Peat Soil Te Mana o te Wai Reserves
Rewild opportunity

Inspiring our community to rewild these places

The Opportunity

All Aotearoa peat soil rewilded to restore wetlands, enhance freshwater ecosystems, restore ancient carbon sinks and immediately stop significant greenhouse gas emissions.

These former freshwater taonga will flourish again under integrated public management to enhance Te Mana o te Wai. They are ideal for rewilding by re-wetting to restore wetlands.
Peat soil wetlands and their riparian margins are nationally important as freshwater and native forest ecosystems, and they are used extensively for mahinga kai and cultural harvest. Many of the species they contain are found nowhere else in the world. Many species are threatened or at risk and will benefit from urgent action under proactive integrated management and rewilding.
Peat soils amount to over 250,000 hectares, an area more than twice the size of Arthurs Pass National Park. They comprise 723 separate areas throughout Aotearoa, ranging in size from 21,000 hectares down to 3 ha. Some larger peat wetlands such as Awarua/Waituna, Kopuatai and Whangamarino are largely legally protected and recognised as internationally important wetlands under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.
A new class of Reserve is needed to recognize the special importance of any publicly managed freshwater taonga restored on peat soils - **Te Mana o te Wai Reserve** status under the Reserves Act. These new Reserves would form an increased role of ensuring future Te Mana o te Wai wellbeing. An Aotearoa Rewild Landuse Change Fund could be established to fund purchasing land from willing public/private owners, to transition the landuse to a wild state, and to legally protect it for future generations.

Current Management

63% of the peat soils comprising 158,000 hectares are High Producing Exotic Grassland and typically grazed for intensive dairy production, with only 19% comprising 47,000 hectares remaining as natural wetland/water.
45,215 hectares of peat soils are managed by DOC as protected areas, but 35 areas comprising 473 hectares are grazed under permission. 15,874 hectares of unprotected peat soils are managed by Councils, SOE Landcorp, LINZ, and Legal Road managers. Management of unprotected peat soils is fragmented into about 30,000 areas under about 20,000 different owners.

