

Desert Rd extension - Tongariro National Park Rewild opportunity



This document is designed to inspire our community to rewild this place.

The Opportunity

Flowing down from the summit of Mt Ruapehu and across the SH1 Desert Rd is the most accessible and stunning alpine landscape in the North Island, that will flourish when the blazing red tussock and native forest is rewilded.

This unique rainshadow area is ideal for rewilding of tussockland, alpine shrubland, native forest, dunefields, ash/boulder fields, wetlands, and 400km of streams that include the Upper Waikato and 17km of the unique acidic and lahar-prone Whangaehu River.

This ecologically complex desert is also a nationally important volcanic landscape, visitor destination/attraction and geopreservation site. The conferring of National Park status would recognize these nationally important values, with all the benefits that rewilding can create.

Current Management

Most of the area (12,900 hectares) is tussockland, native forest and pasture managed by the New Zealand Army as part of the 63,000 ha. Waiouru Military Training Area. Some 2,700 hectares is Iwi Treaty Settlement Commercial Redress Land owned by iwi as the Karioi Forest – and managed as a Crown Forest Licence for exotic forestry by overseas investor Ernslaw One. A 1,200 hectare area is tussockland and native forest managed by DOC as part of Kaimanawa Forest Park. 70 ha of riverbed and Marginal Strips beside eastern Karioi Forest are included for river protection. Some adjoining areas are owned by iwi.

Context

There is a wonderful opportunity to rewild now, using nursery, planting and tending labour to attain immediate ecological and social value.

There is an ongoing effort required for wilding pine, heather and other weed control to retain and enhance ecological and scenic values.

Extensive areas of land damaged by ongoing Army munitions, earthworks, roading, and tracking can be earthworked and rewilded.

Much of the included Waiouru Military Training Area has limited use for that purpose due to its proximity to neighbouring land, State Highway 1, access roads, and 4 powerlines that traverse the landscape. Some sites of wetlands, native forest, and cultural importance are also off limits operationally.

The desert has been degraded by past land use such as grazing and fire, and some is rapidly changing to shrubland. It is host to a variety of nationally important native species; Plants – red mistletoe, *schoenus carsei*, *rytidosperra nudum*, matagouri, red woodrush, mountain aniseed Birds – NZ pipit.

The site is an uplifting experience for travellers along State Highway 1 Desert Rd for 16km of this unique alpine tussock journey.

Inclusive protection of the small area of Kaimanawa Forest Park ensures integrated land management for all public conservation land across the southern Desert Road.

This landscape could be added to the adjoining UNESCO Tongariro National Park World Heritage Area List site as a natural value site, and also as a cultural site if iwi wish.

Key Benefits

15,600 hectares of degraded alpine tussock, native forest, pasture and exotic forest rewilded to alpine ecosystem and carbon sink with an end to carbon emissions

17,000 hectares of new National Park legal protection for nationally important alpine/tussock/wetland/stream/forest ecosystems, tourism access and experience of the unique SH1 Desert Road tussock alpine landscape, and geopreservation sites Corridor for native species to connect the southern flanks of Mt Ruapehu with the southern flanks of the Kaimanawa Ranges to the east

Spade ready employment for iwi and the community in wilding pine and weed control, army land disturbance restoration, and nursery/planting/tending



Further reading

Rangipo Desert - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rangipo_Desert and <https://www.nzgeo.com/stories/beyond-the-desert-road/>

