

HOK_19 – Hokitika River – Bluff Creek, Kawhaka Forest, Kokatahi Riverbed, Mathias Pass Road, Wanganui / Otira Catchments (95236.6963 ha)

Protected Area(s)	Area (ha)	NaPALIS #	# of Primary Parcels
Conservation Area - Hokitika River - Bluff Creek	19.2485	2806272	1
Conservation Area - Kawhaka Forest	5122.5573	2805715	7
Conservation Area - Kokatahi Riverbed	16.7287	2805712	2
Conservation Area - Mathias Pass Road	3.808	2806159	1
Conservation Area - Wanganui / Otira Catchments	90074.3538	2805713	49

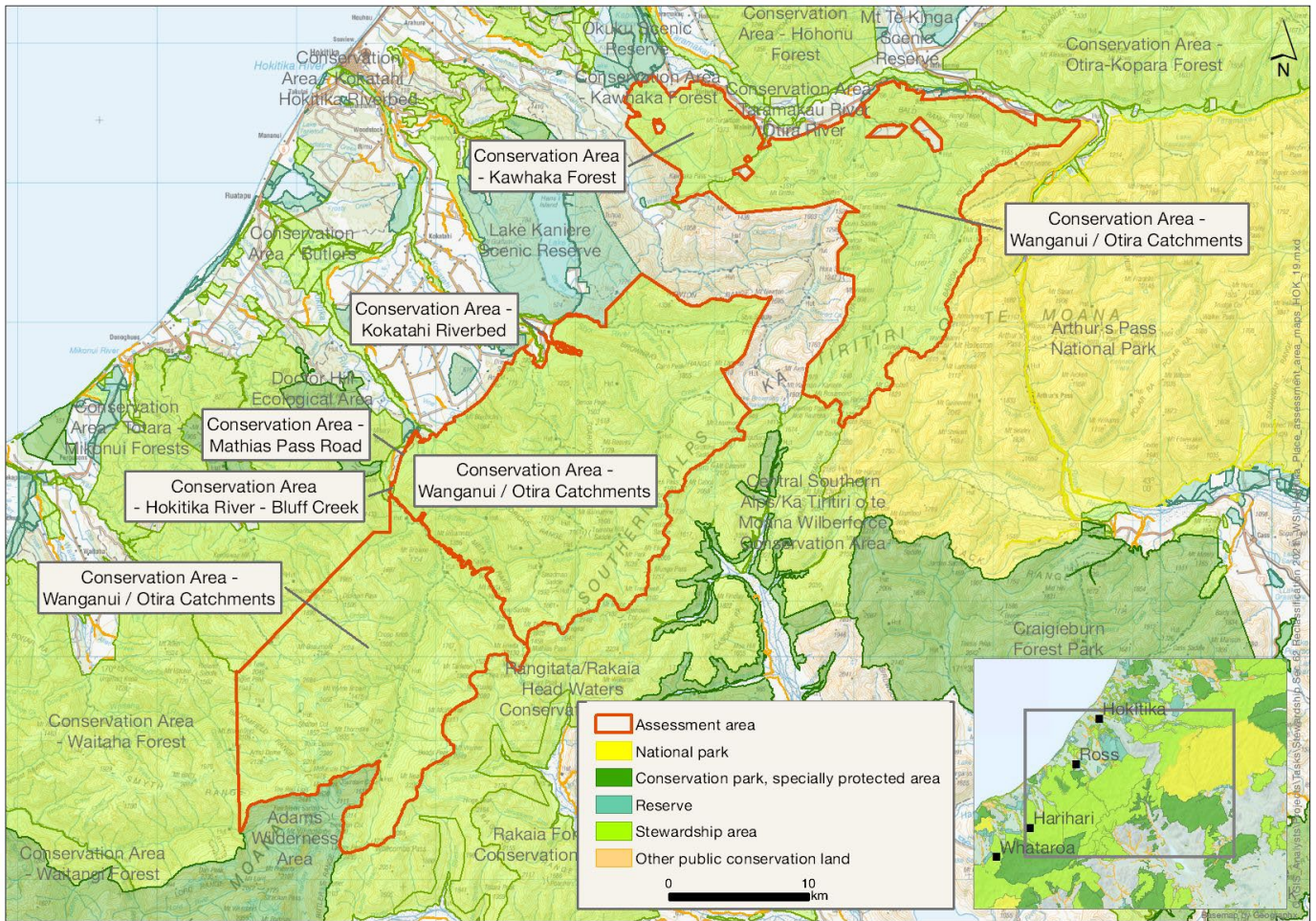
Location and Brief Description

This is nearly 100,000 ha of steep mountain country extending from the Main Divide to foothill forests from Taramakau River near Arthurs Pass to Wanganui River near Harihari. The assessment area is so large that almost every possible non-coastal common ecosystem in New Zealand is likely to be here. Consisting of steep and broken country, large and fast rivers and gorges in some of New Zealand's highest rainfall zones, this area is largely unmodified. Many places within the Wanganui / Otira area are intrinsic to Ngāi Tahu Pounamu legends.

With a large network of tracks and huts - many managed by DOC, but others by other parties - this area is the playground of backcountry adventurers from around the world. People enjoy walking, tramping, extreme kayaking, commercial rafting and hunting. Major catchments have access roads to the beginning of tracks. Local helicopter operators provide air charter services into remote areas. Helicopter operators also wish to carry out regular landings for scenic flights at some locations in the Hokitika catchment.

There are two different periods of history represented by the many recorded heritage sites in the area; the early mineral extraction period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and 20th century wild animal control. A large number of permissions are in place, for a diverse range of activities.

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, and it may be that areas of land are significant to Ngāi Tahu from that broader perspective. 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.