Context

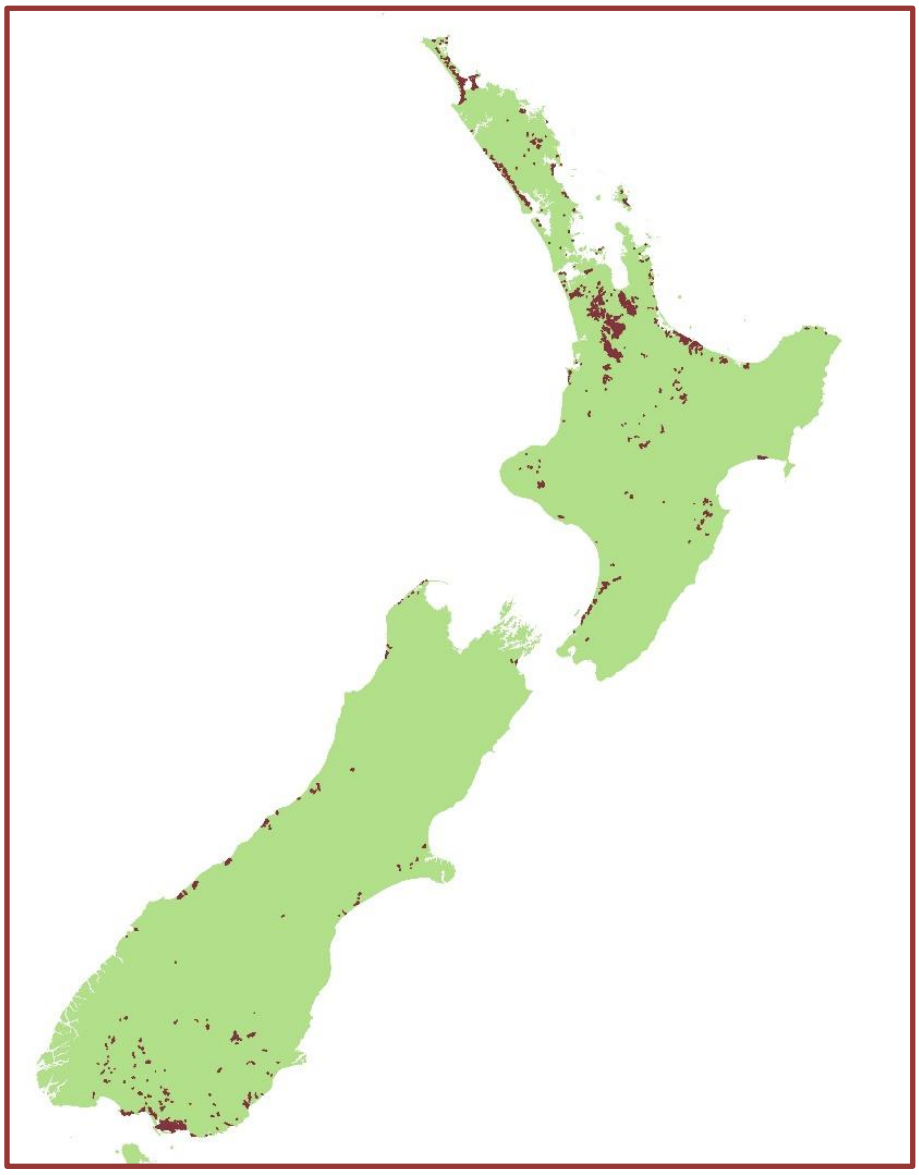
Rewilding the grazed and unprotected peat soils now will result in immediate increased ecological value, reduced freshwater ecosystem pollution, reduced flooding, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and a new carbon sink. High producing grassland grazing with superphosphate fertilizer inputs can result in an unsustainable buildup of toxic cadmium in the soil. Continued grazing of peat soils and the associated lowering of the groundwater level is unsustainable as the peat soil oxidises and sinks up to 12m until any underlaying solid ground is reached, often requiring ever increasing draining and pumping expense. Pump drained peat soils are ecologically isolated by fish passage barriers and often discharge highly nutrified, bacterial and herbicide polluted water into valuable ecosystems such as wetlands, rivers, lakes and the sea. It will also provide jobs to manage the rewilding transition and sustaining.

Key Benefits
200,000 hectares of unsustainably grazed peat areas rewilded to wetland ecosystems, while creating a new carbon sink, reducing flooding, enhancing low flows, ending water pollution and ending current carbon/methane/nitrogen emissions from peat oxidation, stock and inputs.
250,000 hectares of new Te Mana o te Wai Reserve integrated legal protection for publicly managed peat wetland ecosystems, mahinga kai and cultural harvest, public access, recreation, tourism, and the enhancement of natural landscape and character.
Spade-ready employment for iwi and the community throughout the regions.

Dedicated to te mana o te wai, our atmosphere and Russell.

Further reading
Te Mana o te Wai - https://environment.govt.nz/assets/Publications/Files/essential-freshwater-te-mana-o-te-wai-factsheet.pdf *"We can enhance our wellbeing by restoring threatened freshwater ecosystems"*
https://environment.govt.nz/assets/publications/environment-aotearoa-2022.pdf - p 43-44
https://www.climatecommission.govt.nz/public/Inaia-tonu-nei-a-low-emissions-future-for-Aotearoa/Inaia-tonu-nei-a-low-emissions-future-for-Aotearoa.pdf - p 306,322
Managing Peat - https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/environment/land-and-soil/managing-land-and-soil/managing-peat/
Cadmium accumulation in soils - https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/services/publications/tr200551/
Peatlands in global climate change mitigation strategies - https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-018-03406-6
Countries should include peatland restoration in their commitments - https://www.iucn.org/resources/issues-brief/peatlands-and-climate-change
Te Mana o te Wai Reserves - https://rewildaotearoa.org.nz/R04.html

Opportunity Location



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

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