



**QUEENSTOWN LAKES DISTRICT COUNCIL
CORONET FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN 2017**

STATEMENT OF PROPOSAL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1 The Coronet Forest is jointly owned by Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC 75% share) and Central Otago District Council (CODC 25% share). The forest covers a net stocked area estimated at 172 hectares and has been planted entirely in Douglas fir.
- 2 The land is zoned Rural General under the QLDC Partially Operative District Plan, and the forest has been designated (375) for the purpose of forestry operations, which means the use of the land primarily for the purpose of planting, tending, managing and harvesting of trees for timber or wood production.
- 3 The designation specifies that Forestry Plan updates shall be subject to consultation with the community using the Special Consultative Procedure set out in section 83 of the Local Government Act 2002 before adoption by the Council.
- 4 The designation specifies that all management plan updates shall address re-establishment of forest following harvesting operations. This includes the detail of plant schedules, density of planting, and maintenance programs. The designation also states that management of wilding regeneration should be addressed following a harvest operation.
- 5 Douglas fir is considered a wilding species in the Wakatipu and aggressively establishes in areas of un-grazed tussock land. The forest is a significant contributor to the spread of wilding trees on neighboring indigenous tussock grassland and shrub and communities, and the effects of the Coronet Forest on this land are now becoming more and more visible.
- 6 The Wakatipu Wilding Conifer Strategy 2013-17 documents that the Wakatipu is now experiencing the consequences of forests that were planted close to areas of Outstanding Natural Landscape and Ecological Value. The strategy's work program is to target and remove seed sources or coning trees that are causing on-going wilding issues on vulnerable land.
- 7 This updated management plan has been prepared by QLDC and describes the management proposals and revegetation recommended for a 2017 harvest. The plan uses estimates based on recent industry averages, conventional harvest engineering methodology and current knowledge.
- 8 The forest remains a significant seed source and contributor to the wilding pine issue. Future regulation arising from initiatives such as the Regional Pest Management Strategy (RPMS) may require the QLDC and CODC to reduce or eliminate the spread of Douglas fir from the forest. This includes potentially being liable for lands outside the forest now affected by infestations.
- 9 Some private landowners who own sizable wilding plantations are reluctant to participate in programs to remove the trees on the grounds that the Council is a massive wilding seed contributor. If a harvest now is implemented, these landowners may be willing to remove their trees.
- 10 Control of Douglas fir on the site is key in establishing a second rotation crop – not only does Douglas fir have to be controlled within the harvested area, but all seeding sources surrounding the forest will need to be removed to create a successful second rotation vegetation cover.

PROPOSAL

- 11 The QLDC and CODC have an opportunity to harvest the Coronet Forest before full maturity, in order to mitigate the wilding threat and re-establish the site with more suitable vegetation. A full harvest now is a solution for dealing with the wider wilding spread that retention of the forest will inevitably continue to contribute to. Just harvesting the oldest stands will not solve the problem as the younger stands at the top of the forest will continue to spread seed in high winds.
- 12 The Coronet Forest Management Plan 2017 (Appendix A) details a harvest plan which provides a breakdown of staging within the forest and gives an overview of the proposed road and landing locations as well as the harvest method throughout the forest (ground based or cable) and direction of extraction. It has been projected that the harvest will produce 67,940 m³ of recoverable log product from the forest. The duration of the harvest has been estimated to be around a two-year duration and given the current market and the economics of harvesting most of the crop may be destined for an export market.
- 13 As the Coronet Forest is very prominent within the Wakatipu Basin, one of the key objectives of the revegetation program is to promote vegetation of the site as soon as possible after harvest to reduce the visual disturbance of the site. Another is to prevent the establishment of competing woody weeds, especially Douglas fir seedlings.
- 14 The plan evaluated four revegetation options:
 - Natives and grey shrub-land with a predator free fence
 - Natives and grey shrub-land
 - Mixture of Natives and Exotic Forestry Species
 - Exotic Forestry Species
- 15 The plan recommends that the natives and grey shrub-land option is implemented as this option will revegetate the site in a manner that promotes the natural regeneration of native vegetation and provide a habitat for native wildlife.
- 16 The landscape plan is to establish 40% the site with planted forest/shrub-land. The remaining 60% of the site will be revegetated with introduced grasses initially to suppress woody weeds, but to promote the establishment of a vegetation cover across the site.
- 17 Control of Douglas fir on the site is key in establishing a second rotation crop, not only does Douglas fir have to be controlled within the harvested area, but all seeding sources surrounding the forest will need to be removed to create a successful indigenous vegetation cover.
- 18 The planting will occur over three to four years and the plan is to carry out weed control over a ten-year period from harvest.

