Upper Lakes 2025-2035 Catchment Action Plan

The Upper Lakes Catchment Action Plan (CAP) serves as a focus for environmental and natural resource management in the Queenstown Lakes district — including the catchments of lakes Whakatipu Waimāori, Wānaka, Hāwea and Waiwhakaata.

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.

The hapū who hold mana whenua status in the Upper Lakes CAP area are affiliated with seven papatipu rūnaka across Kāi Tahu ki Otago and Ngāi Tahu ki Murihiku. As te Tiriti o Waitangi (treaty) partners, they exercise rakatirataka (authority) in relation to the management of te taiao (the natural environment).

Cultural and community values

- Wai māori (fresh water)
- Mahika kai (traditional food resources)
- Health and wellbeing
- Rest, replenishment and learning
- Local economy
- Sustainable agriculture
- Visitors and tourism
- Recreation
- Taoka (treasured, native) species
- Outstanding landscapes
- Ki uta ki tai (interconnectedness)

Natural and managed environmental values

- Alpine
- Native forest, shrub and tussock
- Lakes
- Rivers
- Wetlands
- Productive land
- Urban spaces

Our mission affirms a shared commitment

"The Upper Lakes, with its soaring mountains and deep glacial lakes, is where manaaki whenua (caring for the land and waters) and manaaki takata (caring for the people) are inherent in all we do.

We are committed to protecting and improving the unique native biodiversity in our place, while aiming to inspire and empower future generations to further protect and enhance the area's special values."

Our vision sets a path for the future

"It's 2075 in the Upper Lakes. Takahē cross paths with hikers, bird colonies nest undisturbed on braided river gravels, and pekapeka tou-roa / long-tailed bat glide through ancient beech canopies.

Behind them, wetlands and bush weave through sustainable, thriving farms renowned for their food and fibre, while towns are cooled and connected by streams, wetlands, and green space.

Mana whenua connection to place and taoka (cultural treasures) is flourishing, mātauraka (knowledge) is strong and rakatirataka (authority) evident."

See our full vision story at **orc.govt.nz/upper-lakes**

Our story

The Upper Lakes Integrated Catchment Group (ICG) was established in 2024 to co-develop this CAP.

The ICG brings together mana whenua, community representatives from catchment and conservation groups, and staff from agencies including Queenstown-Lakes District Council, Department of Conservation, Land Information New Zealand, and Otago Regional Council — each offering knowledge, passion, and perspective.

Over 12 months, we held two hui, six workshops, and a site visit — more than 880 hours of shared commitment. Alternating hui between Wānaka and Tāhuna / Queenstown, we bridged rural and urban communities and built connections across the region.

Through listening and collaboration, we found common purpose. What began as separate contributions has become a collective plan to protect and enhance fresh water and biodiversity.

Today, many of us proudly mention our Upper Lakes ICG membership when we introduce ourselves — a testament to the strength of working together for the health of our place and people.

Our group and ORC team members gather in May 2025

Environmental health goals for 2035 relative to 2025 baseline –

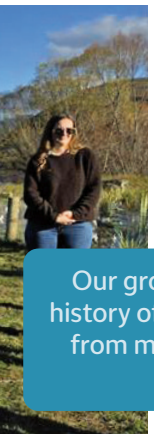
what we need to achieve

- Increase the abundance of native wildlife
- Maintain or improve water quality
- Improve freshwater ecosystem function
- Improve environmental conditions for mahika kai and enable safe use
- Increase overall native vegetation coverage and improve condition
- Improve overall wetland coverage and function
- Maintain or improve naturally uncommon ecosystem (NUE) functions
- Strengthen ki uta ki tai (interconnectedness)

Pressure reduction objectives –

what we need to get on top of

- Reduce introduced predator mammal populations
- Reduce the risk of new freshwater invasive organisms establishing
- Contain and remove lagarosiphon
- Reduce wilding conifer seed sources, infestations, and reinfestations
- Reduce terrestrial weeds
- Improve environmental conditions for mahika kai and enable safe use
- Avoid clearing and changing native vegetation
- Avoid clearing, draining, or filling of wetlands
- Reduce introduced herbivore populations
- Reduce contaminants in stormwater
- Avoid wastewater discharge to fresh water
- Reduce contaminants from land use entering fresh water
- Reduce introduced fish interactions with non-migratory galaxiids
- Assist tuna kūwharuwharu (longfin eel) migration and kanakana (lamprey) migration
- Reduce knowledge gaps



Our group hears about the cultural history of Wai-whakaata-o-Hākitekura from mana whenua representative Darren Rewi.

