



Photo Credit: Environmental Canterbury

# Waimakariri Wetland Ecosystems

## What they are and how you can protect them

### Wetland ecosystems are vital for the wellbeing of both land and waterways.

Wetlands are places where water naturally sits at or near the ground surface for all or part of the year. Like natural sponges, wetlands help to stabilise the water table. Wetland plants trap waterborne sediment, preventing silt from entering streams and estuaries, and bacteria breaks down the nitrogen in farm run-off, improving water quality.

Wetlands are the most productive places on earth. Wetlands in the Waimakariri provide habitat for a wide range of native plants, from tiny orchids through to giant kahikatea trees. They are a key food source and breeding area for native fish, birds and invertebrates.

Lowland wetlands are among our rarest and most at-risk ecosystems. Over 90% of Canterbury's original wetlands have been drained or filled over the past 150 years. Threats to wetland ecosystems include drainage, pollution from excess nutrients and sediment, grazing from stock or deer, and invasion by woody weeds such as willows.

### Ways you can help protect wetlands:

- Contact Environment Canterbury or the Waimakariri District Council about any changes to wetlands, or about their protection.
- Control the constraints to natural regeneration – these might include browsing by livestock or wild animals, or invasive weeds.
- Get advice from an ecologist before considering any planting in your wetland – make sure you only introduce species that are right for the site.

- Minimise sediment and nutrients entering your wetland – fence small waterways feeding it with an appropriate buffer.

### Possible actions:

- Control woody weeds and exotic grasses
- Control animal pests and predators
- Construct a deer fence around your wetland to exclude deer and cattle
- Legally protect your wetland by putting it into a QEII covenant – this will ensure it is appropriately managed both now and after you have left the property.

### Funding and advice

For more information on wetlands or assistance with protecting them, please contact:

- **Environment Canterbury** on 0800 324 636 and ask for the Local Biodiversity Officer. Visit [ecan.govt.nz/your-region/your-environment/our-natural-environment/biodiversity-funding/](https://ecan.govt.nz/your-region/your-environment/our-natural-environment/biodiversity-funding/)
- **Waimakariri District Council** on 0800 965 468 and ask for the Ecologist – Biodiversity Advisor or email [office@wmk.govt.nz](mailto:office@wmk.govt.nz)
- **Queen Elizabeth II National Trust (QEII)** on 0800 467 367 and ask for your local QEII Representative. Visit [qei.org.nz](https://qei.org.nz) or email [info@qei.org.nz](mailto:info@qei.org.nz)



**Coastal wetlands and estuaries** in the Waimakariri District are rich in animal life. They provide vital habitat for wading birds like the rare White Heron. These wetlands are an important Mahinga Kai resource.

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**Photo Greg Byrnes**

**High fertility swamps** are the most common wetland type on the Waimakariri plains. Swamps are fed by groundwater or land surface drainage with water levels that fluctuate seasonally.

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**Photo Environment Canterbury**



**Red tussock swamps** are generally found in the Oxford foothills and the Lees Valley. Swamp environments support a diverse range of plant and animal species.

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**Photo Environment Canterbury**

**Marsh wetlands** usually contain grassland, sedges, rushes, or herbfield. They are often flooded by standing or slowly moving water.

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**Photo Environment Canterbury**