REASON FOR PROPOSAL

- 19 In 2014 the Wakatipu Wilding Conifer Control Group (WCG) and members of the community approached QLDC with their concern about the increasing spread of wilding conifers from the Coronet Forest. Around the same time forestry companies contacted QLDC with proposals for the milling of the forest as Douglas fir log prices were favourable.
- 20 It was decided that a review of the forest should be undertaken. Forme Consulting was selected to review the current management plan and they recommended that a full harvest inventory of the forest was required to understand the available yield, so that the data could be utilised in planning and decision-making for the future of the forest.

- 21 A report was taken to Council on the Coronet Forest's future management in October 2015 and a resolution was passed to carry out a full harvest inventory to understand the current potential resource and create a detailed harvest plan.
- 22 The inventory and harvest plan were considered at the March 2016 Council meeting, and it was decided that the Council would like to seek feedback on the future of the forest from the community. A consultation document was prepared in May 2016 on whether or not the forest should be harvested early.
- 23 In total 248 submissions were received by QLDC and 85% advocated the early harvest of the forest, 10% did not agree with an early harvest and 14% did not stipulate which option they preferred. Most responses stated they were in favour of an early harvest due to the wilding spread from the forest. Many submissions commented that they supported re-establishing the site in natives rather than exotics.
- 24 In June 2016 QLDC passed a resolution that the Coronet Forest Management Plan (2001) be updated to reflect the early harvest of the Coronet Forest, in accordance with the District Plan designation.
- 25 In 2016 a more detailed survey of the wilding spread from the Coronet Forest was completed and this report increased the control area from 4km behind the forest to 10km (and now included Crown Peak and the faces along the Crown Range). The cost to control the spread from the forest if it is harvested at maturity (youngest stands in 2039) has increased to an estimated \$8.5 million to control around 5,500 ha of infested land.

OPTIONS

- 26 Queenstown Lakes District Council has considered the most appropriate way of addressing the issues identified, the options available and determined that the proposed Coronet Forest Management Plan 2017 is the most appropriate means for addressing the issues.
- 27 In considering if the detail in the Management Plan is the most appropriate way of addressing the issues, Council has considered the following options:
 - a) Option 1 – Do Nothing
 - b) Option 2 –Re-adopt the current Management Plan (2001) harvest at age 45
 - c) Option 3 - Replace the 2001 Management Plan with the Proposed Coronet Forest Management Plan 2017

Option 1 – Do nothing

- 28 There will be no visual disturbance to the landscape from the adverse effects associated with harvesting.
- 29 Under the designation the current the Coronet Forest Management Plan shall be reviewed and updated by 31 December 2012, and thereafter every 5 years. The current plan was written in 2001 and is therefore out of date.
- 30 The forest is a significant contributor to the spread of wilding trees on neighbouring indigenous tussock grassland and shrub and communities, and the effects of the Coronet Forest on this land are now becoming more and more visible.

