

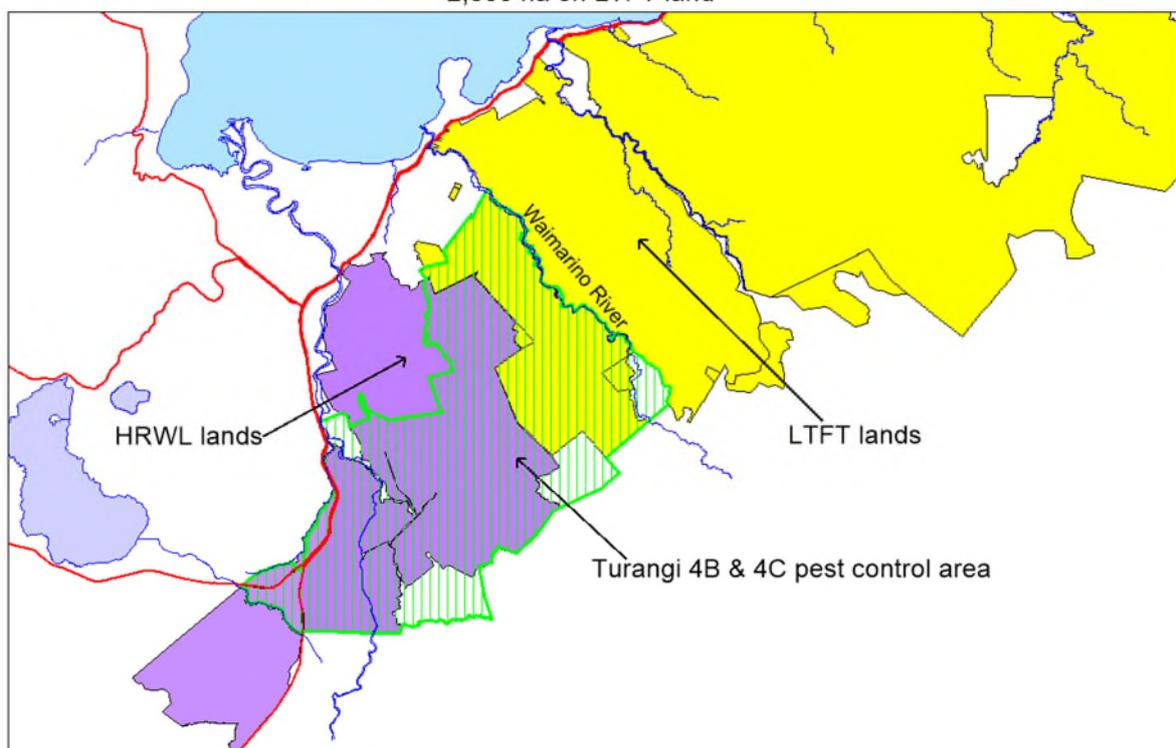
Pest Control Operation – Southern Lake Taupō Forest

Ospri has asked LTFT for permission to undertake a pest control operation over the southern part of Lake Taupō Forest in late 2020 (probably November, but exact date to be confirmed).

The control of what Ospri calls the 'Turangi 4B and 4C' zone involves around 2,600 ha of LTFT lands, plus 6,000 ha of HRWL lands and 1,200 ha of DoC land and other Maori-owned land. As usual, Ospri's operation is part of their plan to eradicate bovine tuberculosis (Tb) from NZ, which they do by keeping the numbers of the primary Tb carrier – possums – at low levels. They plan to use a combination of aerially applied 1080 and ground-based control techniques.

The requested treatment area is shown below, it includes around 2,600 ha of LTFT lands.

Ospri 'Turangi 4B & 4C' - 9,700 ha pest control operation proposed for 2020
2,600 ha on LTFT land



Consultation

It is Ospri's responsibility to consult with the owners of all the lands they want to treat – this report discusses the decision making around the LTFT-part of the control area.

The Trust received a request from Ospri in early 2019 asking to do three operations over the subsequent three years. As is outlined in protocols agreed with owners in 2005, whenever the Trust receives a request for pest control on its lands, it calls a meeting of owners to discuss it. Such a meeting can cover requests for more than one operation, as was the case this time.

LTFT called a meeting of owners to discuss the request, which was held on 9 April 2019 at the Bridge Lodge in Turangi. It was attended by around 50 owners and several Trustees, as well as representatives from OSPRI, contractor EPRO, and NZFM. As was expected, the majority of owners who attended were strongly opposed to 1080, and opposed to the operation, though a few were in support. We also received feedback outside of the meeting in support of the request, from owners who did not feel comfortable to attend the meeting.

Trustee Decision making

While taking that feedback on board, the Trustees also have to consider any benefits of the proposed operation in terms of protecting our native bush and our bird-life. The Trust has a responsibility to make sure that the core asset, our whenua, is protected, and indeed is healthy and can support us all both now and into the future. They receive reports not only on the state of our forest – which show that introduced pests are having a significant impact on the health of our native ecosystems - but also detailed scientific information on the use and impacts of 1080, and about pest control in general.

