

QLDC Council

16 November 2023

Report for Agenda Item | Rīpoata moto e Rāraki take [3]

Department: Community Services

Title | Taitara : Whakatipu Wilding Conifer Strategy 2023-2033

Purpose of the Report | Te Take mō te Pūroko

The purpose of this report is to consider a request to endorse the Whakatipu Wilding Conifer Control Group Strategic plan 2023 -2033, which was developed by the Whakatipu Wilding Conifer Control Group Executive.

Recommendation | Kā Tūtohuka

That the Council:

1. **Note** the contents of this report; and
2. **Endorse** the Whakatipu Wilding Conifer Control Group Strategic plan 2023 -2033.

Prepared by:



Name: Yvette Ridley

Title: Parks Community/Volunteer Officer
19 October 2023

Reviewed and Authorised by:



Name: Kenneth Bailey

Title: Community Services General Manager
25 October 2023

Context | Horopaki

1. The Queenstown Lakes District values its distinctive landscapes, open spaces, and rural productive land for its social, cultural, and economic wellbeing. Wilding trees are spreading across parts of the landscape, degrading biodiversity values, reducing water yield and threatening productive soil.
2. In 2009, Whakatipu Wilding Conifer Control Group (WCG) was established as an incorporated society and to oversee the implementation of the Whakatipu Wilding Conifer Strategy. (Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) played a key role in setting up the WCG.
3. WCG is a community, not-for-profit organisation. The WCG's focus is on protecting biodiversity and the remarkable landscape of the Wakatipu basin by controlling wilding trees. The WCG comprises interested community members, landowners, and representatives from land management agencies QLDC, Department of Conservation (DOC) and Land Information New Zealand (LINZ).
4. QLDC was one of the first district councils to work with the community to form a Wilding Conifer Control Group. This was in recognition of the fact that QLDC reserve land with wilding infestations and Coronet Forest were major seed sources and contributing to wilding spread in Whakatipu. Many other regions in Aotearoa now follow this model. WCG is known as one of the nation's most successful wilding control groups.
5. WCG has been part of the National Wilding Conifer Control Programme with Ministry of Primary Industries/Biosecurity NZ since 2016. The Whakatipu is divided into six wilding control management units (MU) within the programme. Each year, after extensive local operational planning and prioritising, a bid is placed for National Programme funding for each MU in Whakatipu. Successful funding is then distributed through a funding agreement with Otago Regional Council.
6. Annual financial grants of \$500,000 from QLDC and staff support have been foundation elements in the success of this partnership.
7. The WCG has developed a new strategy for wilding control for 2023-2033 (Attachment A) to set out the recommended management approach for the next 10 years. This builds on the previous three strategies that were co-authored by the WCG and QLDC and were formally adopted by Council.
8. The new 2023-2033 strategy has been fully authored by the WCG Executive for the first time. QLDC has contributed to its development through officer's feedback.
9. The WCG has requested the Council to endorse the new strategy to show support for its direction, due to the long-standing relationship between QLDC and the WCG. It is not a statutory requirement for Council to endorse the strategy, but endorsement will mean QLDC has a strategic approach to wilding infestations on QLDC land. Endorsing the strategy is not endorsing future funding.

10. WCG undertakes wilding operations in Whakatipu. Recently the Upper Clutha Wilding Tree Group was formed to protect the wider landscapes within the Wānaka and Hāwea areas. They are currently mapping wilding infestations and developing a plan, setting out the areas to control, priorities and timeframes but note that there are not as many aggressive wilding infestations in Upper Clutha in comparison to Whakatipu. QLDC and WCG are working alongside and supporting the Upper Clutha Wilding Tree Group.

Analysis and Advice | Tatāritaka me kā Tohutohu

11. The 2023 strategy was developed by the WCG Executive and details the national, regional, and local picture of the wilding conifer issue. The strategy is a guiding document to assist with future decision making and to support funding requests.
 12. The 10-year strategy will be reviewed every three years by the Executive. The strategy sets clear guidelines for determining strategic priority locations. The WCG vision from the strategy is that wilding infestations in identified strategic priority locations in the Whakatipu are under control.
 13. An action plan has been developed from the strategy (Attachment B - Strategy in Action plan) that takes the four strategy elements:
 - a. Wilding Conifer Control
 - b. Community engagement and support
 - c. Landowner, Stakeholder and Partner Support
 - d. Funding Security
- and details:
- What success will look like
 - How the WCG will achieve it
 - Measurables to report
14. The strategy is aligned to the Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI) national wilding conifer strategy and program. This program supports collaborative action between land occupiers, researchers, regulators, and communities to address the critical issues facing wilding conifer management.
 15. The Otago Regional Pest Management Plan 2019-2029 which give effect to the Biosecurity Act 1993, references the QLDC Parks and Open Spaces strategy which seeks collaboration on pest management activities in the district. This Plan also references previous WCG strategies.
 16. The QLDC Proposed District Plan has provisions to prevent the spread of wildings in Chapter 34 Wilding Exotic Trees. The objective is to protect the district's landscape, biodiversity, water, and soil resource values from the spread of wilding exotic, which aligns to the WCG strategy.
 17. **Option 1** Endorse the Whakatipu Wilding Conifer Control Group Strategic plan 2023 -2033.