Option 2 – Re-adopt the current Management Plan (2001) harvest at age 45

- 31 There is opportunity for future log markets or advances in steep harvest technology to develop, providing a higher than expected rate of return.
- 32 The increased growth and maturity of the forest are likely to produce higher volumes and timber quality realising the asset's commercial potential.
- 33 The forest remains a significant seed source and contributor to the wilding pine issue. Future regulation arising from initiatives such as the Regional Pest Management Strategy (RPMS) may require the Council and CODC to mitigate the spread of Douglas fir from the forest. This includes potentially being liable for lands outside the forest affected by infestations.
- 34 There is inherent volatility in log markets and the risk from increased transport costs and environmental damage cannot be controlled or anticipated.
- 35 Continued involvement in a commercial forestry operation is not consistent with the provisions of Section 10 of the Local Government Act (LGA).

Option 3 – Replace the 2001 Management plan with the Proposed Coronet Forest Management Plan 2017

- 36 The wilding threat would be mitigated by removing the exponential maturing seed source.
- 37 In May 2016, a consultation document was prepared on whether or not the forest should be harvested early. 85% submissions received by QLDC which advocated the early harvest of the forest.
- 38 Current market prices for Douglas fir are favourable and known.
- 39 Revenue could be used to offset part of the forest re-establishment costs.
- 40 Meets relevant objectives and policies of the District Plan particularly nature conservation and natural landscape values.
- 41 Existing commercial forestry activity is consistent with the purposes of the LGA.
- 42 Updating the Management Plan will comply with the designation conditions.
- 43 The full commercial value of the forest may not be realised by harvesting the forest early.
- 44 The site will be subject to the adverse effects associated with harvesting, which will result in some visual disturbance to the landscape.

TIMETABLE FOR CONSULTATION

- 45 The following dates represent the key times in the consultation programme:

24 March 2017	Council adopts the proposed Coronet Forest Management Plan 2017 and resolves to undertake public consultation following the special consultative procedure.
29 March-5 April 2017	Advertisement in <i>Otago Daily Times</i> and <i>Southland Times</i> .
8 May 2017	Submissions close at 5pm.
22-30 May 2017	Submissions heard by a subcommittee of Councillors (to be confirmed).
29 June 2017	Council considers outcome of consultation process. (Council meeting)

10 July 2017	Public notice of final decision (if Council resolves to adopt the Management Plan). The Management Plan comes into effect subject to the above.
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INSPECTION OF DOCUMENTS AND OBTAINING COPIES

- 46 Copies of this proposal, the Management Plan and the supporting reports may be inspected, and a copy obtained, at no cost, from:
- a) Either of the Council offices at 10 Gorge Road, Queenstown or the Wanaka Service Centre, 47 Ardmore Street, Wanaka
 - b) Any Council library within the Queenstown Lakes District
 - c) The Council website – www.qldc.govt.nz

RIGHT TO MAKE A SUBMISSION AND BE HEARD

- 47 Any person or organisation has a right to be heard in regard to this proposal and the Council would encourage everyone with an interest to do so.
- 48 The Council would prefer that all parties intending to make a submission:
- a) go to the Queenstown Lakes District Council website – www.qldc.govt.nz; or
 - b) post their submission to: Queenstown Lakes District Council, Private Bag 50072, Queenstown 9348.
- 49 Submissions must be received by 8 May 2017. The Council will then convene a hearing, which it intends to hold on 22 and 31 May 2017, at which any party who wishes to do so can present their submission in person. The Council will give equal consideration to written and oral submissions.
- 50 The Council will permit parties to make oral submissions (without prior written material) or to make a late submission, only where it considers that special circumstances apply.
- 51 Every submission made to the Council will be acknowledged in accordance with the LGA 2002, will be copied and made available to the public, and every submission will be heard in a meeting that is open to the public.
- 52 Section 82 of the Local Government Act sets out the obligations of the Council in regard to consultation and the Council will take all steps necessary to meet the spirit and intent of the law.

Making an Effective Submission

- 53 Written submissions can take any form (e.g. Email, letter). An effective submission references the section(s) of the Management Plan you wish to submit on, and states why the section is supported or not supported and states what change to the clause is sought.
- 54 Submissions on matters outside the scope of the Coronet Forest Management Plan 2017 cannot be considered by the Hearings Panel.

Mike Theelen
CHIEF EXECUTIVE