

ANGLING NEWS



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WELLINGTON FISH & GAME REGION

P.O. Box 1325, Palmerston North 4440

Ph: 06 359 0409

Email: wellington@fishandgame.org.nz

Website: www.fishandgame.org.nz

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SENSATIONAL START TO THE SEASON!

Anglers are still pinching themselves at the sublime weather that has seen the season in, but the quality of both the trout and the angling so early on has also surprised many! There's no doubt that the opening of the 2020-21 trout fishing season has been one of the best we've seen in many years, some calling it the best in a decade. We've received an amazing level of feedback from anglers throughout the lower North Island – correspondence and emails citing fantastic fishing and fish condition in a wide range of rivers including the big mainstem fisheries of the Rangitikei, Hutt, Ruamahanga and Manawatu.

While the result of our drift dives last summer suggested the fishery was in good shape, anecdotal evidence and anglers observation pointed to the Manawatu fishery struggling. Indeed, for the previous season the Wellington Fish & Game Council took measures to address this by reducing the bag limit to two fish per angler per day. The great news is the Manawatu really appears to have bounced back... for whatever reason. Anglers saw a dramatic improvement in the trout fishing in the mainstem last season, and the organisers of Sport Flyfishing Manawatu's 2020 competition (held in October this year) reported exceptional catch rates with "very healthy numbers and fish condition".

The Hutt and its main tribs need no further introduction. Anyone who missed the recent episode of Pure Fly (Duke TV) should find it on demand to see what all the hype is about – simply put: world-class trout fishing right on Wellington's doorstep! No other major city in New Zealand – possibly the world – has the range of angling and quality trout in such proximity. There's simply no excuse for Wellingtonians and Hutt City dwellers not to make the most of this amazing fishery.

The same Pure Fly episode also showcased what's available for anglers prepared to venture into the backcountry in the lower North Island. This is the sort of sight fishing for large wild trout that overseas anglers spend a fortune on traveling to New Zealand every year. With very limited international travel due to Covid restrictions, this season will see almost no foreign anglers on our blue-ribbon waterways, providing locals with the opportunity to enjoy these fisheries while they are at their best – uncrowded and with much reduced angling pressure.

To say the past year has been tough is certainly cliché. Everyone deserves a break from what have been unprecedented times. Research shows the mental and physical health benefits that flow from time in the outdoors, so what better way to reward yourself with some wellbeing than getting out for a relaxing fish?

We hope to see you on the water again this season!



Seven-year-old Ben Angove with a whopping brown from a Manawatu River tributary. Photo: Justin Angove

INVEST IN YOUR WELLBEING!

If you haven't already purchased your licence – now's the time. After a hell of a year, a smart idea is to make an investment in your own wellbeing. Destress, decompress, go fishing! Trout fishing also offers a chance to re-connect with our wonderful country, with almost every river or stream you cross in the lower North Island representing an angling opportunity.

In driving SH1 from Wellington to the northern limit of our region you will cross around a dozen fishable waterways; on SH2 from Wellington to the boundary with Hawke's Bay there's even more on offer with about 20 fishable streams and rivers! And don't forget that your season licence is a passport to superb angling beyond our region too, in neighbouring Hawke's Bay, Taranaki, and further afield. Make the most of the amazing opportunities available to you this season. We hope you catch plenty!



PARK & CAST



SCAN THIS CODE WITH YOUR PHONE TO WATCH THE EPISODE



High overhead cover helps shade the water and keep the temperatures at a tolerable level for trout. Photo: Hamish Carnachan

HOW TO BEAT THE HEAT

If the stunning run of weather at the start of this season is anything to go by we're likely to be in for a very hot, dry summer, and this will have a marked effect on trout movement and behaviour in our region. As such it pays to have done a little forward planning for such an eventuality and develop some tactics for fishing through summer to maximise your chance of A) finding fish and B) catching them.

When temperatures are running high and river flow low, often the trout aren't where you'd normally see them or the ones you do spot simply won't eat. Over the course of fishing the drought-prone Wairarapa region for the better part of a decade, I think I'm reasonably well versed in targeting trout through what can be a frustrating fishing period. Foremost, you need to think like a trout. When you're hot in summer, and seeking respite from the heat, what do you do? You look for shade and, preferably, a nice cool breeze.

Naturally, shade has the same effect on fish as it does for us – it takes the sting out of the direct heat from the sun. Target your fishing towards shaded reaches of river or stream. If there aren't overhanging trees to provide shade on the water, run your flies or lures close through undercut banks where fish can evade the direct sunlight.

Obviously there's no such thing as a breeze underwater, but features of hydrology have a similar effect. Confluences, where streams meet and mix, can be similar to a cool zephyr, particularly if one is lower in temperature than the other – i.e. a shaded side-stream flowing into the mainstem of a braided river.

Where two waterways meet at high flow, or whitewater reaches where rivers tumble over rocks, the water becomes oxygenated by the turbid action. This is vital for trout in summer because the higher the temperature the less dissolved oxygen in the water. Run nymphs or lures blind through these parts of a pool or river.

There is also a direct correlation between water depth and temperature – thermoclines are different strata, or layers, that reduce in temperature the deeper you go in a body of water. Hence why you will often see numbers of trout milling around on the bottom of the deepest pool they can find in summer. We do have spring creeks in the Wellington Fish & Game region. These are great habitat for trout in the hot season because, being sourced from underground, they remain at a reasonably constant cool temperature throughout.

How you handle trout over the hot months is particularly important. If you are releasing them and want the fish to have the best chance of surviving, you must take great care. Scan the QR code for more info.

Spring creeks remain at a constant cool temperature even through the height of summer. Photo: Hamish Carnachan



A juvenile brown trout caught electric fishing in a Hutt tributary. Photo: Hamish Carnachan



HUTT A HAVEN FOR TROUT

During the summer of 2019-20 staff undertook an extensive electric-fishing programme to identify previously unknown spawning waters. The sampling also enabled us to provide further evidence to verify existing known sites. An electric fishing machine (EFM) is used to distribute a high voltage charge through the water. This stuns any fish or invertebrates within a given radius. Juvenile trout that are incapacitated are collected with a hand net, photographed against identifying site features, before being released unharmed.

The presence of juvenile trout provides proof that trout spawning occurred somewhere further upstream because fish of this age and size cannot travel any great distances against a current, their movements are generally restricted to downstream migration. A total of 11 streams were sampled last summer with electric fishing machine, 10 of those in the Hutt catchment and all contained high abundance of juvenile fish. Importantly, we discovered three spawning streams previously not identified in Greater Wellington Regional Council's Natural Resources Plan.

While our modelling had identified these streams as likely spawning habitat, the electric fishing has confirmed the hypothesis. Importantly, it means GWRC must now have regard to trout spawning habitat in any planning and resource management aspects of these waterways. The fact so many Hutt tributaries are contributing to recruitment of the trout population also adds insight into why the fishery is in such good stead and gives us confidence it should remain that way for the foreseeable future.

FISHERY FOCUS - WHAKATIKEI RIVER

Few cities have such freshwater angling riches right on the doorstep and the Whakatikei is a hidden gem for Wellington and Hutt anglers, offering backcountry quality fishing mere minutes from home. Often overlooked for the two neighbouring branches of the Akatarua River, as well as the Pakuratahi River, the Whakatikei has bounced back from the lean seasons that saw it fall from favour among the local angling fraternity.

Over the past three years, staff have made regular ventures to the middle reaches as part of their water chemistry and otolith research to ascertain the value of Hutt River spawning tributaries. Observations suggest the absence of any major floods for some years has helped bolster the resident trout population.

Flowing through a steep-sided gorge, with ample deep holding pools and shaded riparian margins, it is also likely that the Whakatikei provides trout from the Hutt with refuge from the high summer heat and low flows that frequent the mainstem river. Trout in the Whakatikei are generally large – averaging over 4lbs – with medium-sized fish seldom caught.

This is certainly a summer fishery, because access is difficult and often involves walking long distance in the river, with frequent crossings. Anglers should always check the forecast before venturing into the catchment as it can rise very rapidly, even from localized rainfall, and above the Hutt confluence you truly are in backcountry isolation.

Sight fishing is the go on warm still days. A breeze can make it difficult to spot fish often holding at the bottom of the deep emerald green pools. The exception to this rule is when the cicadas are on the wing and they can be prolific in this catchment. The trout will respond well to most of the flies that work in the Hutt – Parachute Adams dry flies and dark natural mayfly nymph imitations. Catch and release is advised.

The main two access points are by crossing the Hutt River opposite Whakatikei Street at Upper Hutt and wet wading upstream. Alternatively, drive up into the western hills and right to the end of Bulls Run Rd – if the forestry gates are locked it may require walking a short distance down the Wainui Stream until you hit the confluence.

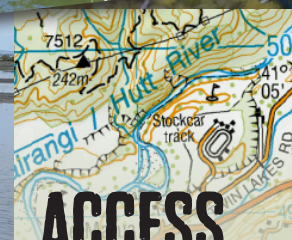
Harold Whitmore from the USA with a typical Whakatikei brown last season. Photo: Andrew Harding

Deep clear pools on the Whakatikei River are ideal for spotting large cruising trout. Photo: Hamish Carnachan



Stalking cruising trout with a spinner at the Tauherenikau delta. Photo: Hamish Carnachan

LAKE WAIRARAPA FISHING GUIDE



ACCESS QUERIES?

