HOK_28 – Mahināpua Creek/Tūwharewhare (133.3125 ha)

Protected Area(s)	Area (ha)	NaPALIS #	# of Primary Parcels
Conservation Area – Mahināpua Creek/Tūwharewhare	133.3125	2806156	1

Location

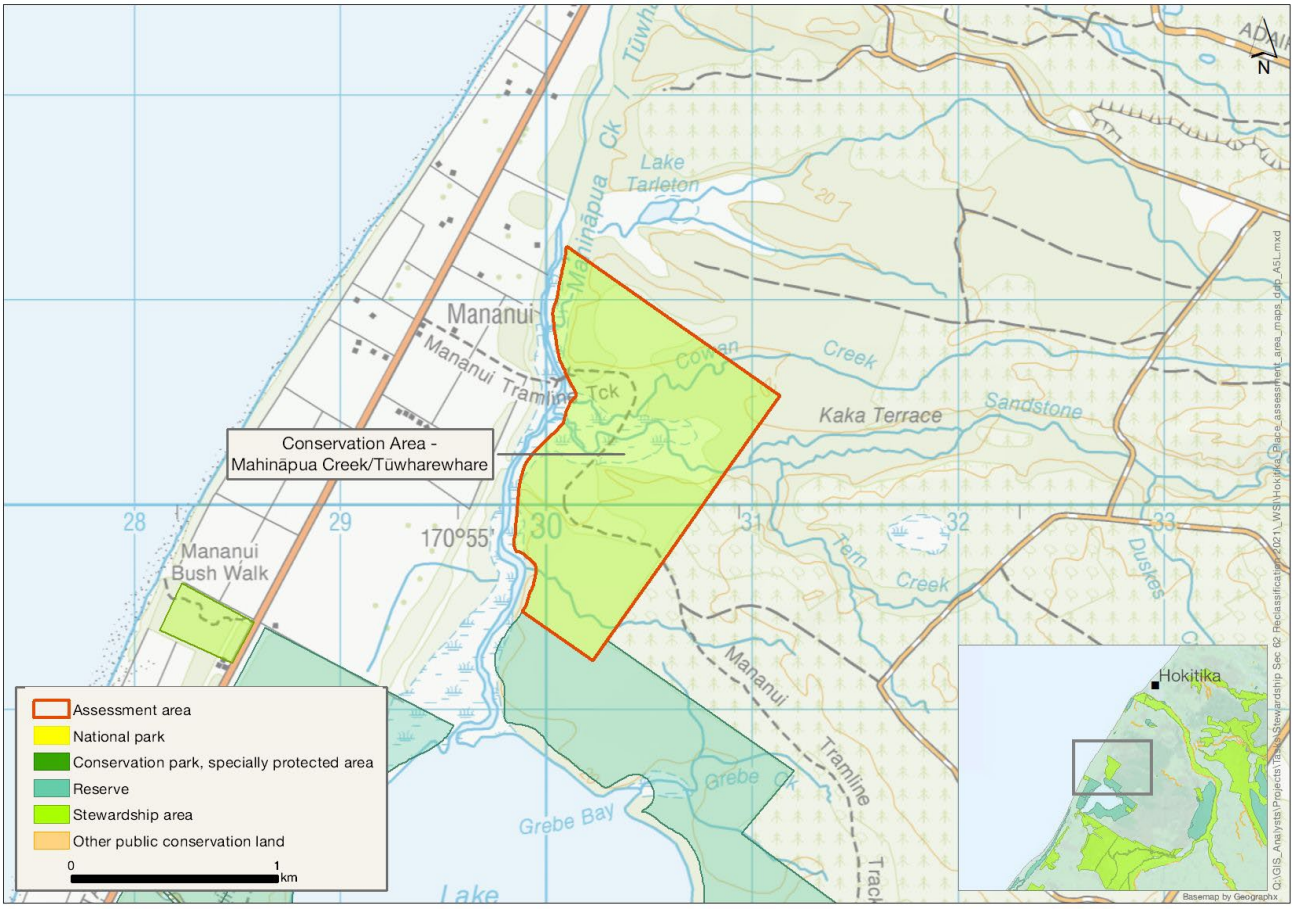
Approximately 9 km south of Hokitika township.

