

# 1. Landscapes and Natural Features

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.0.1 The Southland region encompasses a range of landscapes and natural features (eg coastlines, mountains, river valleys, bush, plains, rolling hills and geological features). Southland landscapes and natural features make it unique and help give us our particular “sense of place”.
- 1.0.2 The Department of Conservation is responsible for managing many large and important landscapes in public conservation lands such as national parks. Such areas are managed by the Department of Conservation, primarily through Conservation Management Strategies and National Park Plans. The New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement provides national policy direction for local authorities in their day to day management of coastal areas, including subdivision, use and development activities and issues around natural character.
- 1.0.3 The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) requires Councils to recognise, provide for and have particular regard to:
- preserving the natural character of the coastal environment;
  - the protection of outstanding natural features and landscapes from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development;
  - the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values;
  - the quality of the environment.
- 1.0.4 Environment Southland’s functions under the RMA include the establishment of objectives, policies and methods to achieve integrated management of resources and uses of land which are of regional significance, including matters relating to the management of landscapes and natural features. The Southland Regional Policy Statement (RPS) provides an important means of undertaking these functions.
- 1.0.5 The Southland District, Invercargill City and Gore District Councils also have important functions for controlling and managing the effects of land use and subdivision activities on landscapes and natural features. This is primarily undertaken through the establishment and implementation of District Plans.
- 1.0.6 Since the current RPS and Southland District Plan were prepared around 10 years ago, increased levels of development in parts of the region has given rise to concerns about adverse effects on landscape and natural values. By way of example, such activities include rural/residential subdivision in coastal areas, Te Anau and Winton; windfarms and associated infrastructure; telecommunications and structures on prominent ridge tops skylines, earthworks; the removal of indigenous vegetation; forestry and extractive activities (eg mining landforms for minerals and gravel/rock extraction).
- 1.0.7 The imposition of planning controls to protect landscapes/natural features can lead to significant conflict between private landowners and community expectations. For example, planning controls can restrict landowner property rights to use and manage their land, in exchange for actual or perceived benefits to the public good of the community (ie sustainable management).

## **2.0 Existing Regional Policy Statement/Southland District Plan issues-a brief synopsis**

2.0.1 The current Southland Regional Policy Statement (RPS) and Southland District Plan (District Plan) both contain issues relating to landscapes and natural features.

2.0.2 The “Landscape and Natural Features” section of the RPS contains four issues. In summary, they are:

1. many of the region’s outstanding natural features and landscapes have been adversely affected by the activities that have taken place on them;
2. insufficient regard has been given to landscape values in preparing resource management documents, considering resource consents, designing buildings and locating activities;
3. the lack of recognition of the important contribution that the different plants and animals, namely biodiversity, make to the varied Southland landscape;
4. changes in landscape affect the cultural relationship of Maori with ancestral lands, water, sites, wahi tapu and wahi taoka.

2.0.3 We’ve reviewed each of these issues to assess whether they remain relevant in Southland. What we’ve found is that on the whole, the issues remain relevant.

2.0.4 We have also undertaken a detailed analysis of each RPS objective, policy and method that relates to each issue to check that they are still relevant. Overall the current RPS takes an “enabling and hands off” approach to the management of landscapes and natural features in the Southland region. Some amendments to the RPS may be appropriate:

- greater strategic guidance and clearer wording to district and city councils for managing landscapes and natural features;
- identification of key threats (or major drivers of change) to landscapes and natural features;
- specific identification/delineation of “outstanding” landscapes and natural features, as well as “other” significant landscapes;
- clearer linkages to biodiversity matters, including pest weed and animal control and restoration/enhancement of degraded landscapes as relevant matters;
- direct reference to “cultural landscapes”, including reference to the relevant landscapes and features contained in the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998 and Te Tangi a Taurira iwi planning document for Murihiku;
- additional methods (eg landscape assessments; financial contributions to be used for landscaping or planting; a further refined Southland Regional Landscape Assessment within a timeframe; advocacy to District and City councils through resource consent/district plan change processes for the protection of landscapes/natural features; dual Māori place names and implementation of the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998).

