The Catlins 2024-2034 Catchment Action Plan

The Catlins Catchment Action Plan serves as a focus for environmental and natural resource management in The Catlins area of Otago.

It is a long-term plan that builds on the work that mana whenua, communities and local government are already doing to protect and manage their place and serves as a focus for new actions and projects.

Credit: Lennon Bright

Environmental values

The plan centres on six environmental values that represent the area's major ecosystems and the native species and habitats found within them:

Native bush, tussock and shrubland

The native terrestrial ecosystems of The Catlins are diverse and teem with native fauna, flora, and fungi – many species of which are threatened.

Dunes and beaches

Dunes and beaches are characteristic of The Catlins coast. These endangered ecosystems are important habitat for native marine mammals and marine and coastal birds.

Soils

Soils are the lifeblood of the terrestrial environments. Soil condition determines the health of the native ecosystems and the productivity of the farms and forestry.

Estuaries

Estuaries are home to many native species of fish, birds, mammals and plant communities. They are complex ecosystems valued for their biodiversity, cultural and recreational values. The Catlins has some of the least modified estuaries in the South Island.

Wetlands

The Catlins has some of the only national examples of forest adjoining swamps, bogs and marshes, while its saltmarshes support nationally threatened plants and animals.

Rivers and lakes

Fresh water is a defining feature of The Catlins, and many of its rivers, lakes and streams maintain good water quality, which supports native fish, shellfish and invertebrates and the native animals that rely on them.

How we will focus work to **enhance The Catlins**

Controlling introduced mammals and birds

Strategy:

Introduced mammal and bird control strategy

Pressures:

Browsers — deer, pigs, goats, possums, rabbits, and hares — eat, dig up and trample native plants on a scale that significantly impacts the health of terrestrial ecosystems and their ability to support our threatened native wildlife.

Predators — possums, stoats, rats, mice and feral cats — prey on native wildlife.

Browser and predator numbers also threaten the productive land and livestock of farmers across The Catlins.

Objective:

- Increase effectiveness of control work through collaboration.

Foundational actions:

- Establish 'Control task-group' to map priority areas.
- Plan on-ground works and access funds and resources.

Environmental values

Removing and controlling weeds

Strategy:

Weed control strategy

Pressures:

Exotic plant species thrive in landscapes altered by humans and natural disturbances where they are better adapted to survive than native plant species. Once weeds become established, they can dramatically alter the composition of plant species and lead to the degradation of valued ecosystems.

Objectives:

- Increase effectiveness of targeted control work through collaboration.
- Increase public knowledge of key weeds.
- Permanently reduce area-wide coverage of invasive plant species.
- Increase native plant coverage in focus sites.

Foundational actions:

- Establish 'Weed task-group' to map priority areas.
- Plan on-ground works and monitoring.
- Access funds and resources to remove weeds and replant natives.

Environmental values

Protecting our native and valued non-native fish populations

Strategies:

Fish species interaction strategy and Over-harvesting strategy

Pressures:

Trout are an introduced species that prey on our native fish, shellfish, and invertebrate species, but are also important to fishing tourism in the area. Similarly, residents and visitors harvest many species from rivers, estuaries, and other intertidal areas. Anecdotally, size and abundance of harvested species have reduced over time.

Objectives:

- Habitats of native fish are protected, and native species can move between the sea and fresh water.
- Monitor and quantify the changes in abundance and size of key harvested species.
- Advocate for greater surveillance and protection of key harvested species.

Foundational actions:

- Identify areas important for native and introduced fish.
- Identify location of fish passage barriers on private land and assess their risk to fish passage.
- Establish community monitoring programme to create an evidence base for overharvesting.
- Ensure catch limit signage is visible and current at popular access areas.

Environmental values

Restoring our dunes

Programme:

Dune restoration / model beaches programme

Strategies:

- Weed control strategy
- Introduced mammal and bird control strategy
- Off-lead dog sub-strategy
- Vehicles on beaches sub-strategy

Pressures:

Dune area in The Catlins has declined by 70% since the early 1900s. Native plants, such as pīkao, have been replaced by marram and tree lupin, while coastal birds and mammals have lost valuable breeding habitat.

Objective:

- To return some parts of The Catlins dunes system to an approximation of their original condition.

Foundational actions:

Dune restoration group established who will:

- Undertake stocktake of accreting dunes
- Prioritise dune systems for restoration
- Consult on restoration best practice
- Access funding and resources.

Environmental value

Enhancing sustainable farming and forestry practices

Strategies:

Sustainable farming strategy and sustainable forestry strategy

Pressures:

Forestry and farming activities have the potential to increase the amount of sediment washing into waterways and inadvertently supporting the survival of introduced mammals by providing refuge and easily available food. Farming can also increase the concentration of nutrients in waterways.

Objectives:

- Farmers and foresters are supported in the environmental work they do.
- Productive soils are kept on land and out of waterways.
- Water quality is improved across the area.
- Introduced mammals are suitably controlled on farming and forestry lands.

Foundational actions:

- Catchment groups are re-invigorated to support farmers continue or adopt best-practice land management.
- Forestry companies and foresters are included in catchment groups.
- Forestry companies and foresters are part of the mammal, bird and weed task groups, and advocate for best practice.

Environmental values

Promoting wildlife-friendly behaviour

Strategy:

Human behaviours strategy

Pressures:

Off-lead dogs and vehicles on beaches can cause disturbance and even death to native wildlife such as penguins and sea lions. Poorly managed and/or old septic tank systems potentially increase the nutrient and pathogen load in Catlins freshwater and estuarine ecosystems. Plastics and waste are improperly disposed of, and recycling options are limited or insufficient.

Objective:

- Locals and visitors understand and follow the bylaws and guidelines so impacts on wildlife and the environment are reduced.

Foundational actions:

- Clutha District Council (CDC) and Department of Conservation continue their current work plans that limit the effects of off-lead dogs, vehicles on beaches, and plastics and waste.
- Otago Regional Council, with the support of CDC, will identify septic tank hotspots and develop appropriate education materials.

Environmental values

How we will **monitor the plan**

We monitor whether the plan's strategies and actions are making an impact on the health of the values.

Monitoring is a vital part of adaptive management, which allows plans to be written based on the best available knowledge and continuously improved based on the monitoring results.

You'll soon be able to track the plan's progress through our dedicated monitoring page on The Catlins Hub:

orc.govt.nz/icm-catlins

How we will **review the plan**

Adaptive management requires plans to be monitored and reviewed regularly, to allow new information as well as the lessons from the current iteration of the plan to be incorporated into future plans and practice.

The temporal scope of this plan is 10 years, and the plan will be reviewed at the following milestones:

18-month health check

The early stages following a plan's launch can feel slow with multiple new workstreams and a new team learning to work together.

The 18-month health check will identify which strategies are on track, which have yet to be begun and which need small changes or extra support.

5-year evaluation review

Halfway through the scope of the plan, this review will be more thorough than the 18-month health check.

It will monitor the progress and success of the strategies and reflect on the work to date.

It will also re-examine the situation diagrams and theories of change on which the current plan is based.

For further information

To learn more about The Catlins Catchment Action Plan, visit: **orc.govt.nz/icm-catlins** or email us at **icm@orc.govt.nz**