Brief Description

The area's generous size and compact shape are key for securing the longterm viability of this site. The area has very low relief with no part being above 30 m above sea level. At an average of 1.5 km from the coast, it supports one of the most extensive and best quality coastal wetlands in the district. Despite previous indigenous logging and fire, it has maintained its native vegetation cover. Survey records show the presence of all migratory galaxias species, making this an extremely important site for whitebait diversity.

The area is bordered in the south by Lake Mahināpua Scenic Reserve, which is a Statutory Adviser site. This area is managed as a Frontcountry site and includes the Mananui Tram/Mahināpua Walkway, which forms part of the West Coast Wilderness Trail and may be biked as part of a loop from the historic Mahināpua Rail Bridge. There is heritage value for the early 75 years of saw milling that occurred here. There are no active permissions.

Map



Ngāi Tahu Values and Interests

Mo tātou, a, mo ka uri, a muri ake nei – for us and our children after us

There is a deep connection between Ngāi Tahu and all of the whenua in the Ngāi Tahu takiwā. A section 4 Conservation Act and Te Tiriti principles perspective is required. To avoid doubt, nothing in the proposed classification affects, limits or derogates from the rangatiratanga of Ngāi Tahu over its takiwā, including in relation to freshwater; and/or any other rights or interests Ngāi Tahu may have.

This conservation area is adjacent to Ngāi Tahu Forestry, an indication of Ngāi Tahu presence, interest and use of the land in this vicinity. Further assessment of the values and opportunities of this conservation area for Ngāi Tahu is required, as provided for by section 4 Conservation Act and Te Tiriti principles of informed decision making and active protection. Ngāi Tahu may have future aspirations for this land (such as forestry) and so those aspirations must be recognised, considered and provided for, when determining a suitable classification for this land.

This conservation area is bordered in the south by Lake Mahināpua Scenic Reserve, which is Statutory Adviser site. This status enables Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu to have greater input to the management of that site, where "The Minister of Conservation must have particular regard to any advice received directly from Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu in relation to a Statutory Adviser site when considering any draft CMS, conservation management plan or national park management plan affecting that site, or when making written recommendations to the New Zealand Conservation Authority in respect of that site. (West Coast Te Tai o Poutini Conservation Management Strategy, p.40)."

Ecological Values

Representativeness

This relatively large assessment area is centred on the confluence of several small catchments (Cowan, Sandstone and Tern creeks) where they drain into the Mahināpua Creek at Mananui. The area has very low relief with no part being above 30 m above sea level. At an average of 1.5 km from the coast, it is within the coastal and semi-coastal bioclimatic zones.

The area comprises a series of low alluvial and morainic terraces derived from both riverine and glacial deposits of gravels, silt and sand. These terraces all terminate at Mahināpua Creek and are separated by deep, tannin-stained, low volume, low gradient, slow-moving creeks draining the extensive glacial terrace hinterland behind the area. The minimal fall of the creeks has resulted in a well-developed system of meandering water courses, cut-off meanders, and an impounded delta system, with a large area of open water where the creeks meet Mahināpua Creek. The swamp formed by these creeks is c. 18 ha in size and long-standing, with a deep peat profile and moderate fertility. The surrounding alluvial terraces (57 ha) in the north and glacial terraces in the south (58 ha) are leached, relatively infertile, gleyed yellow-brown earths, typical of the extensive glacial terrace system of which they form a narrow coastal part.

Most of the area has been logged and burnt. Small parts of the terraces still support primary rimu (*Dacrydium cupressinum*)/kamāhi (*Pterophylla racemose*) forest, but most of the terrace vegetation is now an induced mosaic of mixed broadleaved species forest, mānuka (*Leptospermum scopariu*) scrub, and open pākihi. Typical forest species include pole rimu, kamāhi, *quintinia*, toro (*Myrsine salicina*), hutu, makomako (wineberry, *Aristotelia serrata*), horoeka (lancewood, *Pseudopanax crassifolius*), putaputāwētā (*Carpodetus serratus*) and broadleaf. Additionally, on the drier, steeper sites, are hīnau (*Elaeocarpus*), pigeonwood (porokaiwhiri, *Hedycarya arborea*), māhoe (*Melicytus ramiflorus* agg.), shining karamū (*Coprosma lucida*) and māpou.

