

Full Council

4 September 2025

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

Department: Community Services

Title | Taitara: Adoption of the Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve Restoration Management Plan 2025

Purpose of the Report | Te Take mō te Pūroko

The purpose of this report is to present the final version of the Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve Restoration Management Plan 2025 (the Plan) to Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) for adoption. The Plan was consulted on under the special consultative procedure contained in section 83 of the Local Government Act 2002.

Recommendation | Kā Tūtohuka

That the Council:

1. **Note** the contents of this report;
2. **Amend** the name of the Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve Forestry Management Plan 2025 to “Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve Restoration Management Plan 2025”; and
3. **Adopt** the Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve Restoration Management Plan 2025.

Prepared by:



Endorsed by:



Reviewed and Authorised by:



Name: Briana Pringle
Title: Parks & Open Spaces
Planning Manager
11 August 2025

Name: Dave Winterburn
Title: Parks Manager
11 August 2025

Name: Ken Bailey
Title: General Manager,
Community Services
18 August 2025

Context | Horopaki

1. Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Recreation Reserve (the Reserve) situated on the northern township boundary comprises four parcels of land totalling 109 hectares. The Reserve provides a range of opportunities for recreational experiences that are easily accessible to Tāhuna Queenstown.
2. The Reserve is largely covered with wilding conifer tree species. It is predominantly forested with Douglas fir but includes other exotic species. These Douglas fir trees are acting as a seed source facilitating the spread of wilding conifers elsewhere in the Whakatipu Basin.
3. The zoning of Queenstown Hill under the QLDC Proposed District Plan is Open Space Zone - Informal Recreation, and the forest has been designated (Designation #374) 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.
4. Designation 374 allows QLDC to carry out forestry operations in the area known as Queenstown Hill. The designation states that the Queenstown Hill Forestry Plan must be updated before any operation can take place. It states that all updates of the Forestry Plan shall be subject to consultation with the community using the special consultative procedure as set out in section 83 of the Local Government Act 2002, before adoption by the Council.
5. Te-Taumata-o-Hakitekura Ben Lomond & Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve Management Plan (RMP) has objectives and policies which support forestry management within the Reserve.
6. Council adopted the current Ben Lomond and Queenstown Hill Forestry Plan in 2006. This plan is now outdated and no longer fit for purpose. Before any new forestry operations can take place in the Reserve, a new Forestry Management Plan had to be developed. In May 2025, Council adopted a Statement of Proposal to approve formal consultation on the updated draft plan.
7. The review of the Plan commenced in March 2025. A summary of the key dates in the review process is set out in the table below.

Date	Milestone
25 March 2025	Draft Te Tapunui Queenstown Forestry Plan shared with Councillors at Council workshop to provide an overview and seek input
29 May 2025	Draft Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Forestry Management Plan presented to Full Council for approval to consult.
5 June to 6 July 2025	Public consultation on draft Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Forestry Management Plan
21 July 2025	Public hearing of submissions. Eight submitters spoke to their submission.
22 July 2025	Public deliberations by the Hearing Panel.
4 September 2025	Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Forestry Management Plan presented to Full Council to consider for adoption

8. The draft plan was open for submissions between 5 June to 6 July 2025 and this was supported by three drop-in sessions held at two locations in Queenstown on 12 and 18 June 2025. Ninety-two submissions were received. A summary of submissions received was developed and shared with the community (**Attachment B**).
9. The Hearing Panel, made up of three Councillors, directed changes be made to the draft plan during the deliberations part of the process held on 22 July 2025. This followed the Panel's consideration of written submissions and the comments of the eight submitters who spoke at the public hearing held on 21 July 2025.

Analysis and Advice | Tatāritaka me kā Tohutohu

10. The final Plan (**Attachment A**) assesses the current tree cover and site conditions, and outlines options for harvesting and replanting to replace invasive wilding trees. It guides the removal of these species and supports the restoration of a healthy, diverse forest for the future.
11. The final plan contains the following objectives for the site:

QLDC will fell and eradicate all wilding exotic tree species on Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve (the Reserve) and replant the site with a mixed native/exotic forest and scrub/tussock grassland. The Reserve will not be replanted as a production forest, with the new cover forming a permanent mixed species forest.
12. A version of the final plan showing tracked changes made is **Attachment A**. The main changes after public submissions and deliberations are summarised in the following paragraphs.
13. Name of the Plan
 - It was agreed that the Plan's name should include the word "restoration" and be changed to Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Restoration Management Plan 2025. While forestry remains a component, the primary focus of the updated plan is the ecological restoration of the Reserve, as is now reflected in its new title.
14. Addition of policies from the Reserve Management Plan (RMP)
 - Additional policies from the RMP concerning the Time Walk and trail network have been included to provide context on the future direction.
15. Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) Liabilities
 - Additional clarification was added about the Emissions Trading Scheme. Over 30 hectares of the Reserve are registered as pre-1990 forest land. If the site is replanted within four years using forest species that meet the ETS definition of forest land, the existing forest can be harvested without incurring deforestation liabilities. However, if replanting does not occur within that period, deforestation obligations will apply.