Advantages:

- Builds upon the existing relationship that WCG and QLDC have had since 2009.

- There is a strategic approach to the management of wildings in Whakatipu on QLDC land and community awareness of it.
- QLDC will be actively protecting the district's landscape, biodiversity, water, and soil resource values from the spread of wilding exotic trees.
- Protection and enhancement of landscape, aesthetic, conservation, land use, hydrological, recreational, and historical values.

Disadvantages:

- Nil

18. **Option 2** Decline the endorsement of the Whakatipu Wilding Conifer Control Group Strategic plan 2023 -2033.

Advantages:

- Nil

Disadvantages:

- May cause damage to the existing working relationship that has existed between QLDC & WCG since 2009.
- There is no strategic approach to the management of wildings in Whakatipu.
- Wilding conifers may continue to have a negative impact on the ecosystem and be a continued seed source.
- Missed opportunity to improve local biodiversity.

19. This report recommends **Option 1** for addressing the matter as endorsing the strategy will provide a strategic approach to the management of wildings not only on QLDC land but throughout Whakatipu.

Consultation Process | Hātepe Matapaki

Significance and Engagement | Te Whakamahi I kā Whakaaro Hiraka

20. This matter is of medium significance, as determined by reference to the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy because it involves a high level of community interest (trees) and wilding control can affect future generations.
21. QLDC Parks Team was consulted and provided comments/feedback for the new strategy.
22. WCG also consulted with operational contractors, Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI)/Biosecurity NZ, ORC, LINZ, and DOC.

23. The persons who are affected by or interested in this matter are the residents/ratepayers of Queenstown Lakes District community and visitors to Whakatipu.

Māori Consultation | Iwi Rūnaka

24. WCG consulted with local iwi and sought comments and feedback from both Te Ao Mārama and Aukaha. Local iwi provided the Whakataukī for the strategy as well as other comments that were adopted by WCG.

Risk and Mitigations | Kā Raru Tūpono me kā Whakamaurutaka

25. This matter relates to the Strategic/Political/Reputation risk category. It is associated with RISK10012 Ineffective mitigation response to the declared climate and ecological emergency within the QLDC Risk Register. This risk has been assessed as having a low residual risk rating.

26. The approval of the recommended option will support the Council by allowing the risk to be retained at its current level. This shall be achieved by Council endorsing the approach of the WCG Strategic Plan 2023-2033 to support effective management of an ecological emergency.

Financial Implications | Kā Riteka ā-Pūtea

27. QLDC currently allocates \$500,000 per annum to WCG. QLDC also provides in-kind support of Treasury & Secretary roles. There are no additional costs to QLDC to endorse the strategy. Endorsing the strategy is not endorsing future funding and funding decisions will be made by Council on an annual basis, based on capacity and other competing funding opportunities/priorities.

Council Effects and Views | Kā Whakaaweawe me kā Tirohaka a te Kaunihera

28. The following Council policies, strategies and bylaws were considered:

- ‘Deafening Dawn Chorus’ Vision Beyond 2050: <https://www.qldc.govt.nz/vision-beyond-2050/>
- QLDC Tree Policy 2022
- QLDC Climate & Biodiversity Action Plan 2022
- Parks and Open Space Strategy 2021
- Otago Regional Council Pest Management Plan 2019

29. The recommended option is consistent with the principles set out in the named policies.

30. Funding for the WCG is included in the Long Term Plan/Annual Plan.

Local Government Act 2002 Purpose Provisions | Te Whakatureture 2002 o te Kāwanataka ā-Kiaka

31. Section 10 of the Local Government Act 2002 states the purpose of local government is (a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities; and (b) to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities in the present and for the future. As such, the recommendation in this report is appropriate and within the ambit of Section 10 of the Act.

32. The recommended option:

- Can be implemented through current funding under the Long Term Plan and Annual Plan;
- Is consistent with the Council's plans and policies; and
- Would not alter significantly the intended level of service provision for any significant activity undertaken by or on behalf of the Council, or transfer the ownership or control of a strategic asset to or from the Council.

Attachments | Kā Tāpirihaka

A	WCG Our Strategy in Action
B	Whakatipu Wilding Conifer Control Group Strategic Plan 2023-2033
