

Western Springs Native Bush Restoration Project – Frequently Asked Questions

What? The Western Springs Native Bush Restoration Project was approved by the Waitematā Local Board in 2015 to address the health and safety concerns posed by the aging pines and to fulfil 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, the Zoo, Western Springs Lakeside Park 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 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 Mon-Fri 7am-5pm. The area will have to be closed to the public throughout the project and may need to be closed before the tree felling starts depending on risks associated with the trees.

Why is the area currently closed? April's storms dropped eight trees and left others with damaged limbs, increasing the risk of failure. The track will remain closed until after the consent can be heard.

Why can't we keep the pines? The pines are beyond their life expectancy, are unstable and a safety risk. There were originally 509 trees. A 2013 survey found 238 had died or fallen, leaving 271. A 2018 survey found the live population was down to 203. Of those, 126 (62%) are either dead, have heavily reduced canopies, have sustained damage by fire, or are visually displaying poor health.

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

How will the trees be removed? Because of their age and size, most will be felled from the ground, away from high ecological value zones, to minimise damage to selected native species. The desire is to limit undergrowth damage, but it is possible up to 70% could be damaged during the felling.

Processing the felled pine trees will require heavy machinery. Tracks will be laid and removed as needed. Installation will not require any excavations other than for scraping to level the tracks. All required machinery 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 will follow. Up to 15,000 plants will be planted (the exact number will depend on the amount of bare land available for planting) and the plants will be looked after in the years to follow. It is estimated the planting will take around three weeks. The maintenance will include control of pest plants and replacement of plants that don't survive.

Planting 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 Rd, the zoo, stadium and Western Springs Lakeside Park.

What signage will be posted? Access points will be fenced off throughout the removal with explanatory signage at those access points.

How long will it take? We estimate the entire project, including the maintenance of the restoration planting will take several years. The actual felling work will take about two months and the following planting about three weeks. Working hours will be limited to Mon-Fri 7am-5pm.

What happens to the felled pines? About 70% of the wood will be removed or mulched, and the rest, mainly trunks, will be left for habitat for native fauna. Where it is safe some totem poles may remain as habitat for kingfisher and morepork, and logs will be left as a habitat for insects.

What impact will this work have on the track? The track and pine block will be closed during the removals for safety reasons. We will include notification of the 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. That 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? 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 project. It was intended to undertake a separate consultation on the options for pine management but because of the rapidly deteriorating state of the trees, there were limited options available.

Have mana whenua had a say? Yes, we engaged at a hui in November 2017 or through direct email correspondence with iwi that couldn't attend. The responses we have all support the project.

What about the wildlife? 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 disturbance, no felling will take place in the June-October nesting season unless for emergency reasons. An ecologist will survey the site for the presence of bats before the project starts.

How does the project affect stability of the slope? Council's geotechnical specialist has determined the project will not affect the stability of the slope or the houses on West View Rd. The specialist has specified conditions be met to ensure stability, such as tree planting immediately after the removals, 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