Characteristic mānuka scrub and pākihi components include *Gahnia xanthocarpa and G. rigida*, tanglefern (*Gleichenia*), umbrella fern (*Sticherus cunninghamii*), wire rush (*Empodisma minus*), and the sedges (*Machaerina rubiginosa, M. teretifolia*). The main swamp would have once supported extensive kahikatea (*Dacrycarpus dacrydioides)* forest. Original kahikatea forest is now very small in extent (Cowan and Tern creeks) but significant regenerating ricker stands are evident.

The swamp is now dominated by a profuse cover of harakeke (New Zealand flax, *Phormium tenax*), along with various small-leaved coprosmas (*C. propinqua, C. tayloriae*). Kuta (*Eleocharis sphacelate*) and raupō (bullrush, *Typha orientalis*) are also less common components, being more confined to reaches of standing water. The swamp also supports scattered mānuka and discrete areas of sedgeland, dominated by various carex species (*C. virgata, C. secta)* and swamp astelia (*Astelia grandis*). The coastal swamp part of the area is within the Lake Mahināpua Ecosystem Management Unit (1,288 ha; National Rank: 1160), which has been identified for active management for containing the best ecosystems of their type nationally.

Headwaters of the Cowan, Sandstone and Tern creeks are fully within the extensive inland parts of the moraine outwash terraces that have been converted to exotic pine forestry. There is potential for the stream and wetland quality of the assessment area to be negatively impacted when forests are harvested.

Despite previous indigenous logging and fire, this area has comprehensively maintained its native vegetation cover. Exotic plants are insignificant. The area is highly representative of the Hokitika Ecological District, as it supports one of the most extensive and best quality coastal wetlands in the district.

Regarding freshwater values, this is a very high-quality area of swamp wetland and small streams that is hydrologically and ecologically contiguous with Lake Mahināpua Scenic Reserve, as well as HOK_33 which extends all the way to the Hokitika River. This area does not include Mahināpua Creek itself, but there are tributaries feeding into the creek that have high values, including Cowan Creek, Tern Creek, and Sandstone Creek, and the wetland. Although historical logging is evident, the catchment of tributaries is relatively natural in terms of provision of good quality freshwater habitats, and the predicted water quality is high. The central part of the assessment area is listed in the Regional Plan's wetlands schedules.

Diversity and pattern

The assessment area has a high ecological diversity of both ecosystems and species due to a range of landforms, hydrology and soil fertility, and the way these ecological drivers interact. Throughout the area, vegetation pattern, gradients, sequences, and ecotones across these ecological drivers are exceptional. Their legible natural patterning comprehensively reflects the natural functioning that has been imposed by these drivers. At a landscape level, the area therefore has high ecological integrity. The Mananui Tramline track is the only feature that impacts on this natural patterning.

Species diversity is further enhanced by the area's position within the coastal zone, thereby supporting a suite of warm-temperate forest species, such as puka (*Meryta sinclairii*), kiekie (*Freycinetia baueriana* subsp. *Banksia*) and perching lily (kōwharawhara, *Astelia solandri*). This coastal influence is further illustrated by northern rātā (*Metrosideros robusta*) reaching its southern limit just south of the area.

Exceptionally, survey records within this area and multiple records within feeding tributaries of Mahināpua Creek show the presence of all migratory galaxias species – kōaro (*Galaxias brevipinnis*), banded kōkopu (*Galaxias fasciatus*), shortjaw kōkopu (*Galaxias postvectis*), īnanga (*Galaxias maculatus*) and giant kōkopu (*Galaxias argenteus*) – making this an extremely important site for whitebait diversity. In addition, there have been population records of longfin eel (*Anguilla dieffenbachii*), shortfin eel (*Anguilla australis*), redfin bully (*Gobiomorphus huttoni*), common bully (*Gobiomorphus cotidianus*) and kōura (freshwater crayfish, *Paranephrops planifrons*). All whitebait species will use these creeks to access upstream habitat. The area supports extensive

habitat for giant kōkopu, in particular. Unfortunately, a number of pest/introduced fish are present, including perch and goldfish.

Rarity and distinctiveness

The land environment status is: Less Reduced and Better Protected (greater than 30% indigenous cover remaining and greater than 20% protected). While not threatened, naturally uncommon ecosystems occur in the area, and the wetland parts of the area are highly significant habitat for at-risk and threatened species. Multiple Australasian bittern (matuku hūrepo, *Botaurus poiciloptilus*) (Nationally Critical) have been recorded from the wetlands complex within the greater Mahināpua area – the assessment area no doubt being a significant part of these birds' habitat range. The fully aquatic stout native milefoil (*Myriophyllum robustum*) (At Risk: Declining) has been recorded from the deeper tracts of open water and complements the nearby population in Lake Mahināpua. The floodplain lobelia (*Lobelia fatiscens*) (At Risk: Declining) is recorded in the adjoining scenic reserve and is almost certain to be present within the kahikatea forest stands. Also, while no lizards have been recorded from the area, both the tree-dwelling West Coast green gecko (*Naultinus tuberculatus*) (Nationally Vulnerable) and forest gecko (*Mokopirirakau granulatus*) (At Risk: Declining) have been recorded nearby, and it is likely that they occur in the area.

The area supports a very high diversity of freshwater native fish and invertebrate species, including shortjaw kōkopu (Nationally Vulnerable) and giant kōkopu, kōaro, īnanga and longfin eels (all At Risk: Declining).

Ecological context

The area's generous size and compact shape are key for securing the long-term viability of this site. The native vegetation is largely intact, and it adjoins equally intact tracts of forest and wetland vegetation of the extensive Lake Mahināpua Scenic Reserve to the south (573 ha). All the creeks in the area connect to Mahināpua Creek which is extremely well buffered by a 90 ha Fish & Game Council riparian protected area that runs both sides of the creek, along its entirety from its outlet at Lake Mahināpua to Hokitika River mouth 8 km to the north.

The area is an integral component of the extensive freshwater wetland complex associated with the Mahināpua catchment. It is hydrologically and ecologically connected to the wider morainic and alluvial terrace systems, and the wetland complexes that include Lake Mahināpua Scenic Reserve, and Groves and Harman swamps (HOK_33). Its connectivity to surrounding natural areas and freshwater bodies is exceptional, contributing to very high freshwater ecological values. The northern and western boundaries border private land, currently covered in native vegetation.

Recreation Values

Setting

This area is managed as a Frontcountry site and includes the Mananui Tram/Mahināpua Walkway, which passes through forest and wetland, and includes the historic mill and tramline. The track forms part of the West Coast Wilderness Trail and may be biked as part of a loop from the historic Mahināpua Rail Bridge.

Visitor type and activities typically undertaken

Walking and Grade 2 mountain biking.

Access

Access from SH6, Mananui.

Heritage Values

Historical overview

Nearly 75 years of saw milling occurred here. The first of the four mills was built in 1885 by John Maher, who freeholded the surrounding forest. The Midland Sawmilling Co., builders of the last mill, brought timber via a tram through a scenic reserve in the 1920s – one of the few trams allowed through reserve land. When the forest was exhausted in 1952, timber was trucked in from other areas to the mill. In 1958, it was moved across the creek. Born of a desire to prevent a timber shortage in the post-war years, the State Forest Service was established in 1922. The first experimental forestry station in New Zealand was established at Rimu, in the partially logged sawmill areas to the north and east of Lake Mahināpua that same year.

Sites recorded

- One actively managed heritage place: Mananui tramline track (Equipment ID: 100031630)
- One recorded archaeological site: J33/69 the site of four sawmills (the first built in 1885), and an historic tramline

Heritage values

During the 1860s gold rush, the timber industry was integral to supporting mining operations. As mining declined, sawmilling became an essential part of Westland's economy. Before 1890, Westland was a minor player in timber export, but the expansion of the rail network saw the industry boom. Westland's contribution to the national timber trade peaked in the 1920s–30s, at about 20% of New Zealand's total production.

Mahināpua was the site of one of the earliest moves to halt the wave of indigenous species extinction in the 1890s, and the scenic reserve was one of the first pieces of land set aside on the mainland (1907) for the express purpose of preserving flora and fauna. This was championed by Westland MP and later Premier, Richard Seddon.

Modifying factors

The tramline is representative of a typical mainline bush tramline. What makes it different is that it partly runs through scenic reserve and experimental forestry blocks associated with early forestry research.

Permissions Summary

N/A

Map (aerial photo)