Tarahanga e Toru – Three Passes

The narrative that follows applies to Conservation Areas MAW_09, MAW_44, MAW_53, HOK_01 (in part), HOK_03, HOK_05 (in part) and HOK_19 (in part) as they are all linked by pounamu traditions ki uta ki tai (from the mountains to the sea).

From the snowy peaks to the sea waters of the taniwha Poutini, the central West Coast is of immense significance to Poutini Ngāi Tahu. From the earliest times, pounamu was the reason for settlement on Te Tai o Poutini and this central region is the heart of Poutini Ngāi Tahu legends, customs and traditions.

Every foot of this region was explored, named and utilised. The mountains are criss-crossed by pounamu trails connecting the pā of Arahura, Taramakau and Māwhera with the great Ngāi Tahu trading centre of Kaiapoi Pā.

Three passes in particular were lifelines for Poutini Ngāi Tahu as trading routes for pounamu and kai in times of war and peace.

Rakimaurikura, the alpine crossing at the head of the Taramakau (Harpers Pass) was the easiest and favourite route. It started at the great pounamu pā at the mouth of the Taramakau, crossing over to Kōtukuwhakaoko (Lake Brunner) via the Ōhonu (Greenstone Creek) to avoid the swift rapids, re-emerging in the Taramakau valley at the foot of Kaimatau (Mt Alexander) – a tohu whenua or notable landmark visible from all over the Taramakau and inland Grey Valley as a beacon for travellers. Whakamoemoe was the resting place just before ascending or descending the pass.

Another important trail follows the Kokatahi (Styx River) into the Arahura headwaters and then across Te Tarahanga o Kaniere (Brownings Pass, also known as Nōti Raureka). This trail has carried 500 years of pounamu trading and numerous water parties since the first footsteps of Raureka, who innocently disclosed the path up the Kokatahi.

The next great alpine route is up the Ahaura River and over Amuri Pass for a more direct route to Kaiapoi Pā, and was favoured by war parties, including Tuhuru. This route was marked by another tohu whenua, Mt Whakarewa.

These three pathways are also markers in the 1860 Arahura Deed of Purchase with the Crown.