The Trustees recognise that while Ospri's objective is the national eradication of bovine Tb, as owners of forest and bush lands we are not directly concerned about this disease. What we do have concerns about is pests threatening our native birds and native bush, and about possums damaging our pine trees. Research has shown that the work done by Ospri on our lands has generally kept pest numbers down to very low levels, and done so without any financial input from the Trust. The methodology used however has alienated some of our owners who oppose 1080 for reasons of convenience (inability to bring dogs into treated areas for 6 months), concerns about the side-effects of 1080, and general opposition to applying poison on the whenua.

Following the 2019 consultation meeting, the Trustees discussed the proposal further and came to the view that the benefits of the proposed operation outweighed any concerns. They resolved at that point to approve just the first of the three operations, and to consider the next two at future dates. The operation approved in 2019 was for the treatment of around 12,000 ha of LTFT land (Ospri's 'Hatepe Zone 4'), being the area from the Waimarino River north to the Waitetoko Stream, and that operation happened in November 2019. Trustees and staff inspected the operation as it happened, and were very pleased with the sophistication and professionalism of all aspects of the job, and with the outcome.

2020 Operation

As mentioned above, Ospri has now asked whether the Trust will approve the second of the three operations discussed at the 2019 consultation meeting. At their meeting on 9 June 2020, the Trustees resolved to approve the Ospri request, but subject to a number of strict criteria, being:

- That Ospri approve and pay for a ground-based trapping trial covering around 1,000 (38%) of the 2,600 ha LTFT control area;
- That LTFT be able to undertake close and detailed cultural monitoring of all aspects of the operation, including water monitoring;
- That 1080 be kept out of waterways; and
- That deer-repellent baits be used.

We are now finalising the details of the operation with Ospri, including the timing. We will keep this updated, but at this point it appears likely that the operation will occur in around November 2020

In addition to being on our web-site, all people getting permits to enter LTFT lands will be advised of the operation as and when we know more details.

Trust Pest Control Strategy – We understand that Ospri will soon succeed in their plan to eradicate Tb from the central North Island region, and from that point will no longer be requesting to do pest control on our lands. This will not mean that there will not be the same pest problem – just that the pests will not carry Tb. The trust will still have to manage pests to protect our assets.

With this in mind, the Trust, together with the Lake Rotoaira Forest Trust, Hautū Rangipō Whenua Ltd, and Opepe Farm Trust, have been developing a plan on how we will manage those pests in future. This is a large project, E ora Tāne, is based on tikanga and cultural values as well as science, and we are only part way through. Keep an eye on this web-site for updates as we further develop the strategy.

The 1,000 ha trial this year will give us a feel for the type of work we are likely to do as part of the strategy, as well as whether we can find people able and willing to do it, the success of the techniques proposed, and the cost. All of these will be useful findings for us to take forward for when we start our strategy-driven pest control work in full.

Other considerations

Bird monitoring – concern about the possible impacts of 1080 on native birds on LTFT and LRFT lands led to Ospri agreeing to commission an independent a 10-year bird population assessment being done. The study is now in its 9th year, and reports to date are therefore only interim. However, they show that populations of most native bird species have either stayed the same or have increased over this period, during which two 1080 operations having been undertaken in one survey area (Kakaramea) and three in the other (Pihanga). Decreases have been noted in bellbird numbers at both sites, and in fantail numbers at Kakaramea, but further analysis shows that these are not related to 1080 use. There is clear evidence that 12 months after 1080 operations, many bird species have benefited through decreased predation impacts and/or increased overall forest health.

Farming community – in addition to the benefits the operation will bring to our own ecology, we should also remember that the Ospri's Tb-eradication objective is to support farming – including the numerous Tuwharetoa-owned farms in the area. We have received appeals from local Tuwharetoa farms to support Ospri requests, as they have experienced the devastation that Tb infections have on their farming businesses. In addition to many of our owners having shares in the farm-lands, some of these farms are also our business partners – in HRWL and with our Opepe lease.

Blue ducks – LTFT has for five years been contributing to a project aimed at enhancing the habitat for blue ducks along the Waimarino River, in the hope that the whio will establish in the LTFT-portion of the river. The main work involved trapping along the river-banks, both in the LTFT portion and further up in the Kaimanawa Forest Park portion of the river. The 2019 1080 operation on the northern side of the river will have helped protect the birds, as will this year's operation on the southern side of the river. While to date the birds have not established themselves in the LTFT portion of the river, whio numbers further upstream are flourishing. Further south on HRWL lands, this year's operation will also help protect whio on the Tongariro River.

1080 Sowing rate – the amount of 1080 applied per hectare has fallen considerably over the last few decades, as a result of improved baits, and better understanding of application techniques and pest responses. Ospri are proposing to apply 1080 at 2 kg/ha, which is standard for modern operations.