2.0.5 The Landscape Areas section of the existing Southland District Plan divides the Southland District up into seven distinct landscape areas, known as “Resource Areas”: Fiordland, Stewart Island, The Coast, Catlins, The Mountains, The Hills and The Plains. A summary of the issues in the District Plan relevant to natural features and landscapes includes:

- inappropriately located buildings and vegetation adversely affects the outstanding visual amenity provided by this area (Scenic Resource Area);

- retention of lake qualities while developing activities in and around Te Anau and Manapōuri townships (Fiordland Resource Area);
- retaining landscape and ecological values if any essential buildings or structures are required (Fiordland Resource Area);
- the natural character of the coast is threatened by inappropriate use and development (Coastal Resource Area);
- inappropriate land management practices can adversely effect the aesthetic environment of the Rural Resource Area, which is an important component in the District's growing tourism industry (Rural Resource Area);
- residential activities can compromise the natural, open-space character of the rural environment (Rural Resource Area);
- there are a number of significant habitats, areas of natural value, and landscapes in this resource area that are threatened by a number of inappropriate activities (Hills and Catlins Resource Areas);
- this environment dominates the views from other resource areas of the District and is therefore an environment sensitive to changes in land use (Mountains Resource Area).

2.0.6 We feel that given the size and various landscape types found in the Southland District, a similar approach which also provides for specific landscape categories within each Resource Area could have merit for the second generation District Plan. Furthermore, the existing Scenic Resource Area (and associated policy/rule framework) could be extended to protect other outstanding landscapes which the Southland District Council is currently proposing to do in respect of the Te Anau Basin, through a proposed change to the District Plan (yet to be publicly notified). Also, relevant sites/features of natural significance could be identified in the District Plan as outstanding natural features and given formal regulatory protection.

### **3.0 What has changed and what are the issues now and for the future?**

3.0.1 Changes have occurred over the last 10 years in respect of the planning and management of landscapes and natural features. Some of the main changes that we feel need to be considered as part of the RPS and District Plan review process, are as follows:

#### **3.0.2 Change in overall philosophy of the value of landscapes and their management**

3.0.2.1 There is increasing recognition that “all” landscapes have value, and sustainable management of landscapes is not just about the protection of our most valued/outstanding landscapes. Examples of landscapes that fall outside Section 6b of the Resource Management Act 1991 include landscapes with amenity, heritage/cultural and other values.

#### **3.0.3 Changes to legislation and new case law around landscapes and natural features**

3.0.3.1 Various amendments have been made to the RMA during the last 10 years and new case law has been developed around landscapes and natural features, which both need to be addressed through the review process. Those changes directly relevant to the management of natural features and landscapes include:

- the strengthened role of Regional Policy Statements (eg regional and district plans are now required to “give effect” to RPSs);
- a new “Matter of National Importance” in the RMA, being the protection of historic heritage from inappropriate subdivision, use and development (which includes heritage/cultural landscapes);

- the emergence of Environment Court case law around the classification of landscapes, the meaning of “outstanding” and criteria for assessing landscapes (eg Wakatipu Environmental Society and Pigeon Bay decisions).

### 3.0.4 **National Policy Statements**

3.0.4.1 Regional Policy Statements must “give effect to” National Policy Statements. The government has both proposed and released national policy statements which have implications for the management of natural features and landscapes. These include:

- the Proposed New Zealand Coastal Policy, which includes a new definition of “coastal environment” and new objectives and policies around subdivision, use and development;
- the NPS on electricity transmission, which provides that “...in rural environments, planning and development of the transmission system should seek to avoid adverse effects on outstanding natural landscapes...”.

### 3.0.5 **Preparation and implementation of regional and district plans**

3.0.5.1 Since 1997, the Invercargill City Council, Southland and Gore District Councils have all prepared District Plans that are now operative. Environment Southland has also prepared several regional plans, most of which are operative.

