

# 10. Landscape and Heritage

## 10.1 Introduction

The landscape we see is a combination of three components: landform, land cover and land use. Landform is made up of soil and rock, moulded and shaped by geological processes and the effects of water and wind. Landform also includes the water that moves across or lies on the surface of the land in the form of rivers and streams, wetlands, and lakes. Land cover refers to the vegetation that grows on the surface of the land (be it alpine grasslands, indigenous bush, or pasture for agricultural production) and other surface covers such as towns and cities. Land use refers to the human activities that occur on the land and water and which leave a mark on the landform and/or the land cover (from the wake of a boat on a lake to a sprawling city).

To most people the term "landscape" conjures up an aesthetically pleasing image; they see landscape as primarily something to look at. However, landscapes are more than just how places and things look; they are those places and things. Landscape management means managing the natural and physical resources which make up landform, land cover and land use so that they combine and interact with each other in ways that maintain their individual functioning, their usefulness to humans and the health of the ecosystems that are interwoven through them.

Throughout the Regional Policy Statement there are many policies directed separately at resources such as soil, water, air and ecosystems. This chapter helps to integrate these resources by suggesting their management should include consideration of their **interaction** in an holistic way. Each of these resources, however they may be combined or manifested in a particular place, is but a constituent part of a greater whole, the individual parts of which should be managed to protect their contribution to the total landscape. A river, for example, may be managed to protect its instream life or its recreational value, but it is also part of a wider landscape, and its contribution to the physical and visual functioning of that landscape needs to be recognised in decisions about its use and management.

It is a characteristic of landscapes that they do not remain static, despite the fact that, for most of us, viewing a landscape means taking a mental "snapshot" of landform, land cover, and land use



while they are arranged in a particular way. However, the components we see in our snapshot are really a cross section of a number of **processes**: the shape and form of the land is constantly changing, the vegetative cover is part of a dynamic and evolving ecosystem, and the use to which land is put varies continuously with human intervention. As time passes, the landscape changes, hillsides are eroded, forests grow, towns spread out, and city skylines are altered. While there may be a tendency to think of landscapes as snapshots, in reality humans are affected by and even measure their lives through the constant changes in the landscapes that surround them.

Policies for landscapes, therefore, should be directed towards management of processes rather than the preservation of their appearance at a particular point in time. By and large, landscapes need to be managed for use, not preserved in glass cases. (Of course, some landscapes may be so sensitive to disruption or damage that they may require protection from development or have their uses restricted.) Managing these processes means not only the management of resources (land, water, and ecosystems), but also the effects of human activity upon them.

The importance of landscapes to human wellbeing should not be underestimated. They have a vital influence over people and communities. Places or scenes bring forth responses in humans which are greater than simple appreciation of their scenic qualities. The physical settings in which people live their lives become important to them and they become concerned when those settings are threatened. Landscapes are often an important means by which communities perceive themselves. This is especially so for Maori, for whom special places are central to the exercise of the *kaitiakitanga* and *rangatiratanga* of their tribes. However, other cultures and communities also treasure their defining landscapes; it is worth considering how the identity of the Kapiti Coast would change without Kapiti Island or how Wainuiomata residents would feel without their famous hill.

Landscape policy needs to take account of human needs such as these. The policies in this chapter suggest we should take account of human values as well as ecological principles in implementing the Act. Land, water and ecosystems should be managed so that the landscape continues to contribute to people's appreciation of it and to meet human expectations of it (for the amenities it offers — recreation, spiritual uses, cultural uses etc). The Act recognises this by requiring policy makers to consider amenity values in Part II. Thus, while landscape management is primarily concerned with managing the interaction of resources to achieve



various ecological ends, managing the visual amenity of a landscape remains an important aspect of landscape management.

### **Landscapes of the Wellington Region**

The unique, rugged landscape of the Wellington Region is the result of many interrelated biophysical, climatic and cultural processes over a relatively short period of geological history. These have resulted in a wide variety of landscapes within a relatively small regional land area. These include exposed mountain ranges, undulating hill lands and broad plains, natural harbours and estuaries, rocky headlands and sand dune coastlines.

There is an enormous number of landscapes of differing scales and sizes in the Region. These may be conceptualised in several ways. On a macro-scale the Region can be seen as made up of five broad landscape areas that transcend territorial authority boundaries. These are analogous to the Department of Conservation's Ecological Districts. These areas are:

- (1) Kapiti coastal plain (part of the Foxton Ecological District);
- (2) Wellington hill country (part of the Cook Strait Ecological District);
- (3) Tararua and Rimutaka Ranges (part of the Tararua Ecological District);
- (4) Wairarapa plains (Wairarapa Plains Ecological District);  
and
- (5) Wairarapa eastern hill country (Eastern Hill Country Ecological District).

Each area may be recognised by its distinctive character and features, the shape of its surface and surface cover — forest, scrub, grassland, urban and rural areas, and so on.

At the macro-level also, it is possible to identify a number of broad geographical systems — coastlines, skylines, fault lines, rivers and valleys — which have no regard for administrative boundaries and which could also be said to be of a regional, or even an extra-regional, scale.

Spread across these large landscapes are numerous smaller landscapes which can be thought of as local or community landscapes (e.g., the view of the Hutt Valley from above Totara



Park; the natural setting of Wainuiomata). These landscapes are mostly only of local significance since the particular combination of resources and activities that make them up are important to, have an effect on, or are viewed by, the people who live in the local areas. Some local landscapes, however, are of such a quality or are so widely appreciated that they achieve a wider importance. Examples of these include Wellington's Town Belt, the headlands and capes of the south coast, Kapiti Island, Kupe's Sail and Castle Point. These landscapes may be said to be of regional importance, even though they may be found within a single territorial authority's district.

Landscape management may also be concerned with intimate and other small landscapes around dwellings and workplaces (e.g., the wooden cottages of Mount Victoria), streets, suburbs, hillsides, and even individual properties. The built environment and the patterns of urban living form an important part of these smaller (and sometimes not so small) landscapes. The changing streetscapes of our cities and towns provide the most immediate and intimate landscape experience for most of the Region's population. It is little wonder, then, that people care greatly about these environments and are keen to preserve their key features and historic and cultural values. By and large, however, these smaller landscapes are not generally regionally significant.