



HUDSON ASSOCIATES
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

WANGANUI DISTRICT

OUTSTANDING NATURAL LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

10th July 2015



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**HUDSON ASSOCIATES
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For

Wanganui District Council

10th July 2015

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Contents

1	Executive Summary	7
2	Background	7
3	Issue to be Managed	7
4	Legislative Setting	9
5	Policy and Regulatory Setting	9
6	Existing Information	9
7	Additional Information Required	9
8	Consultation to Date	11
9	Existing Approach to Managing the Issue	11
9.1	Effectiveness and Efficiency of Existing Approach	11
10	Alternative Approaches to Managing the Issue	11
10.1	Effectiveness and Efficiency of Alternative Approaches	11
11	Most Appropriate Approach	11
12	Risk of Acting or Not Acting	11
13	Method	13
13.1	Expansiveness	13
13.2	Expressiveness	13
13.3	Memorability	13
13.4	Openness	13
13.5	Simplicity	15
13.6	Complexity	15
13.7	Coherence	15
13.8	Vividness	15
14	Potential Threats	15
14.1	Wind Farms	15
14.2	Damming for Hydroelectricity	15
14.3	Pastoral Farming	15
14.4	Pine Plantations	15
14.5	Earthworks	11
15	Removals	17
15.1	Whanganui River and River Valley as seen from Aramoana Lookout	17
16	Conclusion	17

Landscape Areas

Overview	19
Area 1 - Whanganui River Gorge and Upper National Park	21
Area 2 - Whanganui River and Lower National Park	25
Area 3 - North East Inland Hills and Valleys	29
Area 4 - North West Inland Hills and Valleys	33
Area 5 - Otoko	37
Area 6 - Whanganui Western Coastline	41
Area 7 - Whanganui Eastern Coastline	45

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1 Executive Summary

The landscape assessment of the Whanganui District has been undertaken as an expert based approach, with 8 areas identified as having the significance to qualify them as Outstanding Natural Features or Landscapes.

The landscapes have been assessed according to the Pigeon Bay Criteria, which is a list of landscape assessment criteria established by the Environment Court in its decision on an appeal for a series of mussel farms in Pigeon Bay, Banks Peninsula¹. These criteria, which were refined in the subsequent *Wakatipu Environmental Society Inc (WESI) v Queenstown Lakes District Council* appeal, are known from that case as the WESI criteria². However, the Pigeon Bay case has taken on a greater prominence in rhetoric, and is the commonly used name for the method of assessing the significance of landscapes. It is also the process referred to in the Wanganui Manawatu Regional Council's One Plan.

The assessment process identifies three categories for assessment: Natural Science, Perceptual & Associational. These are each subdivided into a further 11 factors, being:

Natural Science	Geological/Geomorphological
	Biological/Ecological
	Hydrological
Perceptual	Memorability
	Legibility/Expressiveness
	Transient
	Aesthetic
Associational	Naturalness
	Historical
	Tangata Whenua
	Shared/Recognised

While efforts have been made to obtain information relating to all 11 categories, inevitably greater information will be held in relation to each area and each category than is known to the author. However, the results of the assessment process have shown a consistency in terms of higher values occurring for specific areas over a range of factors for landscapes of significance i.e. high values may occur for geomorphology, ecology, hydrology, memorability, expressiveness, aesthetic and naturalness in the same area. This reinforces the assessment that this particular area has landscape significance. It is then a value judgment as to whether that area qualifies as an outstanding natural landscape.

Outstanding natural landscapes (and/or features) are generally of high value in terms of natural science and perceptual criteria, with less human modification and greater aesthetic appeal. There are a number of areas that rank highly in terms of the assessment criteria, however may not qualify as

Outstanding. This is typically due to the level of modification which provides clear evidence of human intervention, or reduced values in terms of natural science or perceptual values. This assessment relates specifically to s6(b), being Outstanding Natural Features and Landscapes, and has not identified amenity landscapes as provided for as a s7(c) matter.

2 Background

An assessment of the District's landscapes was motivated by a desire to clearly identify landscapes of significance within the District. This was commenced by the work of Horizons Regional Council, where their provisions relating to significant landscapes evolved as the One Plan moved from its Proposed version to the Decisions version and now onto the Operative Version. The One Plan Provisions (Policy 7-7A) note that some significant landscapes have not been included in the POP, and provide a policy framework for Territorial Authorities to add to the One Plan list of outstanding natural features and landscapes. This has been done in the Whanganui assessment, while the general areas that were identified within Whanganui in the One Plan have been refined through this assessment process. Additional areas not identified in the One Plan have also being added in the Whanganui assessment.