3.0.5.2 Land use and subdivision are primary issues and drivers of landscape change, and District Plans are important means of achieving sustainable management of natural features and landscapes. The District Plans contain a variety of approaches for managing landscapes, such as identification and delineation of outstanding landscape areas; criteria based approaches; investigations/research, and rule thresholds for land use activities. Consequently, landscapes and natural features are being managed differently and protected to varying degrees across Southland. The Southland District Council is contemplating changes to the District Plan relating to rural/residential subdivision in the Te Anau Basin, including the protection of landscape, visual, and amenity values based on the findings of the Te Anau Basin Landscape Capacity Study.

### 3.0.6 **Landscapes investigations/assessments**

3.0.6.1 Landscape investigations and assessments are now an important basis for planning and managing landscapes. Several studies and assessment have been undertaken in Southland since 1997, including:

- Southland Regional Landscape Assessment prepared by Boffa Miskell Limited – a region-wide study of “outstanding” and “characteristic” landscapes.
- Te Anau Basin Growth Planning Landscape Capacity Study 2006 prepared by Boffa Miskell Limited.
- Southland Coastal Landscape Study 2006 prepared by Boffa Miskell Limited, which identifies possible areas of outstanding landscapes/natural features along the coast, and possible suitable areas for rural/residential development and other recommendations.
- Southland Coastal Landscape Assessment prepared by DOC, which forms part of the Southland Regional Coastal Plan.
- Landscape assessments prepared individually for major resource consent proposals such as windfarms and major subdivisions.
- Non-Regulatory Development Guidelines for Te Anau Basin and Riverton/Aparima Township prepared by the Southland District Council.

### 3.07 **Rural/residential development and subdivision**

3.07.1 Rural/residential subdivision and development in parts of the Southland District has increased significantly in recent years and can have significant visual and amenity effects on prominent coastal landscapes. Specific “hotspots” include:

- parts of the Southland coast particularly Colac Bay/Ōraka, Curio Bay, Riverton/Aparima and Ōrepuki;
- Te Anau Basin;
- lifestyle block development in rural areas, such as the periphery of Winton.

### 3.08 **Extractive/mining activities**

3.08.1 The effects of extractive activities on natural features and landscapes are highly topical. Examples include:

- extractive activities, such as mining of landforms for minerals.
- rock/gravel extraction activities associated with dairy farming, including those taking place in coastal areas.

### 3.09 **Commercial wind farm development**

3.09.1 The development of commercial windfarms in Southland is a resource management issue that has emerged since 1997. Due to their height, size and infrastructure requirements, such activities can have significant effects on landscape and natural values.

### 3.10 **Planting of Trees in the Scenic Resource Area of the Southland District Plan**

3.10.1 Under Rule SRA.2 of the Southland District Plan, planting trees for shelter, commercial or ornamental purposes in the Scenic Resource Area requires a resource consent from the Southland District Council. The rule seeks to protect landscape and amenity values of the area, however the current wording of the rule has proved to be difficult to administer for both the Council and Plan users.

## 4.0 **Options for addressing issues**

4.0.1 Options for the second generation review of the RPS and District Plan include:

### 4.0.2 **Option A: Status Quo**

4.0.2.1 This option is roughly the current regional/district approaches, which would continue to provide an “enabling/hands off” approach to the management of natural features and landscapes in Southland.

### 4.0.3 **Option B: Limited regional policy intervention (with correspondingly more district council autonomy)**

4.0.3.1 Under this option, the management of landscapes and natural features would be largely left to district/regional plans and resource consent processes, albeit with some regional policy direction on specified matters. District Councils may choose to include any of the following in their second generation District Plans:

- definition and mapping of outstanding natural features and landscapes in District Plans (eg in coastal areas and the Te Anau Basin, based on recent studies);

- identification and mapping of locations within areas of high landscape values, where future growth would be appropriate and best absorbed;
- regulatory methods (eg District Plan rules to protect landscapes and natural features from inappropriate subdivision, use and development activities);
- non-regulatory approaches (eg guidelines and information on landscape issues for developers when designing new developments, tailored to a specific locality/township which may include best practice examples throughout the country).