16. Recreation – Time Walk and trail network

- More detailed information was added about Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Time Walk. Noting that during the harvest period, there may be temporary changes or closures to the Time Walk. Where possible, alternative routes to the Basket of Dreams will be provided and QLDC will make every effort to protect the trail and maintain public access.
- Detail was added acknowledging that mountain biking trails are unauthorised, and therefore will not be protected during harvesting operations. Access to these trails will be restricted during harvesting operations and as a result of the forestry activities the trail network will effectively be removed from the Reserve.
- Addition of the statement that the development of new logging road infrastructure provides an opportunity to create a new network of walking trails for public use once the site is safe to access again, and that policies in the RMP support working with the key stakeholders to develop and implement a Trail Masterplan that formalises the trail network.

17. Future Vegetation Cover – Attachment A.

- The Plan now emphasises that native species will be preferred where appropriate, and more detail was added explaining why exotic trees are to be planted at the site. Exotic species will be selected only when there is a clear benefit to the Reserve, such as helping natives establish by reducing wind and sun exposure, and suppressing competition from other invasive species.
- In addition changes were made to the native species list based on recommendations from local ecologists and community groups.
- Any exotic trees with wilding potential have been removed from the list of potential species.
- Giant Redwood (*Sequoia giganteum*) have been removed from the exotic list as they grow so large that they will dominate within the forest canopy.

18. Environmental Management Plan

- A section detailing the environmental planning for the site has been added to address operational concerns that were raised. It states that a detailed environmental management plan (EMP) will be developed to ensure that appropriate environmental management practices are followed during the harvest operation. The EMP will provide guidance on stormwater management, sediment control, slash and the design of roads and tracks.

19. Slash Management

- An objective on slash management was added at the beginning of the document: To ensure effective and environmentally responsible slash management practices are implemented.

- Further detail on slash management has been added under the new Environmental Management section. The Plan explains that any slash will be managed to reduce the risk of mobilisation. Slash removal will meet the criteria outlined in the Resource Management (National Environmental Standards for Commercial Forestry) Amendment Regulations 2023.

20. Next steps

- A section detailing the next steps was added to the Plan, including information on the consenting pathway and financial implications.

21. This report identifies and assesses the following reasonably practicable options for assessing the matter as required by section 77 of the Local Government Act 2002.

22. Option 1 Adopt the final Plan.

Advantages:

- Ensures there is a plan for the future vegetation management in the Reserve;
- There will be an opportunity to enhance biodiversity outcomes by revegetating the site with more ecologically appropriate species;
- Ensures community expectations are met and acknowledges the community and stakeholder engagement through the submissions and hearings process;
- Alignment to the policies and objectives in Draft Te-Taumata-o-Hakitekura Ben Lomond & Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve Management Plan;
- Meets objectives in the Otago Regional Pest Management Plan. The wilding threat will be mitigated by removing the maturing seed source.

Disadvantages:

- Implementation of the Plan is only partially funded in the current QLDC Long Term Plan (LTP), and future LTPs will require revised funding to enable the QLDC to deliver on the Plan.

23. Option 2 Do not adopt the final plan.

Advantages:

- There will be no impacts on the existing use of the Reserve for recreational users such as walkers and mountain bikers, and there will be no change to the visual amenity of the reserve, including its vegetation and landscape;
- There will be no cost to Council.

Disadvantages:

- The reserve will remain subject to the 2006 Forestry Plan, which is no longer fit for purpose. As a result, there will be no updated guidance or clear direction for the management of vegetation within the reserve;
- As the spread of wilding conifers continues and removal becomes necessary, the Council will likely be required to undertake the same planning process at a later date, thereby delaying any effective management actions;
- Council will not be complying with QLDC Proposed District Plan Designation #374 conditions;
- Council will not meet the policies and objectives in the Draft Te-Taumata-o-Hakitekura Ben Lomond & Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve Management Plan.
- Council will not meet the objectives in the Otago Regional Pest Management Plan.
- There will not be an opportunity to enhance biodiversity outcomes by revegetating the site with more ecologically appropriate species.

