

# Wetlands Day

A Taranaki Daily News advertising feature



**NURTURED:** The Taranaki Regional Council encourages the protection and enhancement of wetlands with fencing and planting. Photo: SUPPLIED

## Many forms, many roles for wetlands

**W**HAT is a wetland? A wetland is an area of permanently or intermittently wet land and shallow water, with fluctuating land-water margins.

Wetlands may be fresh, saline or a mixture of both, and are characterised in their natural state by plants or animals adapted to living in wet conditions. They are unique habitats for many such species.

Wetlands on farms encompass a variety of waterbodies and landforms – a coastal salt-marsh or mangrove swamp; a freshwater lagoon; boggy seepages; wet margins of a lake, river, stream or drain; a peat bog; and even a stock water dam or effluent pond. They stand out in the landscape, with outlines etched sharply by a dramatic change in vegetation.

As few unmodified or undrained wetlands remain in Taranaki, the Taranaki Regional Council encourages landowners to preserve existing wetlands on their properties.

Rules in the Regional Fresh Water Plan control drainage that affects the significant wetlands listed in the plan. A resource consent is also required for land drainage that affects any wetland greater than five hectares.

Wetland management should be viewed as an integral component of sustainable land management.

### Water storage

Wetlands store water and during times of rainfall and flood slowly release it to downstream areas, lowering flood peaks. They also provide a reservoir of water for release during dry periods. In doing so, they help maintain base flows in streams and provide aquifers with an opportunity to recharge.

### Erosion & sediment control

In reducing flood flows and the velocity of floodwaters, wetlands reduce erosion and allow floodwater to drop its sediment. Wetland vegetation filters and traps sediment that would otherwise enter watercourses, lakes, ponds and the ocean. This helps preserve the quality of

inland and offshore fisheries, such as those for whitebait or inanga, the short-finned eel and estuarine flounder.

### Pollution prevention & control

Wetland vegetation intercepts nutrients, sediment, and organic matter in slow-moving water, while micro-organisms utilise it and break it down. Runoff emerging from a wetland is typically much cleaner than when it enters.

Wetlands, both natural and man-made, assist to extract nitrogen and phosphorus from farmland runoff. They are now increasingly used for tertiary treatment of agricultural and industrial effluents, and for urban stormwater runoff.

### Habitat for indigenous species

The land-water interface is among the richest ecosystems in the world. Many plants and animals are especially adapted to live in wetland conditions.

The survival of a diversity of plant and animal life, including rare species, is threatened as many of our wetlands, particularly swamps, have been cleared and drained.

### Recreation

Wetlands, particularly lakes, are important for fishing, duck shooting, boating, swimming, bird watching and other forms of outdoor recreation.

### Other values

Wetlands also possess educational, scientific, cultural and scenic value. They offer study areas for ecology and biology, and they are a source of information on historic climate and vegetation. Wetlands are a scenic part of the natural landscape.

In addition, they are important to Maori as mahinga kai (food gathering areas) and are a source of plants for medicines and dyes.

Wetlands were also used to store tribal artefacts and remain resting-places for these taonga or treasures.

## Taranaki Tree Trust

**Dedicated to saving our natural heritage**

The Taranaki Tree Trust works with landholders and other agencies to:

- protect wetlands and forest remnants
- assist with riparian planting
- provide funding and advice to worthy ecological projects

The Taranaki Tree Trust is an independent and charitable trust administered by the Taranaki Regional Council.

For more information contact the Tree Trust Co-ordinator  
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Tree Trust