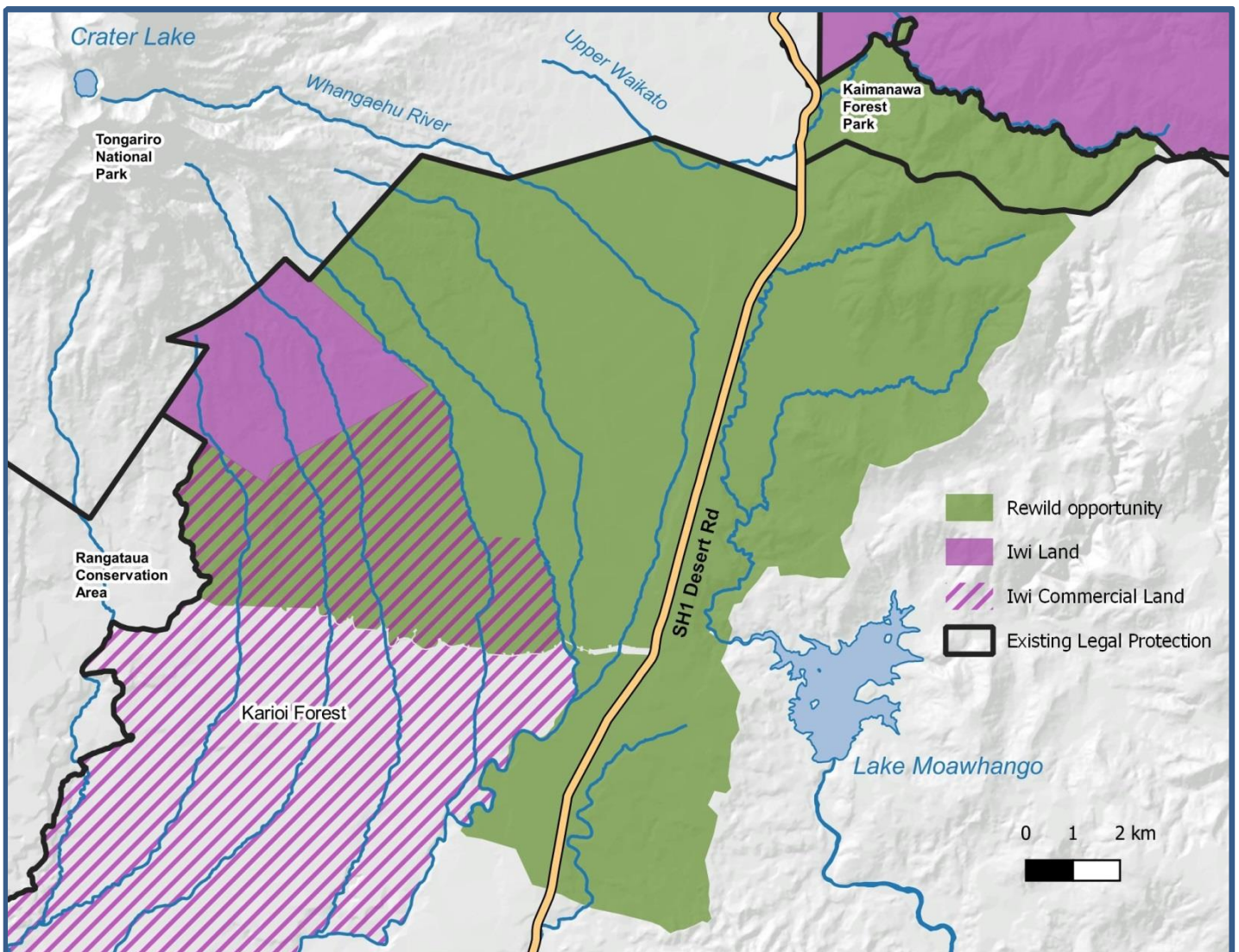
Landscape ecology of the Rangipo Desert - <https://mro.massey.ac.nz/handle/10179/10867>

Tongariro National Park Management Plan - <https://www.doc.govt.nz/about-us/our-policies-and-plans/statutory-plans/statutory-plan-publications/national-park-management/tongariro-national-park-management-plan/>

Whangaehu River - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whangaehu_River

Adjoining World Heritage List site - <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/421> and <https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/central-north-island/places/tongariro-national-park/about-tongariro-national-park/world-heritage-site/>

Opportunity Location



Rewilding: to create and protect healthy ecosystem processes and functions that can sustain themselves, our society, and our economy.