Our group brainstorms actions towards the goals

Our group takes in one of our workshop tasks in Wānaka

We will focus work to enhance the Upper Lakes area through **13 strategies**

Foundational Action Programme

Strategy one

Develop a long-term and diverse framework that sustains funding that will support actions

Objective: Develop a long-term, sustainable, and diverse funding framework to deliver CAP strategies and support proactive, community-led restoration.

Initial action plan, 3–5 years:

- Advocate for funding that recognises landscape-scale action is a long game
- Create investable projects for self-sustaining action
- Cost–benefit-based early intervention to reduce long-term costs
- Provide funding tools such as co-funding and credit systems for landholder restoration
- Create incentives and co-funding programmes to encourage landholder participation in restoration actions

Strategy two

Increase science, research and knowledge sharing for the community

Objective: Identify and bridge knowledge gaps, and provide accessible science to enable evidence-based management and support CAP strategies.

Initial action plan, 3–5 years:

- Undertake research on deep lakes and apply the results to management of land use
- Support community monitoring with coordination and robust methods
- Develop an interactive CAP data system
- Establish a knowledge-sharing network

Strategy three

Strengthen our mana whenua partnership in the Upper Lakes area

Objective: Continue to build partnerships between mana whenua, government, and conservation groups to uphold Kāi Tahu values and shared aspirations.

Initial action plan, 3–5 years:

- Develop a partnership plan that ensures genuine and meaningful kōrero (discussions) and mahi (work) that reflects partnership commitments and to ensure mana whenua are appropriately resourced and enabled to participate to the extent they wish
- Position the mauri (life force) and mana (prestige) of te taiao (the environment) and the catchments as the central priority for what we do in partnership

Strategy four

Improve environmental conditions for mahika kai and enable safe use

Objective: Strengthen understanding of mahika kai, improve conditions at sites, and increase species abundance.

Initial action plan, 3–5 years:

- Strengthen community knowledge and awareness of mahika kai practices and their importance in Kāi Tahu life and identity
- Ensure mahika kai resources, habitats, and practices are appropriately built into large-scale restoration projects

Native wildlife programme

Strategy five

Control introduced predator mammals

Objective: Reduce predator mammal populations to increase native wildlife, enhance mahika kai, and protect uncommon ecosystems.

Initial action plan, 3–5 years:

- Use advanced and innovative trapping and monitoring tools
- Intensify predator control in core areas, buffer zones, and wildlife corridors
- Establish a 10,000-ha predator elimination zone in 5–10 years
- Expand community engagement and trapping in urban/semi-rural areas
- Support responsible companion cat ownership and policy interventions
- Develop targeted feral cat control plans

Strategy six

Assist tuna kūwharuwharu (longfin eel) and kanakana (lamprey) migration, in partnership with mana whenua

Objective: Support tuna (eel) and kanakana (lamprey) migration to enhance wildlife, mahika kai, freshwater ecosystems, and ki uta ki tai.

Initial action plan, 3–5 years:

- Mana whenua-led collaboration with key partners to increase tuna trap and transfer.
- Support mana whenua-led tuna research
- Monitor tuna (eel) health in the deepwater lakes
- Support mana whenua-led research that can lead to a trial of assisted kanakana passage

Native vegetation programme

Strategy seven

Protect and enhance galaxiid habitats

Objective: Reduce interactions between introduced fish and galaxiids to boost native wildlife and freshwater ecosystem health.

Initial action plan, 3–5 years:

- Form a clearer picture of non-migratory galaxiid distribution using eDNA analysis and mātauraka (Kāi Tahu knowledge)
- Install educational storyboard signage about galaxiids
- Improve galaxiid habitats with barriers, trout removal, culvert fixes, and planting

Strategy eight

Control wilding conifers (pines and firs) and terrestrial weeds

Objective: Reduce wilding conifers and terrestrial weeds to improve vegetation, expand natives, and protect ecosystems.

Initial action plan, 3–5 years:

- Expand education on pest plant identification, impacts of weeds, and effective control methods
- Update and maintain data on the spread of wilding conifers
- Replace conifer seed sources with native plants or non-spreading exotics
- Support collaborative weed control — share crews, resources, and expertise across groups
- Proactively manage fast-spreading weeds
- Control weeds in braided rivers
- 'Right plant, right place' and targeted control approach

Strategy nine

Protect, restore and enhance native vegetation

Objective: Protect existing native vegetation, expand planting, and reduce browsing by introduced herbivores.