For these reasons, and due to the fact that the Whanganui District Council is embarking on a review of its District Plan, it is timely to initiate a comprehensive landscape assessment to allow the results to be incorporated into the proposed Whanganui District Plan.

The request to prepare the landscape assessment was made in early 2015, and the fieldwork and draft report were completed in June 2015.

3 Issue to be Managed

The issue to be addressed in the landscape assessment is the identification of outstanding landscapes so that these are known and can thus be protected or had regard to in terms of the requirements of the Resource Management Act.

Part and parcel of the need to carry out a landscape assessment of the District was the fact that Horizons Regional Council has identified significant landscapes at a regional scale by way of written description. The landscape report for Whanganui District Council was required to identify the outstanding areas spatially and at a cadastral level. To achieve this, the assessment has gone about mapping their extent, describing them in terms of the Pigeon Bay criteria, and determining the landscape characteristics and values that relate to each area. This is intended to form a basis for objectives, policies and rules that relate to the identified areas and for assessment criteria that may apply to activities within these areas.

¹ *Pigeon Bay Aquaculture Ltd and others v Canterbury Regional Council [1999] C32/99*

² *Wakatipu Environmental Society v Queenstown Lakes District Council [2001] C075/2001*. These have been further refined in subsequent appeals, but the underlying principles remain the same.

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4 Legislative Setting

The key provisions of the RMA that need to be considered when addressing the issue of landscape significance are:

Sn 6(a) The preservation of the natural character of the coastal environment (including the coastal marine area), wetlands, and lakes and rivers and their margins, and the protection of them from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development.

Sn 6(b) The protection of outstanding natural features and landscapes from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development.

Sn 6(e) The relationship of Maori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral lands, water, sites, waahi tapu, and other taonga.

Sn 7(c) The maintenance and enhancement of amenity values

5 Policy and Regulatory Setting

The Regional Policy Statement identified significant landscapes throughout the Horizons Region. This has been replaced by the One Plan which repeated part of this list, and initially mapped their extent. In the now operative One Plan, the maps have been removed and the ONFL are listed by description in Schedule F. Additionally, the One Plan lists a set of assessment criteria at Table 7.7 (which are generally akin to the Pigeon Bay criteria and have been adhered to in the Whanganui Assessment) that are to be taken into account when identifying outstanding landscapes, and when Territorial Authorities are identifying or considering adding to the One Plan Schedule F. The One Plan acknowledges that the submission process has highlighted the potential for additional areas to those identified as outstanding, but this could not be done under the scope of the Plan's development as those areas had not been identified or consulted on in the notified version of the Proposed One Plan. None of the additional areas acknowledged as absent from the POP by the Provisional Determination fall within the Whanganui District.

6 Existing Information

Existing information that was drawn on for the preparation of the landscape assessment included the following:

- District Plan Boundary and cadastral information from Quickmap
- Topographic and NZTopo50 mapping from Quickmap and LINZ
- Aerial photography from Quickmap, WDC, Google & Bing Maps
- Conservation significance information from DoC websites
- DoC Actively Managed Historic Places
- One Plan Chapter 7 and Schedule F
- Operative Whanganui District Plan
- Pigeon Bay Aquaculture Ltd and others v Canterbury Regional Council [1999] C32/99
- Oblique aerial photographs taken on two flights over the District on 28 May 2015 and 17 June 2015
- GIS layers supplied by WDC
- Associational factors

7 Additional Information Required

To complete this assessment, additional information is needed from consultation to inform decision-makers on the views of land owners, the public, and cultural representatives. This information will be obtained during consultation with key stakeholders through notification or submissions after notification. Without this information the assessment remains purely an expert based assessment and lacks the breadth and depth, particularly regarding Associational Factors, that comes from community input.

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8 Consultation to Date

Consultation will take place as appropriate during the sectional review of the Proposed District Plan

9 Existing Approach to Managing the Issue

The Whanganui District Plan (Operative 2004) has three areas listed as Landscapes which are Outstanding and Regionally Significant as defined in the RPS. In the Whanganui District these are:

- Whanganui River and River Valley upstream of Aramoana
- Whanganui National Park
- The District's coastline

Under the Issues section, it also listed a range of criteria that qualify areas suitable for inclusion as having particular significance, such as DOC estate, Council Reserves, QEII land etc. These landscapes are not mapped and rely on the One Plan descriptions and the qualifying criteria listed above. These landscapes are managed by the Whanganui District Council through their responsibility to give effect to Regional Plans, where significant landscapes are identified. Schedule F of the One Plan has the three areas listed above within Whanganui District listed as Outstanding Landscapes.

9.1 Effectiveness and Efficiency of Existing Approach

The Whanganui District Plan (Operative 2004) does not identify the spatial extent of those landscapes identified as outstanding and regionally significant. Having completed the landscape assessment for the Whanganui District, it is apparent that there is some minor variance between the extent of areas described in the Operative One Plan and the areas identified in this landscape assessment for the District Plan. The variance relates to the collection of smaller areas to the east and west of the district that are identified in this assessment but not in the One Plan, plus the mid reaches of the Whanganui River and River Valley as seen from Aramoana Lookout which is identified in the One Plan but not in this assessment. The One Plan provides for refinement and addition of areas at the territorial level, so such discrepancies are to be expected when a detailed review is undertaken at a district level. By identifying the extent of areas of landscape significance throughout the district and the values relating to them, policies can be put in place to ensure the relevant provisions of the RMA, One Plan and NZCPS are met.

The results of the landscape assessment will lead to greater efficiency if adopted into the Proposed Whanganui District Plan. A reason for this is because the areas of landscape significance have been spatially defined so whenever a consent application arises in close proximity to a significant landscape, the boundaries are already defined. This removes the need for assessment work to potentially be repeated and gives certainty to users of the Plan, which adds to its effectiveness and efficiency for future users of the Proposed Whanganui District Plan.

10 Alternative Approaches to Managing the Issue

The primary alternative approach to the Operative Plan is to not only describe the areas of landscape significance but to map these areas also. This has the advantages of introducing a higher level of certainty when applications are considered and may reduce subsequent costs in identifying whether applications relate to areas of landscape significance or not. Alternatively, the Operative Plan approach of not spatially defining any areas could be adopted and the current level of landscape protection could continue. This has issues relating to uncertainty and the subsequent costs this leads to.

10.1 Effectiveness and Efficiency of Alternative Approaches

The expected effectiveness of the alternative approach outlined above (being the current approach) is low, while the expected efficiency is also low due to the potential need for redefinition of areas of landscape significance each time a consent application is assessed.

11 Most Appropriate Approach

The assessment has listed the values relating to each area, and these can be incorporated into the policies that the plan writer needs to incorporate when drafting the provisions of the proposed WDP. A cost evaluation has not been carried out.

12 Risk of Acting or Not Acting

The risks of acting or not acting relates to the need to meet the statutory requirements of the RMA, in which sections 6 deals with significant landscapes. If these are not identified in the District Plan, there is considerable difficulty in giving effect to the Act and the One Plan.

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13 Method

As outlined above in the Executive Summary, the landscapes have been assessed according to the Pigeon Bay Criteria, which is a list of landscape assessment factors established by the Environment Court in its decision on an appeal for a series of mussel farms in Pigeon Bay, Banks Peninsula³. These factors, which were refined in the subsequent Wakatipu Environmental Society Inc (WESI) v Queenstown Lakes District Council appeal, are known from that case as the WESI criteria⁴. However, the Pigeon Bay case has taken on a greater prominence in rhetoric, and is the commonly named method for assessing the significance of landscapes.

The assessment process identifies three categories for assessment: Natural Science, Perceptual and Associational. The factors under these three headings have also considered the factors listed in One Plan **Table 7.2 Natural Feature and Landscape Assessment Factors**. The three categories used in the Whanganui assessment are subdivided into a further 11 categories, being:

Natural Science	Geological/Geomorphological
	Biological/Ecological
	Hydrological
Perceptual	Memorability
	Legibility/Expressiveness
	Transient
	Aesthetic
	Naturalness
Associational	Historical
	Tangata Whenua
	Shared/Recognised

The assessment process gathered information from available sources, but in some cases there were information gaps and these have been marked as 'unknown' in the assessment sheets. Any gaps may be filled when submissions are received on the proposed plan. Until that time, this is an expert assessment that does not have the input from the wider community, particularly in relation to Associational factors where local knowledge is essential.

When undertaking the assessment to arrive at the Summary of Key Values, subjective assessments needed to be made in relation to aesthetic values. To provide some guidance when reviewing this assessment, the following explanations have been developed in relation to some of the subjective words used in these categories:

13.1 Expansiveness.

Used to describe the appreciation of wide open spaces and views. Typically views of more than 180° and sometimes up to 360°. Long distance views are normally available, with objects diminishing in prominence and visibility due to distance and increasing dominance of the landscape in comparison to the object itself. The perception of expansiveness can be significantly reduced when large structures or features are seen in the foreground or mid ground, as they provide a focus that is well short of the natural horizon. Even if these structures do not block the view, their presence can provide a visual distraction and focus that disrupts the perception of expanse.

13.2 Expressiveness

Landscapes evolve over geological time. The ability to perceive evidence of this evolution reflects how expressive the landscape is of its formative processes. For example, the Whanganui River escarpments are within an incised river bed and have evolved through erosion over time, therefore they are expressive of these geological processes. Highly expressive landscapes are often also dramatic, which in turn can make them highly memorable.

13.3 Memorability

A landscape becomes memorable when the image perceived by the viewer remains with them after they leave the site. It is not possible to fully define what makes landscapes memorable, as the combination of factors is numerous and of different importance to different people. However, the factors contributing to memorability include how dramatic the view is, the expansiveness, openness, simplicity, naturalness, coherence, vividness, expressiveness and rarity of the view, and the extent of panorama obtained. In terms this landscape assessment, the more memorable views are typically those with higher natural character and/or of greater dramatic quality due to their expressiveness of natural and formative processes.

13.4 Openness.

Typically an open landscape has few structures or features, as such elements would collectively start to create a sense of enclosure. Shelter belts, buildings, trees, and large structures such as wind turbines can all contribute to a loss of openness, but they would need to be of sufficient prominence or density to actually limit visibility of parts of the view. This is different to loss of expansiveness, which can occur without loss of views.

³ Pigeon Bay Aquaculture Ltd and others v Canterbury Regional Council [1999] C32/99

⁴ Wakatipu Environmental Society v Queenstown Lakes District Council [2001] C075/2001. These have been further refined in subsequent appeals, but the underlying principles remain the same.

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13.5 Simplicity.

Typically a simple landscape has a uniform land cover and even land form. Simplicity is lost when elements introduce diversity. These can be varied vegetation, new structures, earthworks, drainage etc. Structures such as wind turbines and access roads would reduce simplicity. However, in a somewhat ironic way, simple landscapes can also be well suited to visually accommodating wind turbines due to the simplicity of these large structures - the two can complement each other. When a simple landscape is of sufficiently large scale, it can potentially accept simple elements such as wind turbines, but it is important that ancillary features like roads and transmission lines have minimal impact. Other aspects of landscape character may be adversely affected, such as natural character, if this is a feature of that particular part of the landscape. Where there is a simple landscape that does not have high natural character, there is potential for a wind farm to be appropriate.

13.6 Complexity

A complex landscape occurs when there are features, elements or patterns that individually or collectively contribute to diversity. The complexity may be in the vegetation cover or the landform. Typically, more complex areas are able to visually integrate additional features such as large structures due to the existing diversity that already exists.

13.7 Coherence

A coherent landscape occurs when there are features, elements or patterns that individually or collectively contribute to a cohesive appearance. The coherence may be in the vegetation cover or the landform, such as a full cover of native vegetation or a repetitive landform. Typically, more coherent areas are able to be visually identified as having a common character which can define the extent of an ONFL.

13.8 Vividness

A vivid landscape occurs when there are features, elements or patterns that individually or collectively contribute to the landscape having 'stand out' or spectacular aspects within it. It is often accompanied by memorability e.g. 'I vividly remember ...'. It can also be linked to expressiveness due to the legibility of a scene such as an extensive coastal dune strip with no buildings. Vividness may not be limited to visual, but may include transient values such as bird song or sea spray.

14 Potential Threats

There are a number of potential threats to the areas identified within this assessment and these have been outlined below. These primarily relate to weed and pest nuisance and effects, loss of indigenous vegetation, earthworks, loss of water flow and in coastal areas the effect of wind farms.

14.1 Wind Farms

The results of the landscape assessment conclude that wind farms would have an adverse effect in any Outstanding Natural Landscape or Feature. There is potential for them to be located adjacent to Outstanding Landscapes, but in doing so they should not adversely affect the values associated with any Outstanding Natural Landscape or Feature which may be adjacent or some distance away.

14.2 Damming for Hydroelectricity/Irrigation/Recreation

The results of the landscape assessment conclude that the construction of dams in most of the Outstanding Natural Landscapes or Features would have an adverse effect. This is primarily due to the effect on the geomorphology and ecology, both of which make a significant contribution to most of the features.

14.3 Pastoral Farming

There are no examples within the areas identified as Outstanding Natural Landscapes where farming activities are already occurring (except a very small area at Atene Meander). The results of the landscape assessment conclude that farming should not be accommodated in the identified ONFL areas. Farming is more common within areas associated with Amenity Landscapes, which are not considered as part of this assessment.

14.4 Pine Plantations

The results of the landscape assessment conclude that pine plantations cannot be accommodated in any Outstanding Natural Landscape or Feature. This is because the regimented planting of exotic species reduces the ecological values of the landscape and also downgrades the perceived naturalness values. There may be potential for them to be located in some Amenity Landscapes, but these have not been considered as part of this assessment.

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14.5 Earthworks

The geology/geomorphology of the areas identified within this report play an important role in heightening the landscape classification. This is because the geology/geomorphology within the Whanganui District typically contributes to a number of key value aspects. For example, the Whanganui River geomorphology allows confined views along the gorges of the river corridor, is expressive in the way the dramatic escarpments expose the layered sedimentary mudstone rock while also representing a complex and memorable landscape comprised of numerous patterns, processes and elements. These values are all connected to the underlying geology/geomorphology and as such protecting the landform from modification, such as earthworks, must be considered. Mining and damming are unlikely but possible threats.

15 Removals

As part of this assessment the ONFL areas detailed in both the Horizons One Plan and the operative District Plan have been specifically considered. All of the Horizons One Plan ONFL's have been accepted (with refinement), however the landscape items listed in the District Plan 2013 have not been specifically mapped so it cannot be known if they are accepted or removed.

15.1 Whanganui River and River Valley as seen from Aramoana Lookout

While it is acknowledged that the views obtained from this vantage point is highly memorable, much of the landscape content in view from these locations is not considered to qualify as an Outstanding Natural Landscape or Feature in their own right. The District Plan should deal with the protection of vistas as a separate issue from the identification and protection of Outstanding Natural Features and Landscapes. This may be achieved through District Plan provisions which control the size and position of trees/development which may block views from identified locations. The Whanganui River has very high associational values, particularly for iwi. It is considered that these values do not cause the entire river to be an Outstanding Natural Feature under s6(b), but would more properly be recognized under s6(e) 'The relationship of Maori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral lands, water, sites, waahi tapu, and other taonga.' The sections of the Whanganui River that do qualify for recognition under s6(b) are upstream of the Aramoana Lookout and occur where the terrestrial and aquatic values come together to form an Outstanding Natural Landscape or Feature.

16 Conclusion

While efforts have been made to obtain information relating to all 11 factors, inevitably greater information will be held in relation to each area and each factor than is known to the author. However, the results of the assessment process have shown a consistency in terms of higher values occurring for specific areas over a range of factors for landscapes of significance i.e. high values may occur for geomorphology, ecology, hydrology, memorability, expressiveness, aesthetic and naturalness in the same area. This reinforces the assessment that this particular area has landscape significance. It is then a value judgment as to whether that area is an outstanding natural landscape, however ONFL's (apart from the Whanganui River Atene Meander) exclude productive farmland. It is recommended that this be noted in the provisions to allow for continuation of existing rural practices in this specific location.

As this assessment relates to s6(b), being Outstanding Natural Features and Landscapes, significant amenity landscapes do not qualify but would qualify for recognition under s7(c). Amenity values relating to cultural importance can be mapped under s7(c), but determination of such values will require contributions from the public and special interest groups. Areas valued as part of the national cycleway may qualify for such values, as might areas appreciated by tourists for their scenic values. Before considering them for recognition in the District Plan, Council should also be aware that there may be a very limited range of additional policy provisions that would apply to significant amenity landscapes as distinct to adjacent rural landscapes. Amenity Landscapes have not been considered as part of this assessment. It is a separate matter whether threats to their values warrant separate recognition in district plan provisions. This is a matter that needs to be decided by Council.