The varied and plentiful mahinga kai resources in this area supported pā and kainga nohoanga (temporary settlements) throughout the region, and were critical to the success of the pounamu pathways. Ngāi Tahu tīpuna had vast knowledge of these resources, their availability and sustainable practices for their use.

Pounamu legends associated with this area abound, from the hills of Ōhonu (Hohonu Range) – where Māori in 1864 struck gold that sparked the West Coast gold rush and settlement – to Turiwhate, the entire Arahura and environs, including Kawhaka, Tuhua, Timuaki, Raparapahoe, Mt Tara o Tama (the great mountain of the pounamu explorer Tama Ahua) and as far as Mt Kaniere (Mt Harman), named for sawing the pounamu. These places are all remembered in whakapapa, waiata and oral histories.

War parties trod these lands, and battles for ascendancy of this taonga see-sawed at Kokatahi, Kaniere, Māhinapua, Arahura and Kōtukuwhakaoko. Brunner and Heaphy, the first Pakeha explorers, found a thriving pounamu pā at the mouth of the Taramakau at the head of the lagoon Ohinerata, and from here, jewellery, hei tiki and mere were expertly crafted and then traded up the coastline to Whakatu (Nelson) and across the Taramakau to Kaiapoi. Historical and contemporary associations with pounamu are integral to Poutini Ngāi Tahu identity.

Poutini Ngāi Tahu ancestors and their stories are literally embedded in this landscape and the immense historical, spiritual and cultural significance of this area cannot be understated. The Kokatahi, Arahura, Taramakau and Ahaura catchments, along with Kōtukuwhakaoko, are inextricably linked and integral to Poutini Ngāi Tahu history and identity. Parts of this cultural landscape have been recognised through provisions in the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act, including Statutory Acknowledgements for the Taramakau River and Kōtukuwhakaoko.

The reclassification of these lands must recognise and provide for the ability for Ngai Tahu whānui to reconnect to their ancestral lands, provide for the mana and rangatiratanga of Ngāi Tahu and to exercise kaitiakitanga and mahinga kai, as well as the protection of natural and historic resources.

Ecological Values

Representativeness

This assessment area consists of very large parcels of forested slopes, rivers, ranges and mountains extending west of the Southern Alps and Main Divide. The areas extend southwards from Taramakau River to include the main catchments of the Whitcombe, Wanganui Hokitika, Styx and Taipo rivers, but excluding Arahura River. Most of the area sits within the Whitcombe and Hokitika ecological districts, making up most of the land in the Whitcome ecological district. As such, it is as highly representative an area as could possibly be.

The Whitcombe Ecological District is characterised by very high rainfall, geology, landform and vegetation. This area includes large, heavily glaciated mountains of greywacke and schist, with peaks that ascend above permanent snowline. The vegetation is dominated by podocarps (*Podocarpaceae* and *Phyllocladaceae*) and broadleaved species with beech (tawhai, *Fuscopora* and *Lophozonia*) almost entirely absent south of Taramakau River as far as Paringa River.

The vegetation associations ascend from mixed podocarp/hardwood forests on the lower slopes to forests dominated by southern rātā (*Metrosideros umbellata*) and kamāhi (*Pterophylla racemosa*) forest with scattered mountain tōtara (*Podocarpus laetus*) and pahautea (*Libocedrus bidwillii*) on the mid-slopes merging into alpine scrub with mountain holly and other stout tree daisies and the characteristic *Dracophyllum traversii* - mountain neinei. Beyond the range of the woody trees and shrubs lie diverse alpine communities of grasslands dominated by snow tussocks, herbfields, wetlands and scree.

Most of these ecosystems represent a very high level of naturalness, with modification limited to Arthurs Pass Road plus some areas of farmland in the lower altitudes. There are extensive zones of fen and marsh wetland types. Water quality and river naturalness are predicted to be high throughout this parcel.

