

Western Springs Native Bush Restoration Project – Frequently Asked Questions

What? The Western Springs Native Bush Restoration Project was approved by the Waitemātā Local Board in 2015. This involves addressing the health and safety concerns posed by the aging pines and fulfilling the objective of the Western Springs Lakeside Management Plan to return the area to native forest.

Where? The pine stand area is bordered by West View Rd, Auckland Zoo, Western Springs Lakeside and the Stadium and will be replaced with regenerating native bush.

When? A resource consent to begin the work is being sought. Subject to that consent, Auckland Council will confirm the timing of when the project will commence.

What is involved? The expert advice the board has received is that for the work, and overdue track maintenance to begin, the stand of about 200 pine trees will have to be removed. That work is expected to take about three months, with felling about two months. Working hours will be limited to Monday to Friday 7am-5pm. The area will have to be closed to the public throughout the actual tree removals project and may need to be closed before the tree felling starts depending on risks associated with the trees.

Why can't we keep the pines? The pines are beyond their life expectancy, are unstable and a safety risk. There were originally 506 trees. A 2013 survey found 224 had died or fallen, leaving 282. A 2016 survey found the live population was down to about 200, many in poor health, with sparse crowns and dead limbs, with regular branch and pine tree failures occurring.

Why not only remove the unhealthy pine trees? Removing only dead or unstable pine trees would cause a dramatic increase in the failure rate among those left behind, most of these which lean toward and within falling reach of the walking track.

How will the pine trees be removed? Majority of the pine trees will be felled from the ground, away from high ecological value zones determined by ecologists, to protect selected native species due to their size or age. A small portion of pine trees will be removed by helicopters. While our desire is to limit damage to undergrowth it is expected that approximately 70% of the vegetation may be damaged during the felling.

The processing of the felled pine trees will require heavy machinery. Tracks will be laid and removed as the work progresses. The installation of the access tracks will not require any excavations. All required machinery for the works will access the site from Western Springs Stadium premises on Stadium Road.

What happens after the pine trees are gone?

A major planting and restoration effort – estimated at about 15,000 plants – will follow immediately. This will turn the site into a healthy podocarp-broadleaf forest dominated by kauri, puriri, taraire and tanekaha, along with a native understorey. The project's native bush objectives also provide the chance to expand the track network through the area bordered by West View Road, the zoo, stadium and Western Springs Lakeside Park.

What signage will be posted? The access points will be fenced off throughout the removal of the pine trees and explanatory signage placed at these access points.

How long will the project take? We estimate the entire project, excluding the replanting, will take about three months. The actual felling work will take approximately two months. Working hours will be limited to Monday – Friday from 7am to 5pm.

What happens to the felled pine trees? About 70% of the wood will be removed or mulched, and the rest, mainly trunks, will be left for habitat for native fauna. About 20 totem poles will remain as habitat for kingfisher and morepork, and logs will be left as a habitat for the insects they eat.

What impact will this work have on the track? The track and the pine block will be closed during the pine removals for safety reasons. The track may need to be closed before the removals start depending on risks associated with the pine trees. We will include notification of the track closure on the council website and local board facebook page.

Is there a chance for public input? The application for a Resource Consent to remove the pine trees will be notified. This will allow the public to submit any comments. The regeneration plans, and track proposals will be confirmed with input from the local community and we will be exploring opportunities for community participation in the regeneration planting.

What consultation has already been undertaken on this project? The Western Springs Native Bush Restoration project was consulted on as part of the 2015-2025 Long-term Plan. There was strong support for the proposed environmental initiatives including the implementation of the Western Springs Native Bush Restoration project. It was then intended to undertake a separate consultation on the options for pine management and removal. However because of the rapidly deteriorating condition of the pine trees this meant there were limited options available.

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Have mana whenua had a chance to consider the plan? Yes, there has been resounding approval from mana whenua for the removal of the pine trees as part of the native bush plan. Kaitiaki representing Te Ākitai Waiohua, Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki, Ngāti Maru, Ngāti Tamaoho, Ngāti Te Ata and Ngaati Whanaunga have all had had input, and mana whenua are also expected to be able to help with planting because of their expertise in local plants.

What about the birdlife? There are various exotic and native birds in the pines. In terms of the White-faced heron habitat, the board has received expert advice that the area is not an important habitat for the birds and none were recorded during a 2016 survey. To avoid the unlikely disturbance, no felling will take place in the heron's nesting season during June to October unless for emergency reasons. Additionally the site will be inspected by an ecologist prior the project starting.

How does the project affect stability of the slope?

The project will not affect the slope stability or the stability of the houses along West View Road. This has been confirmed by the Council's Geotechnical Specialist. Conditions have been specified by the Geotechnical Specialist to ensure stability is not affected such as tree planting immediately after the pine tree removals are completed, monitoring of the site and timing of the works.

What is the ecological status of the area?

The pine forest is part of a larger area of local vegetation that is scheduled as Significant Ecological Area (SEA) C05-23 "Western Springs/Zoo Forest" under the Auckland Unitary Plan. Western

Springs/Zoo Forest is scheduled for its podocarp/broadleaved forest and coastal forest types, and its value as habitat for indigenous fauna

Further questions, please email westernsprings@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz