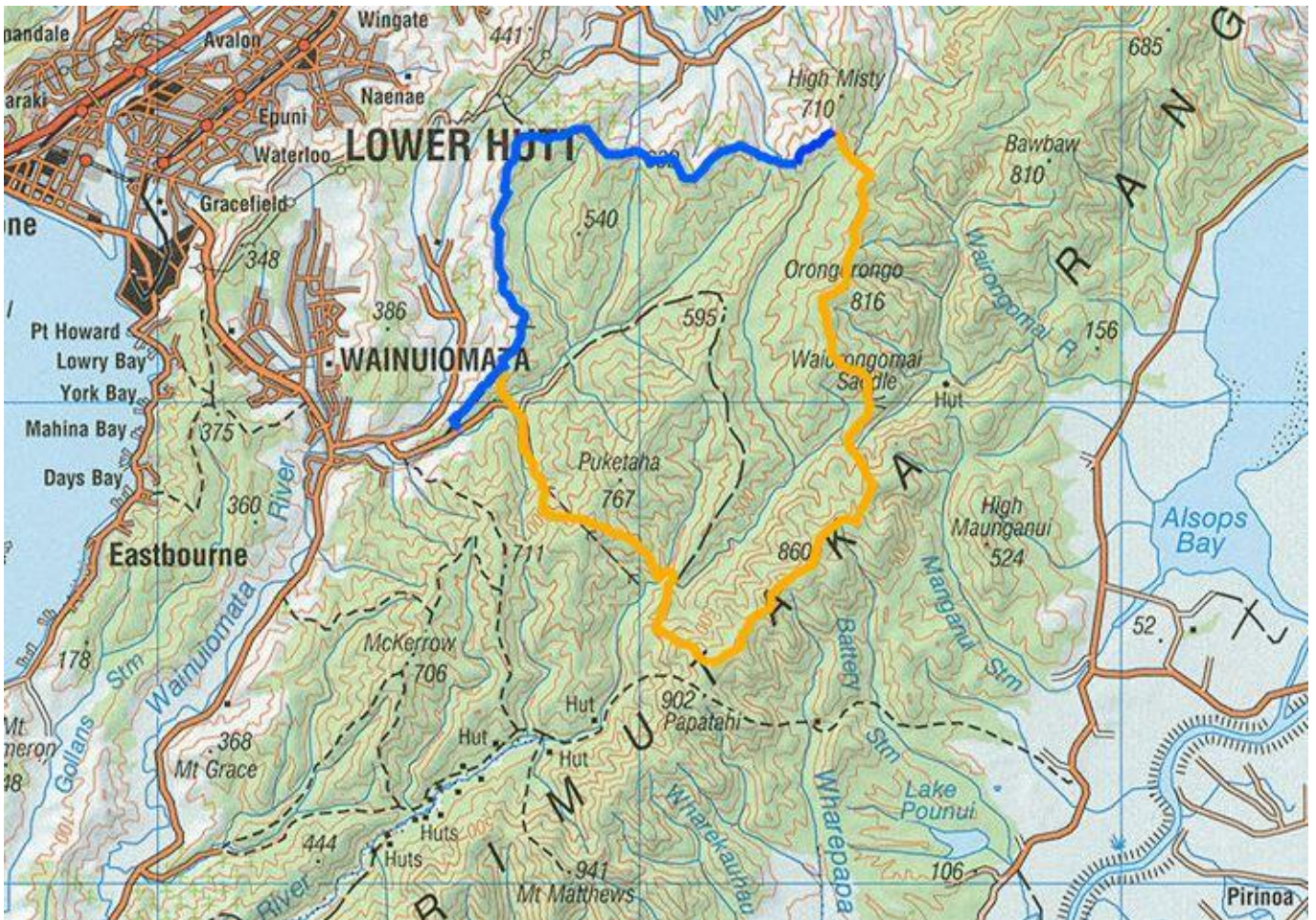
The project has two main components. The first will be a significant increase in hunting activity. This will involve a combination of ground hunting and helicopter hunting, all by highly experienced professional hunters.

The second component, a proposal at this stage, involves completing the catchment fencing to prevent feral animals from returning. An existing fence protects the western and northern boundaries. The new fence would follow the Remutaka Range crest, separating the water collection area from Remutaka Forest Park, and extend across the Ōrongorongo and Wainuiomata valleys. Designed to exclude feral deer, pigs, and goats, the fence would weave between the trees to minimise its impact on the forest and would need regular inspection and maintenance.



Water collection area forest showing the lack of understory plants due to feral deer and goats

View over the water collection area with Mount Matthews in the background



Map showing the location and boundary of the water collection area. Blue line: existing fence. Orange line: proposed new fence.

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