Diversity and pattern

The assessment area is so large that almost every possible non-coastal common ecosystem in New Zealand is likely to be here.

South of the Taramakau - Otira watershed an altitudinal sequence of vegetation belts characteristic of high rainfall areas lacking beech occurs. Most of the forest is mixed podocarp/hardwood on lower slopes with prolific tarata (lemonwood, *Pittosporum eugenoides*) and kōtukutuku (tree fuchsia, *Fuchsia excorticata*) and occasional miro (brown pine, *Prumnopitys ferruginea*) scattered among southern rātā and kamāhi forest.

The area has high natural diversity and pattern encompassing a number of freshwater environments, alpine bogs and lakes, Taipo River catchment, and highly diverse vegetation associated with intact altitudinal sequences. The sequence of vegetation provides a variety of habitats and food sources for indigenous fauna and common native bird species such as rifleman (tītiti pounamu, *Acanthisitta chloris*), robins (*Petroica*), grey warbler (riroriro, *Gerygone igata*), brown creeper (pīpipi, *Mohoua novaeseelandiae*), weka (*Gallirallus australis*), tomtit (ngirungiru, *Petroica macrocephala*), tūi (*Prothemadera novaeseelandiae*) and bellbird (korimako, *Anthornis melanura*).

The waterways within these areas contained population records of kōaro (*Galaxias brevipinnis*), upland bully (West Coast) (*Gobiomorphus breviceps*), bluegill bully (*Gobiomorphus hubbsi*), longfin eel (*Anguilla dieffenbachii*), torrentfish (piripiripōhatu, *Cheimarrichthys fosteri*), dwarf galaxias (*Galaxias divergens*) and banded kōkopu (*Galaxias fasciatus*) being present. There are likely many more species present, as the area surveyed as a proportion of the total parcel area is very small.

Rarity and distinctiveness

Threatened and at-risk species known in the area include whio (Blue Duck, *Hymenolaimus malacorhynchos*) (Nationally Vulnerable), rock wren (tuke, *Xenicus gilviventris*) (Nationally Endangered) (DOC Hokitika), kākārīki (yellow-crowned parakeet, *Cyanoramphus auriceps*) (not threatened), long-tailed cuckoo (koekoeā, *Eudynamys taitensis*) (Naturally Uncommon), kea (*Nestor notabilis*) (Nationally Endangered), kiwi (*Apteryx*), and kōaro, torrentfish, dwarf galaxias and longfin eel. Bio18 Migratory Species programme has identified areas here to be significant habitat for longfin eel. Additionally, non-migratory fish habitats – likely brown mudfish (*Neochanna apoda*) (At Risk: Declining) – 234, 1940, 1503 and 885 overlap with areas of these parcels.

The alpine environment is also within the known range for *Ranunculus godleyanus* (Given & Harding 1989). Naturally Uncommon and Threatened Ecosystems are found in the alpine environment such as boulder fields, cliffs, scarps and tors of acidic rock as well as alpine wetlands. The area is notable for the absence of beech forest (the so-called “Beech gap”), a phenomenon that occurs rarely around New Zealand. It also provides important connectivity between the large forests of North and South Westland.

Ecological context

Heavy possum infestation has resulted in damage to the rātā/kamāhi forest that dominates parts of this area. Recently, more pest control has considerably reduced their impact. Other common animal pest species such as deer, goats, rodents, mustelids and pigs are present. The area also has some pest plant species, historically in the lower Taipo River and around former settlements such as where the Dillon homestead stood. Recently there has been active management of the pest plants along the tracks and around the huts.

Collectively, the sites that make up this assessment area represent a key part of a large uninterrupted sequence of public conservation land that connects with Arthurs Pass National Park, a local purpose reserve at Harrington Creek and marginal strips in the Ōtira River and Harrington Creek. There is also a large continuous border with Arahura River, a DOC Ngā Awa catchment. The Arthurs Pass, Wilberforce and Ōtira ecological management units are present or near the assessment area.

