

Your vote VOTE NATURE 2025 Your backyard

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Your council and your environment

Local and regional governments play a key role in managing the environment. By investing in environmental services, public transport, and infrastructure, the amount of money councils spend can improve the environmental quality of the place – or degrade it. Some councils provide incentives and support landowners to protect nature on private land. Some fund community groups that protect nature. Councils regulate the environmental impacts of activities and police those regulations.

Effective council regulation means cleaner rivers, healthier ecosystems, less erosion, and healthy coasts. Poor council regulation results in unswimmable rivers, toxic shellfish, polluted beaches, more damage from erosion and flooding, and diminishing what remains of our natural areas.

The choices elected councillors make over the next three years will impact on quality of life and the environment.

OUR MESSAGE TO CANDIDATES

If elected, the decisions you make will have a big impact on the communities you represent. New Zealand is facing a warming climate, more extreme weather, and rising seas. We have all seen the impact of recent cyclones and the impact that poor land management decisions had on communities when Cyclone Gabrielle struck. Forest & Bird is calling on all candidates for local government to commit to working with nature to build community resilience in our changing world.



FOREST & BIRD'S PRIORITIES

- Restoring and protecting our rivers and lakes
- Protecting communities from climate change by protecting nature
- Protecting nature on private land
- Funding community conservation in your region
- Protecting nature, people, and livelihoods by controlling pests.



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WHAT ARE NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS?

Nature-based solutions: local action for climate, biodiversity, and communities

Nature-based solutions are practical, cost-effective ways councils can respond to the climate and biodiversity crises at the same time. These solutions work with nature to reduce emissions, build resilience to extreme weather, and restore ecosystems.

Examples include:

- making room for rivers to reduce flooding risk
- restoring native forests to absorb carbon and reduce erosion
- protecting and regenerating wetlands to buffer floodwaters and filter pollutants
- supporting coastal ecosystems like mangroves and saltmarshes to reduce storm surge impacts
- creating urban green spaces that cool cities, reduce runoff, and support biodiversity.

Local government plays a critical role in enabling nature-based solutions through land use planning, freshwater management, climate strategies, and investment decisions.

By putting nature at the centre of decision-making, councils can protect communities and create healthier, more resilient environments.



QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

What role do you see nature-based solutions playing in your council's climate and biodiversity plans?

LOCAL PRIORITIES AND QUESTIONS





OUR RIVERS AND LAKES ARE POLLUTED

Water is one of the most important issues for New Zealanders, yet many of our waterways are in crisis. We can't live without fresh water and neither can the plants, fish, insects, and other wildlife that rely on clean water to survive and thrive. But our rivers and lakes are in deep trouble.

Restoring and protecting our rivers and lakes

Key facts:

- Most of New Zealand's rivers and many lakes fail to meet water quality guidelines, with numerous swimming spots carrying a high risk of infection.
- Dairy cattle numbers and associated urine and faecal matter have almost doubled since 1990.
- Urban waterways and the coast are polluted by urban development.
- We have drained or destroyed almost all (90%) of our wetlands since human arrival.
- Almost 33% of our freshwater plants, 76% of our freshwater fish, and more than 25% of our freshwater invertebrates are threatened with, or at risk of, extinction. Many of our native birds depend on freshwater environments, and 66% of these were classified as threatened or at risk in 2016.
- Levels of nitrate pollution in groundwater in many places – including drinking water sources – continue to increase.

COUNCILS CAN REVERSE THE DECLINE FRESHWATER QUALITY

Regional and district councils play a critical role in solving the freshwater crisis. They can do this by regulating urban development and intensive agriculture, setting water quality and pollution standards, preventing excessive abstraction of water, and investing in planting and restoring catchments.



QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

- **What do you see as the most urgent freshwater issue in our region, and what will you do to address it?**
- **Will you support stronger protections for [insert regional water body] – including limits on pollution and water takes?**
- **How will you support the restoration of rivers, wetlands, and catchments in your area?**
- **Do you support tighter limits on nitrate pollution to protect both ecosystems and drinking water?**
- **How will you ensure urban growth does not further pollute local streams and estuaries?**

LOCAL PRIORITIES AND QUESTIONS





Protecting communities from climate change by protecting nature

Key facts:

- More than 400,000 homes (worth \$218 billion) are currently built on flood plains around the country – land that should, instead, be prioritised for the implementation of nature-based solutions (such as wetlands, widened river corridors, native forest).
- The average percentage of rates funding in regional and unitary councils for biodiversity is 5.59% (or 3.76% excluding the two biggest spenders). This is inadequate to protect, restore, and maintain the natural assets that can protect our communities from severe weather and a changing climate.
- More than 75% of New Zealanders live within 10km of the coast. The need to protect our coastlines and the adjacent infrastructure is clear.

NATURE CAN HELP US WITH CLIMATE CHANGE

Our native plants and animals are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and so are we. Local communities need investment that cares for both people and the planet. Cutting emissions, stopping inappropriate land use, and investing in nature-based solutions are key to supporting Aotearoa New Zealand's communities. Healthy forests and wetlands can protect us from floods by holding excess water and releasing it slowly, while also reducing erosion. Natural dunes and healthy foreshore areas can protect us from sea level rise and storm surges.

Nature can protect us, but only if we also protect nature.



QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

- **Do you believe that councils should invest in nature-based solutions? If not, why not?**
- **Which nature-based solutions do you want council to support?**
- **Are you aware of any nature-based solutions projects in your area?**
- **How can council better enable nature-based solutions in this city/district/region?**

COUNCILS CAN HELP BUILD COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Councils have a key role to play in building resilience through nature-based solutions to climate change. They can do this by investing in coastal, forest, and wetland restoration, better management of council parks and reserves, supporting land managers and landowners to protect nature on private and iwi land, creating room for rivers to flow naturally, regulating activities that reduce resilience, and appropriately zoning land to work with, not against, nature. Some councils are already leading work on nature-based solutions to climate change and have active programmes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

LOCAL PRIORITIES AND QUESTIONS





NATURE IS IN TROUBLE ON PRIVATE LAND

Having evolved in isolation for 80 million years, New Zealand's natural heritage is radically different from the rest of the world, and our native plants, animals and wild places are like no others on this planet. Yet it has taken humans less than a thousand years to wipe out a significant amount of this natural heritage. Current threats include intensified land development for farming and urban development, forest destruction and wetland drainage. Major projects like coal, mines also threaten nature on private land.

Protecting nature on private land

Key facts:

- More than 80% of our land-based birds, bats, reptiles, and frogs are in trouble.
- 12 out of 13 native habitat types shrunk between 2012 and 2018.
- Almost two-thirds of our rare ecosystems are threatened with collapse.
- Much of our lowland indigenous forest within pastoral landscapes is fragmented and in poor condition, often due to lack of pest management and the impacts of grazing.
- Indigenous scrub and shrubland decreased by 18,684ha between 2012 and 2018.
- More than 90% of our wetlands have disappeared.

COUNCILS CAN PROTECT NATURE ON PRIVATE LAND

Councils play a key role in protecting nature on private land by providing incentives and supporting landowners and land managers who want to protect nature, by regulating activities that can result in the destruction of natural areas on private land and by properly enforcing the rules. Some councils have effective programmes for protecting nature on private land, while others are struggling.



QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

- **If elected, what specific actions will you support to protect and restore native biodiversity on private land?**
- **Do you support using the Resource Management Act to protect significant indigenous vegetation and habitats on private land? Why or why not?**
- **What role should councils play in helping landowners protect native ecosystems – through funding, advice, or enforcement?**
- **Do you support stronger protections for remaining wetlands, lowland forests, and shrublands in your region?**
- **How will you ensure council rules are effectively enforced to prevent illegal clearance of native bush or wetland drainage?**

LOCAL PRIORITIES AND QUESTIONS





Funding community conservation in your region

Key facts:

- Between an estimated 25,000 and 45,000 New Zealanders are conservation volunteers.
- There are likely to be more than 600 conservation groups in Aotearoa.
- A 2021 survey of nearly 300 conservation and environmental groups in New Zealand revealed that weed control and planting of natives were reportedly undertaken by most groups (86.1% and 85.4% respectively). <https://predatorfreenz.org/research/survey-studies-huge-volunteer-contribution/>
- Three-quarters of those 296 conservation groups surveyed carried out pest animal control (75.3%).
- In 2024, Forest and Bird alone did more than 7000ha of animal pest control, over 9000ha of plant pest control, planted more than 31,000 plants, and grew nearly 50,000 plants in nurseries.

