



Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Park

Restoring our wetland treasure – Whakaora te repo, ka ora te taonga



Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Park

The Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Park is made up of the beds of Lake Wairarapa and Lake Onoke and the publicly owned reserves around them. This covers over 9,000 hectares, from Lake Domain in the north to Onoke Spit, 30km away, at Palliser Bay.






The park contains mudflats, lagoons, sand flats, marshlands, salt marshes and back waters which are regularly flooded or exposed, depending on the season.

Wetland grasses and turf plants are competing for survival with introduced plants such as willows and alders. Introduced ducks, geese, and swans form a large part of the birdlife, although there are still many native species including wading birds. Introduced fish compete with the original aquatic wildlife of the area. Fishing is popular – for brown trout and our native whitebait and eels.

Over the years, weather patterns, manipulating the lake levels, clearances and drainage for farming have impacted on the size and nature of the wetlands and surrounding private pasture land.

Restoration projects to restore the balance of nature on the public land are supported by farmers and the wider community, with the Department of Conservation, iwi, regional and local councils working together to protect the wetlands for future recreational enjoyment.

Wairarapa Moana Wetlands

-  Native vegetation
-  Exotic vegetation
-  Grassed mud flats
-  Beach gravel
-  Water

Caring for your wetlands park

-  Do not remove, disturb or damage native plants or animals
-  Light no fires
-  Take rubbish home
-  Keep vehicles to formed roads
-  Keep your dog under control
-  Game bird hunting by permit only
-  Poison or traps may be laid to control animal pests. Do not remove notices or disturb baits, lures, trapping lines or carcasses.



SAY NO TO DIDYMO!

CHECK > CLEAN > DRY



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NEW ZEALAND. IT'S OUR PLACE TO PROTECT.



Legend

- Easy walking
- Keep dogs under control
- Car park
- Picnic area
- Toilet
- Bird watching
- Birds nesting
- Seasonal game bird shooting
- Fishing
- Track to Birdhide



1 Lake Domain Reserve

Access via South Featherston Road. Popular with walkers, mountain bikers, picnickers, campers and duck-shooters, this open area is great for recreation, although exposed to the elements. Projects are underway to encourage the growth of native plants.



2 Matthews and Boggy Pond Wildlife Reserve

Access via Parera Road, off Kahutara Road. Observe wetland birds – ducks, swans, white herons, stilts, bitterns, royal spoonbills – from a new viewing hide accessed via an 800m walking and mountain biking track. Return to the road, or explore a longer 2.6km loop.



3 Wairio Block

Access via Parera Road, off Kahutara Road. The area provides several kilometres of access to the eastern shore of Lake Wairarapa and features large flocks of wading birds during the summer months. Long grass and thick wetland plants make walking difficult.



4 Wairarapa Lake Shore Scenic Reserve

Access via Western Lake Road. The only remaining area where native forest still reaches the lake shore, it features trees such as black beech, titoki, nikau and karaka. Three separate roadside areas provide opportunities for picnicking and extensive lake views.



5 Pounui Lagoon

Separated from Lake Onoke by a stopbank in the 1960s, this is an excellent example of a native salt marsh. Wetland birds can be viewed from the stopbank, although access may be limited particularly in whitebait season.



6 Onoke Spit

Access at the end of Western Lake Road, Palliser Bay. A 3km spit of land which extends to the sea channel separating it from the Lake Ferry settlement on the opposite shore. It is a breeding ground for the rare Caspian tern and habitat for banded dotterel, albatross and penguins. Lower slopes are home to rare grasses, katipo, lizards and other wildlife. Out to sea, dolphins, seals and whales are sometimes visible.



A traditional waka with several hinaki (eel traps) at Wairarapa Moana circa 1904. Photo courtesy of Te Papa.

History

Wairarapa Moana literally means “sea of glistening water” and was among the first areas settled in New Zealand with sites dating back some 800 years. Fish and waterfowl were plentiful, but the major drawcard was tuna – the native freshwater eel. Tuna could be caught in vast quantities during their seasonal migration to the sea, and the catch could be dried for storage or trading. Seasonal eeling settlements dotted the edge of Wairarapa Moana with several permanent settlements on the surrounding higher ground.

In the 1840s sheep farmers started arriving in Wairarapa and began leasing land from Māori landowners. Leasing was soon made illegal by the Crown, which was only interested in purchasing land from Māori and selling it to settlers for a profit.

Land was sold, but Māori retained the flood-prone areas crucial for eel fishing, and the lakes themselves. When the outlet to the sea was blocked, the lakes and wetlands filled up. Between February and April this process was called the *hinurangi*, which was important for tuna preparing to migrate over two thousand kilometres into the South Pacific to breed.

There were several decades of disagreement between Māori fishers and Pakeha farmers over opening the mouth of Lake Onoke. One wanted high water for fishing and the other dry pasture for farming. This was resolved in 1896 when the title of the lakes moved into Crown ownership. The transaction is now subject to a Treaty of Waitangi claim.

Farming prospered on the fertile land around the lakes, although seasonal flooding still hampered production. This problem was tackled throughout the 20th century with drainage and stopbanks, although large floods could still wreak havoc.

Several generations of government engineers had pondered the flooding problem. In the 1960s a project got underway to divert the Ruamahanga from flowing into Lake Wairarapa and connect it directly with Lake Onoke, enabling flood waters to escape quickly. This was finished in the 1970s allowing 40,000 hectares to be farmed more intensively. Since then many sheep and beef farms around Wairarapa Moana have been converted into more profitable dairy farms. These farms are the economic powerhouse for South Wairarapa District.

Wairarapa Moana today remains a richly diverse and wild place as well as being severely compromised by many threats to its ecology and water quality. The third largest lake in the North Island, it is home to more than a hundred native and exotic bird species, rare plants and native fish species and is still revered by Māori as a source of wellbeing for the region.



Mission

“We will work with the community to enhance the spiritual identity and ecology of Wairarapa Moana, and improving recreational and economic opportunities for the benefit of everyone.”

Goals

- Wairarapa Moana is highly valued as a place of cultural and historical significance that inspires our future.
- Healthy water in Wairarapa Moana nurtures all native plants, animals and their ecosystems.
- Wairarapa Moana underpins environmental, customary, recreational and commercial values that benefit the wider community.

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