Recreation Values

Setting

These areas are dominated by the Backcountry-remote zone that extends from SH73 south to the headwaters of Waitaha River and back to the Main Divide. New Zealanders regard this area as part of the country's backcountry adventurer 'capital' because of the extensive network of backcountry tracks, routes and huts. Opportunities range from multi-day valley and transalpine crossings via remote and challenging terrain, to day tramps and weekend trips to more accessible huts or hot pools. The Department manages a core network of the tramping tracks and huts up the valleys including Taipo Valley to Harman Pass, Styx Valley, Lathrop Saddle-Zit Saddle, Adventure Ridge, Toaroha Valley, Hokitika and Whitcombe valley. The huts in this network include 2, 4, 6 and 10-bunk huts including Rapid Creek, Prices Flat, Wilkinson, Ivory Lake, Prices Basin, Top Waitaha, Top Tuke, Bluff, Poet, Gerhradt Spur, Grassy Flat, Cedar Flats and Top Toaroha.

Volunteers and groups including Permolat and The Backcountry Trust maintain side tracks to remote huts including Griffin Creek, Rocky Creek, Scottys Biv, Newton Biv, Yeates Ridge, Crystall Biv, Kokathai Valley, Booboo hut, Sir Robert, Mungo. They maintain many of these huts themselves. A section of the West Coast Wilderness Trail (cycling) between Old Christchurch Road and Kawahaka Saddle is located in the northwestern part of the area. The popular Hokitika Gorge Walk starts at that gorge.

Visitor type and activities typically undertaken

Backcountry Adventurers seeking relatively accessible and more challenging tramping and transalpine trips. The area is also popular for hunting and fishing. The rivers provide some challenging kayak runs, and some of the larger catchments such as the Lower Taipo, Hokitika and Whitcombe valleys are used for commercial rafting operations. The section of the West Coast Wilderness Trail is used by locals and domestic cycling visitors from around the country. The Hokitika Gorge Walk is very popular with local, domestic and international visitors.

Access

The backcountry areas can be accessed from SH73 and major catchments have access roads to the beginning of tracks. Local helicopter operators provide air charter services for hunters, trampers and kayakers who wish to be flown into remote areas. Helicopter operators also wish to carry out regular landings for the purpose of scenic flights at a limited number of locations in the Hokitika catchment.

Heritage Values

Historical overview

The Waimea water race was built to provide a continuous water supply to the Waimea gold field in 1873–75. Drawing water from a dam (J33/33) on Kawhaka Creek, it was flumed and ditched around 6 km to a 3 km pipeline that commenced west of Old Christchurch Road. The township that spang up for the workers on the dam is within the stewardship land (J33/35). The pipeline crossed the terrace and a flume-ditch system distributed water around the system. Although construction began in the 1870s, it did not reach its full extent until 1900. The race-keeper's cottage remains (J33/32), associated with the Waimea water race fall here.

Construction of the dam was supported by a tramway (J33/164). It was built over in the 1930s as far as the Waimea intake dam to serve Malfroy's mill near Fox Creek. The mill used steam locomotives to move timber felled from the valley back along the tramway to the mill. The tramway was also used as a pedestrian route between the end of a pack track and Old Christchurch Road in the late 1880s. The pack track (J33/165) ran from the Rough Wainihinihi Creek and the Waimea intake dam.

There are two different periods of history represented by the recorded heritage sites in the area; the early mineral extraction period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and 20th century wild animal control. Serpentine was mined near Lynch Creek by the Mt Griffen Serpentine Mine 1912–14 for use as decorative stone. The serpentine was transported from the quarry to the workshop area beside Lynch Creek by an aerial ropeway.

Cedar Flat Hut on Toaroha River was built in 1957 during the early stage of the wild animal control programme by the New Zealand Forest Service (NZFS) when individuals could trial their own hut designs before these were nationally standardised. Price Flat Hut was built 1949–50 by deer cullers working in Whitcombe valley. Components were transported by pack horse from the road end and then carried through the last gorge.