COUNCILS CAN SUPPORT COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

Councils can support community conservation on private land by providing funding, technical assistance, materials and plants, assistance with fencing and paths, access to council land for projects, and promoting projects. Some councils are already very active in assisting with conservation projects.

COMMUNITY CONSERVATION IS VITAL

Community groups play a key role in protecting nature. Volunteers and community-based professionals are replanting native forests and shrublands, restoring dunes, cleaning up waterways and beaches, clearing weeds, and trapping pests. For many New Zealanders, taking part in community conservation initiatives is an important way to put something back and show their love for nature.



QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

- **Have you been involved in any local conservation projects – as a volunteer, supporter, or decision-maker? What did you learn?**
- **If elected, how will you ensure consistent funding and support for community conservation groups in your area?**
- **What role do you see for council in enabling volunteer-led conservation – beyond funding alone?**
- **Will you advocate for council investment in tools, plants, pest control, and other resources to support local groups?**
- **How will you ensure that community conservation is recognised and included in council planning and environmental strategies?**

LOCAL PRIORITIES AND QUESTIONS



Protecting nature, people, and livelihoods by controlling pests

Key facts:

- More than a quarter of Aotearoa New Zealand is at risk of being smothered by wilding pines – including ancient native landscapes, unique biodiversity, and productive soils for high-value, sustainable land use. Central government funding for wilding conifer control has been considerably reduced, yet the job is unfinished and there is a risk that gains made will be undone (MPI National Wilding Conifer programme).
- If left unchecked, it is estimated that wallabies could occupy one-third of New Zealand by 2065, resulting in at least \$84 million a year in damages. The costs of wallaby damage are expected to increase annually (MPI Tipu Mātoro National Wallaby Programme).
- Predator Free 2050 identifies that predators kill an estimated 25 million native birds each year. PF 2050 focuses on eradicating possums, rats, and mustelids (stoats, weasels, ferrets) and currently excludes other predators like unowned/feral cats, hedgehogs, or mice.
- Feral cats in New Zealand are a significant threat to native wildlife and are considered pests in many areas due to their predation on native bird, lizard, and bat populations. Recently, a Lincoln University Masters student estimated there are 2.4 million unowned feral cats in New Zealand, compared to owned 1.2 million pet cats.
- According to DOC's monitoring (2022–23), feral ungulate (deer, pigs, goats) populations have expanded across 20% more public conservation land since 2013. Private landowners are complaining that feral animals are negatively impacting on conservation efforts and production, and pest control is becoming a significant financial burden. A recent survey of more than 700 Federated Farmers members from across the country shows feral animals are costing farmers at least \$213 million a year.

COUNCILS ARE LEGALLY OBLIGED TO MANAGE PESTS

Regional councils have responsibilities under the Biosecurity Act to prepare pest management plans to control and eradicate pests in their region. Local councils also have a responsibility to control pests on land that they manage. Some councils are very proactive in controlling and managing pests and supporting community efforts.

PESTS ARE RAVAGING NEW ZEALAND

Pests are increasing in numbers and spreading across Aotearoa. In the north, the marine algae caulerpa is smothering the seabed, while in rivers across New Zealand didymo is smothering the beds of rivers and lakes. Deer, goats, pigs, possums, and wallabies are munching their way through native forests, planted exotic forests, and farmland, costing land owners money, destroying nature, and contributing to climate change. Wilding conifers are pushing out native vegetation and everything that relies on it. Despite all we know as a country about the damage pests cause, the problem just keeps getting worse.



QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

- **What do you think are the top three pest threats in your region, and why?**
- **What specific actions will you support to improve pest control on public and private land in your region?**
- **Do you support stronger funding and coordination for controlling widespread pests like deer, goats, or wilding pines? Why or why not?**
- **How will you ensure council pest management plans are effectively implemented and enforced?**
- **Will you advocate for council support (funding, resources, or training) for community groups and landowners undertaking pest control?**

LOCAL PRIORITIES AND QUESTIONS