4.0.4 **Option C: Additional and comprehensive regional policy intervention (with correspondingly less district/city council autonomy).**

4.0.4.1 This option could include introducing any or all of the following changes into the RPS:

- the introduction of wording changes into the RPS, to include mandatory and certain language to require RPS objectives, policies and methods for landscapes and natural features to be “given effect to” by district and regional plans, as well as timeframes for implementation (eg district and regional plans shall ... before or at the time of the next Plan review/change);
- criteria for assessing the significance of landscapes and natural features, and policy direction on landscape assessment processes and management techniques for district and city councils;
- identification of regionally important landscapes/natural features within the RPS (ie incorporate maps/words into the RPS that identify landscapes and natural features from various existing studies and other sources).

4.0.5 **Option D: Another approach (or combination of approaches)**

4.0.5.1 Following consultation with the regional community, other approaches may be identified for the protection and management of landscapes and natural features in Southland.

**5.0 Questions for your comment**

1. Does Southland have any outstanding/significant landscapes or natural features (eg coastlines, mountains, river valleys, plains, hills, geological features or other areas or places) that the regional community values or feels are special areas?
2. Are the landscapes/natural features listed in the table in the Table below the outstanding/significant landscapes and natural features of Southland? Please identify any others, and the values they hold.
3. What outstanding/significant natural features and landscapes within Southland should the RPS/ Southland District Plan look to protect from inappropriate subdivision, use and development?
4. Can you identify any specific examples or locations in Southland, where natural features and landscapes are/are not being appropriately protected?
5. How should landscapes and natural features actually be managed and protected, and what methods (or combination of methods) should be used in the second generation RPS/Southland District Plan:
  - is the use of non-regulatory development guidelines a useful approach for managing natural features/landscapes, and one that the Councils should continue with in Southland?
  - is a rules based approach that seeks to protect and preserve more stringently Southland’s outstanding natural features and landscapes an approach that should be adopted in the second generation RPS/District Plan?

- are there other appropriate policy methods/instruments for managing landscapes and natural features (e.g. self-regulation, voluntary methods, education and information, economic instruments, or free-market methods)?

**Table 1: Landscapes/natural features in the Southland Region**

Source	Outstanding landscapes/natural features	Important/significant landscapes and natural features
Southland Regional Landscape Assessment prepared by Boffa Miskell Limited (dated August 1997)	Te Wāhipounamu World Heritage Area-Fiordland	Longwoods
	Stewart Island/Rakiura	Taringatura's, including the limestone outcrops at Castle Rock
	The Inland Mountains, including the Takitimu, Livingstone, Eyre, Garvie and Umbrella Ranges	Hokonui's, including Croydon, Waterfall Range, Southland syncline
	The Southland Coast	Waimea Plains
	The Te Anau Basin	Southland Plains, including Forest Hill Lower Waiau Valley, including Clifden rock outcrops Inland Catlins, including Venlaw, Slopedown and Pukerau
Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act 1998	Takitimu Mountains, Motupōhue/Bluff Hill, Tūtoko, Mount Anglem/Hananui, Tribal Properties (e.g. Taramea, Matariki, Rarotoka) and others.	
Gore District Plan	Hokonui Hills	
Invercargill City District Plan	Ōtatara Peninsula, Bluff Hill/Motupōhue, Three Sisters-Bluff Dunes System, Awarua Wetlands, New River Estuary, Bluff Harbour/Awarua Bay, Sandy Point Reserve, Thomsons Bush.	
Southland District Plan	Scenic Resource Area (situated between Te Anau - Manapōuri Rd, the Waiau River and between Lake Te Anau outlet and Supply Bay Rd).	
Southland Coastal Landscape Study prepared by Boffa Miskell Limited and dated August 2006.	Areas within the Southland District Council "Coastal Resource Area" identified in the study as being an "Outstanding Natural Feature" or an "Outstanding Natural Landscape".	
Te Anau Basin Growth Planning Landscape Capacity Study prepared by Boffa Miskell Limited and dated April 2006.	Areas within the Te Anau Basin identified in the study as having "low" and "moderately low" landscape capacity.	
New Zealand Geological Society Geopreservation Inventory for the Southland Region	Natural features and areas identified within the Inventory.	