Initial action plan, 3–5 years:

- Fund planting maintenance to ensure survival and growth
- Support community nurseries
- Improve public access to eco-sourced native plants
- Develop a spatial native-vegetation restoration plan
- Provide incentives to retire land and covenant sensitive habitats
- Facilitate coordinated goat and pig control between landholders and across boundaries
- Fund rabbit-proof fencing, rabbit guards for seedlings, and coordinated control efforts

Freshwater programme

Strategy ten

Protect, restore and enhance wetlands

Objective: Protect and restore wetlands to increase extent, function, biodiversity, and downstream water quality.

Initial action plan, 3–5 years:

- Build community knowledge and awareness of wetland values
- Provide best practice guidance on wetland restoration and mana whenua-led guidance on wetland mahika kai enhancement
- Provide a start-to-finish support package for wetland restoration
- Enable phased willow removal with streamlined consents and experienced operators

Strategy twelve

Reduce contaminant losses from land use

Objective: Reduce sediments, nutrients, pathogens, and agrichemicals from land use entering fresh water.

Initial action plan, 3–5 years:

- Provide a start-to-finish support package for contaminant management — fencing, planting out gullies, buffer strips, sediment traps, wetlands and riparian planting
- Help landholders co-fund runoff and sediment measures across diverse land uses
- Encourage on-the-ground observations during heavy rain events and provide follow-up advice for mitigation, with an 'education over regulation' approach

Strategy thirteen

Reinforce freshwater biosecurity in deepwater lakes

Objective: Reduce risk of new invasives and contain/remove lagarosiphon to protect ecosystems and mahika kai.

Initial action plan, 3–5 years:

- Build community awareness of invasive freshwater organisms
- Work with tourism operators and visitor-based businesses to train key staff to share 'Check, Clean, Dry' knowledge
- Continue work to contain and remove lagarosiphon
- Detect and map lagarosiphon with divers and cameras and provide cleaning facilities for vessels entering deepwater lakes

Strategy eleven

Reduce contaminants from stormwater and wastewater

Objective: Reduce stormwater and wastewater contaminants to improve water quality, freshwater ecosystems, and mahika kai.

Initial action plan, 3–5 years:

- Increase delivery of community education programmes such as 'Our Drains are Streams', 'Adopt a Drain', and rain garden workshops
- Enable residential/commercial property-level water sensitive solutions — rain tanks, greywater systems, rain gardens, and permeable surfaces
- Encourage best practice stormwater design
- Understand sources of stormwater contamination to deepwater lakes through a scientific study
- Promote best practice land disposal and oppose wastewater discharges to water

Bringing the **plan to life**

This CAP is designed to be a living plan — one that moves from vision to action on the ground.

A new Upper Lakes CAP Governance Group, including mana whenua and key partners, will guide decisions, while a wider circle of collaborators ensures diverse voices stay involved.

Early projects will 'kick things off' and delivery rests with many hands. Conservation and catchment groups, mana whenua, agencies, landholders, and industry partners will lead projects, supported by ORC coordination, technical expertise, and shared resourcing.

Progress will be tracked through existing monitoring programmes, guided by science, mātauraka Māori (Māori knowledge), and community knowledge.

Transparent communication and regular reviews (18 months and five years) will keep the plan adaptive, ensuring it grows and evolves with new challenges and opportunities.

Want to get **involved?** Here's how!

- Visit our Upper Lakes CAP hub at **orc.govt.nz/upper-lakes** to stay up to date
- Use the iNaturalist app to snap photos and log locations of native species. We will synch the data to our maps to help guide our actions at **inaturalist.nz**
- Join your local trapping group and help trap predators to boost our native bird populations — find them on **trap.nz**
- See a pest? Report it online using our form at **orc.govt.nz/reportpests**
- Pollution in our waterways, air, or land? Call the ORC Pollution Hotline on **0800 800 033**
- Heading out on the lake or river? **Check, clean and dry** your gear to stop the spread of freshwater aquatic pests
- Adopt a drain and stop rubbish from reaching our lakes — find info at **waiwanaka.nz/adopt-a-drain**
- Pitch in a helping hand tackling wilding conifers — find volunteer events at **whakatipuwilding.co.nz** and **uppercluthawildingtreegroup.co.nz**
- Volunteer at a planting day or help a community nursery to restore our beautiful native vegetation — find events at **loveqt.co.nz** or **lovewanaka.co.nz**
- Learn about water quality and find the latest data at **lawa.org.nz**

For further **information**

Email our team with any questions: **icm@orc.govt.nz**

To download the summary or full plan, visit

orc.govt.nz/upper-lakes