24. This report recommends **Option 1** for addressing the matter because this will ensure a clear plan is in place to direct vegetation management in the reserve and it will meet community expectations for a plan to be in place.

Consultation Process | Hātepe Matapaki

Significance and Engagement | Te Whakamahi I kā Whakaaro Hiraka

25. This matter is of medium significance, as determined by reference to the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy 2024. This is because of the high community and stakeholder interest in the vegetation management in the Reserve, which is highly valued by the community.
26. The persons who are affected by or interested in this matter are users of the Reserve, residents/ratepayers of the Whakatipu Basin community, visitors to Queenstown, immediately adjoining neighbours and local recreation clubs, conservation groups and commercial operators.
27. The Council has undertaken consultation on the draft plan in line with the requirements of the Statement of Proposal for formal consultation adopted by Council under the special consultative procedure outlined in section 83 of the Local Government Act 2002 on 29 May 2025.

28. The draft plan was open for public submissions on QLDC's online platform Let's Talk from 5 June to 6 July 2025. The draft plan and submission form were publicly notified and advertised through notices in local papers, QLDC's website, social media platforms and radio. A letter drop and targeted emails were sent to addresses within the Queenstown Hill residential suburb located adjacent to the Reserve. Council conducted three drop-in sessions with elected members present to talk to people about the draft plan at two locations in Queenstown over two days for people to ask questions.

Māori Consultation | Iwi Rūnaka

29. The Council held workshops and collaborated with Aukaha and Te Ao Marama Incorporated during the preparation of the initial version of the Plan in 2002, and updated versions have been shared with Iwi.

Risk and Mitigations | Kā Raru Tūpono me kā Whakamaurutaka

30. This matter relates to the Community & Wellbeing risk category. It is associated with RISK10005 Ineffective planning for community services or facilities within the QLDC Risk Register. This risk has been assessed as having a high residual risk rating.

31. The approval of the recommended option will allow Council to avoid the risk. This will be achieved by creating a clear plan for how Council intends to manage the vegetation within the Reserve.

Financial Implications | Kā Riteka ā-Pūtea

32. The preparation and finalisation of the draft plan is planned for within existing operational budgets.

33. The QLDC Long Term Plan (LTP) 2024-2034 includes a capital budget of \$21M to progress the wildfire reduction programme. Specifically, there is a wildfire mitigation budget of \$1,067,000 in year 2026/27 of the LTP and there are elements of the draft plan which may align to this funding. Future LTPs will require revised funding to enable QLDC to implement the plan.

34. The Reserve was not planted as a production forest, but it does contain some merchantable timber. However, challenges such as slope, rock outcrops, access, and the presence of power lines will impact the feasibility of logging. Harvesting may not generate an economic return due to the site difficulties, although it may offset some costs associated with the operation.

35. Government initiatives which would help with tree removals and tree planting may be available in the future. An example is the National Wilding Conifer Control Programme which is led by Ministry for Primary Industries.

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

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

- Vision Beyond 2050: Our Vision and Mission - QLDC
- Reserves Act 1977
- Local Government Act 2002
- Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2021
- Significance and Engagement Policy 2024
- Proposed and Operative District Plan
- QLDC Climate and Biodiversity Plan 2025-2028
- Whakatipu Wilding Conifer Control Group Strategic Plan 2023-2033
- Otago Regional Pest Management Plan 2019
- National Environmental Standards for Commercial Forestry
- Te-Taumata-o-Hakitekura Ben Lomond & Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve Management Plan 2025

37. The recommended option is consistent with the principles set out in the named policies. It aligns with the QLDC District Plan Designation #374 which specifies that draft plan updates shall be subject to consultation with the community using the special consultative procedure.

38. This matter is not included in the Long Term Plan/Annual Plan. But completion of the draft plan will be covered through existing operational budgets.

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

39. 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. The development of the draft plan ensures there is a plan in place to manage the removal of wilding tree species on Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve and supports the restoration of a healthy, diverse forest. As such, the recommendation in this report is appropriate and within the ambit of Section 10 of the Act.

40. 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 significantly alter 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	Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Reserve Restoration Management Plan 2025 (track changes)
B	Full submissions pack with officer comments
C	Minutes of Te Tapunui Queenstown Hill Forestry hearing held on 21 July 2025