Sites recorded

Two actively conserved heritage places:

- Cedar Flat Hut (Equipment ID: 100060610)
- Price Flat Hut (J34/3) (Equipment ID: 100062481)

Eleven recorded archaeological sites:

- J33/32 race-keeper's cottage remains for Waimea water race supply
- J33/34 water race intake for race constructed 1878–79 to supply Kumara goldfield

- J33/35 site of Kawhaka settlement, a supply town and base for men working on construction of the intake dam on Kawhaka Creek
- J33/164 tramway initially used during construction of the Waimea water race intake dam and later used by Malfroy's mill
- J33/33 Waimea water race and dam which started in Kawhaka Creek and ran to area west of Old Christchurch Road
- J33/165 19th century pack track from Wainihinihi to the tramway for the Waimea intake dam
- K33/7 reported location of mine battery and associated buildings on Wallaces Creek
- K33/20 alluvial gold working comprising stacked tailings and tailraces – mined 1865–66
- K33/16 serpentine mine which operated between ca. 1912–15
- K33/17 serpentine quarry
- K33/14 rockshelter used by deer cullers in 1930s

Heritage values

The Waimea goldfield was one of the first to employ large-scale hydraulic sluicing. Providing a consistent and reliable supply of water was a critical factor and important enough in this field that the government stepped in to construct the race (many were privately built with the water rights on sold). Price Flat Hut has historical significance as representative of the period when anything that could not be made from materials taken from the local environment had to be transported by horses and humans. It was built in collaboration between the government and a local outdoors club that donated the second-hand iron.

The historical value of Cedar Flat Hut is high as one of a handful of huts built under the early NZFS wild animal control programme in 1956. The designer of this hut was influential in the innovation and improvement of hut design in the pre-national standard years and subsequently went on to be involved a national level. Price Flat Hut is one of the best examples of a hand-hewn timber backcountry hut on the West Coast.

Modifying factors

These features are integrally connected with the Waimea goldfield, and the ones in the assessment area are largely in good condition. Cedar Flat Hut is part of a network of NZFS deer control huts in both the Toaroha catchment and across the region generally. Price Flat Hut is a relatively rare example of a hut made using materials from the surrounding environment and hand tools (once widespread from the early 19th century).

Local context

Permissions summary

- Non-notified easement for access for the Kumara Dillmanstown hydro-electric easement
- A grazing licence for grazing within various conservation areas near Hokitika River, Kowhitirangi

Eighteen concessions:

- Access arrangement for open cast gravel extraction held by Geotech Ltd and Matthew Dove for extracting schist from alluvial gravels at Lynch Creek and Wainihinihi River.
- Mining access arrangement for alluvial gold mining in approximately 5,365 ha of Wanganui / Otira Catchments
- Mining access arrangement for suction dredging at Hokitika and Mungo rivers
- Guiding concession for heliskiing

- Easement for Kumara Dillmanstown hydroelectric
- Grazing licence for Styx and Kokatahi rivers
- Access easement for access for site access for rock extraction Wanganui / Otira
- A structure easement (for a small (1.3MW) hydroelectric power scheme at Griffin Creek
- Notified aircraft concession to permit irregular landings in Canterbury Conservancy
- Extraction permit for the collection of schist and granite from creeks and rivers for sale as decorative stone and paving
- Extraction permit for gravel extraction sites within Hokitika and Kokatahi rivers
- Grazing licence for grazing within various conservation areas near Hokitika River, Kowhitirangi
- General agricultural permit for placement of hives in Kahurangi National Park and on the West Coast
- Grazing licence for grazing part of Taipo River bed
- Grazing licence for grazing on part bed & flats adjoining Diedrichs & Muriel Creeks 24.2 ha
- Telecommunications licence for land mobile sites on public conservation land
- Telecommunications licence
- Right of way easement at Kokatahi

Map (aerial photo)

