

Biodiversity Action on the Ground: Ecological surveys

Information for property owners



► What is the Biodiversity Action on the Ground programme?

The Biodiversity Action on the Ground programme supports landowners to maintain or enhance native biodiversity and ecosystems on their properties.

Our team identifies threats affecting native biodiversity and ecosystem health and provides advice and funding opportunities to help you maintain or enhance sites on your property.

There are three key aspects to the programme:

1. Identify native biodiversity, ecosystems and their threats on properties through an ecological survey
2. Create a management plan based on survey data and landowner goals
3. Action the plan on the ground, supported by the Environmental Enhancement Fund

► Why is Environment Southland doing this programme?

Environment Southland's Biodiversity Action on the Ground project received \$4.25 million in funding from the Government's Jobs for Nature programme to concentrate on initiatives to protect biodiversity throughout Southland.

In Murihiku Southland, we are fortunate our landscape is still scattered with remnant wetlands and native vegetation. We've used aerial photos and satellite data to identify areas that may contain native biodiversity.

Landowners like you value and protect these special places which are a refuge for native birds and wildlife. Additionally, native biodiversity and ecosystems provide ecosystem services, such as enhanced water and air quality.

The Biodiversity Action on the Ground programme helps us to understand the condition and extent of Murihiku Southland's native biodiversity, supporting its maintenance region wide.

► What is an ecological survey?

The ecological survey is completed by a qualified ecologist. They make observations about plant species, animals, landforms, soils and climate. This information pulls together to tell the story of the native biodiversity on your property, and create the ecological survey report.

Additionally, the ecologist will make recommendations on actions you can take to maintain and enhance your native biodiversity and ecosystems.

► What's in it for me?

Participation in this programme is voluntary. Should you choose to get involved, a summary report of the ecological survey's findings will be provided to you. The report will describe the types of native biodiversity and ecosystems present on your property and any notable features.

It will contain an aerial image of the surveyed site, highlighting locations of notable biodiversity and a list of bird and plant species observed. It will identify any threats that may be degrading the site, such as plant and animal pests. Additionally, there will be a summary table describing the site in a variety of metrics. They can be used to understand the special significance of your site, and how serious any threats may be.

A biodiversity officer can assist you with the development of site management plan based on the information provided in the report and your personal goals. This is a helpful way to identify specific strategies and actions best suited to your site.

A management plan may also help you seek funding for restoring ecological values if you wish to do so. This funding is available through Environment Southland via the Environment Enhancement Fund.

► What's involved in getting a survey?

You will be contacted by the ecologist to arrange a visit. They will discuss access and health and safety requirements on your property with you. The survey involves visiting the location(s) of native vegetation or wetland, assessing what is present and its condition. This includes creating plant species lists, looking for rare and important species, mapping the vegetation, and listing what animals are seen and heard at the site.

When speaking to the ecologist, we encourage you to share any of your own stories about the site. Examples might be the history of the land, or plants or animals you have seen. The survey, normally takes a few hours depending on the area to be covered. You can join the ecologist during the survey if you wish.

► Who will be doing the surveys?

We have engaged Wildland Consultants to undertake ecological surveys on public and private land.

► Is this a regulatory visit?

No, taking part in this programme is entirely voluntary. Your site(s) will only be assessed with your permission.

We're undertaking this work to assist landowners with the management of indigenous biodiversity on their properties, and to better understand the distribution and condition of indigenous biodiversity across Murihiku Southland. Allowing access will not result in your site being made a Significant Natural Area or given any such designation in a District Plan.

► Does an ecological survey and management plan place any legal obligations or protection on my land?

The information collected does not place any obligations on the landowner or place any additional protection on the sites surveyed.

Please note wetlands, and some native vegetation are already subject to protection and rules under; the Resource Management Act, the proposed Southland Water and Land Plan, the Southland District Plan, the Invercargill District Plan and the Gore District Plan. It is important to check these rules before undertaking any activity affecting native ecosystems. You are welcome to contact Environment Southland for help.

The report generated by the ecological survey is not an Ecological Impact Assessment. It cannot be used in a consent application. However, the summary table can provide you with an indication of areas on your property considered significant under various national and regional legislation.

▶ Will this cost me anything?

No, there is no fee for landowners.

▶ Where has the funding come from?

Environment Southland has received funding from the Jobs for Nature fund administered by the Ministry for the Environment. The work will result in the employment of additional ecologists in Southland.

▶ When will the surveys be done?

The surveys will take place over the next four years to be completed by June 2025.

▶ What if I refuse a site visit?

No problem. Taking part in this programme is voluntary, we will only visit sites that we have permission to access.

▶ I have lots of natural areas on my property. Will the ecologist visit all of them?

Yes, we can look at all sites of native biodiversity regardless of the ecosystem or their condition. Each individual area will be described in the report. Areas of wet paddocks, (which now may be considered wetlands under the Freshwater Policy Statement), will only be surveyed if you plan to fence them off and restore them.

▶ What happens to the report information?

Environment Southland will respect your wishes regarding your data. Please note however, collected information remains subject to the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987. Under the Act, Environment Southland is required to release information to the person who made the request.

A consent form will be provided when you request or agree to an ecological survey. On this form, you can state your preferences for how your data is used, and your response will be kept on file.

The report information will be used by Environment Southland for regional scale planning, ecosystem mapping and monitoring. The information will improve our understanding of ecosystem types and distributions across the region.

At a property level, this information supports our consent and compliance team in understanding your property better. This could reduce the work required to respond to any enquiries you make more efficient.

Providing the information to the consents and compliance team is optional. You may opt out if you wish. The ecological survey report not replace an Ecological Impact Assessment in any consent application but it may reduce the cost of an Ecological Impact Assessment by making the ecologist's job easier.

Additionally, report information could be provided to the Southland District Council, Gore District Council and the Invercargill City Council to help them meet their requirements under the proposed National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity. Under the proposed statement, territorial authorities are required to map all Significant Natural Areas, and will be obliged to employ a considerable number of people to complete this work.

Providing the information to territorial authorities is optional. You may opt out if you wish.

Further information

Thanks for taking the time to consider joining our Biodiversity Action on the Ground programme. To request a survey or for more information, please contact Wildlands consultants directly at Southland@wildlands.co.nz or phone 0508 945 369.