Does the Queen's Chain run alongside that river? Can I get through that property to the small stream I want to fish? Is it legal to walk up that river without encroaching on private property?

The Walking Access Mapping System has all your access queries covered in a one-stop website. Visit www.wams.org.nz and let your fingers do the searching before you head out on the water.

Angler interest in Lake Wairarapa has been growing since Wellington Fish & Game started to promote the waterbody as an underrated trout and perch fishery. To meet demand from our licence holders looking for a stillwater fishing venue, we've developed an online guide for the lake which details hot spots and key tips and techniques to boost success.

Lake Wairarapa is a large body of water fed by numerous streams, rivers and wetlands, and has very good populations of brown trout and perch. Taking in neighbouring Lake Onoke (Ferry), the area offers a wealth

of freshwater angling potential in the right conditions, but its size can make it daunting for anglers who struggle to know where to start.

It is a very diverse fishery that covers all angling bases including shallow-water trolling (or harling flies), stalking sighted fish cruising the river deltas, spin fishing for trout chasing whitebait in the estuarine Lake Onoke, targeting the spring feeder creeks and small wetlands and Taupo-style night time angling at the stream mouths.

You can find our Lake Wairarapa Fishing Guide on the Wellington Fish & Game webpages at www.fishandgame.org.nz or scan the QR code inset.

A GREAT SEASON TO DO SOME EXPLORING



Camping with the kids at Kaitoke, a favourite Harding family getaway, especially combined with some fishing in the nearby Pakuratahi River. Photo: Andrew Harding

With major restrictions on international travel caused by Covid, Kiwis have been forced to change their travel plans and many are opting to hit the road and explore their own backyard. Knowing there will be plenty of interest from folks who want to fish their way around the region, or further afield, Fish & Game has developed a suite of web-based resources to assist itinerant anglers who might need to know a little more about what opportunities exist.

Pretty much every river or stream you cross in New Zealand, and certainly the Wellington Fish & Game region, is a fishing opportunity waiting to be discovered. It's a great feature of this country that you can invariably pull over at a waterway, park up, start casting and have a reasonable chance of catching a trout.



Our Park & Cast website highlights some of the best spots in the region, and throughout New Zealand, to target if you're on a roady and want to take a break to fish or are looking for somewhere new to explore. These are also places where camping is available streamside or not too far away from the action, and they are family-friendly fishing locations too.

For anglers looking for something different to do with the family this Christmas break, or perhaps over a long weekend, check out the lower North Island Park & Cast circuit as an exciting and low-cost holiday option. The circuit has camping spots on each of the following rivers – Hutt, Otaki, Rangitikei, Mangatainoka and Ruamahanga – giving you and the family access to some excellent fishing and a good look of the region along the way.

NEED HELP CATCHING FISH?

From our how-to guides on Fishing the Hutt River, Reading Water, Spin Fishing Basics, Advanced Spin Fishing to fishery access, we've got a heap of information and resources to help you catch more trout and get the best value out of your licence.

You'll find most of these resources readily available on the website, but if there's something you're specifically after then don't hesitate to get in touch via email (wellington@fishandgame.org.nz) or give us a buzz – (06) 359-0409.



Hutt River – Kaitoke Regional Park has an amazing campground on the banks of the Pakuratahi River, a tributary of the Hutt. While trout numbers are better in the nearby Hutt, anglers will find fish in the Pakuratahi away from the popular swimming spots.

Otaki – The Otaki Forks campsite is a stunner and it's cheap. On the edge of the Taranui Forest park the drive in is beautiful, following the Otaki River. There is good fishing at the forks or below SH1.

Rangitikei – The Vinegar hill campground is a Manawatu institution. Set on a lovely flat bounded by a seeping curve of the Rangitikei River. Excellent spin fishing for the whole family both upstream and downstream of the campsite.

Mangatainoka – The campground opposite the famous Tui Brewery is a great spot to park up with very good numbers of fish a short way upstream. Fly angling and spinning will both do the business and you can't beat a cold beer and tasty bar snack at the brewery after your fishing.

Ruamahanga – The cliffs campsite at the end of Dakins Road is free and just happens to be right beside one of the most productive stretches of this great angling river. Walk a short distance upstream or downstream if the campsite is busy. Watch for the evening rise in summer!

If you are travelling around fishing this season, please ensure you thoroughly Check, Clean and Dry all your equipment to prevent the spread of weeds and other unwanted aquatic organisms.

WE WANT TO SEE AND HEAR FROM YOU

The Wellington Fish & Game Council meets six times each year, at venues around the lower North Island.

These meetings are open to the public and anglers are encouraged to attend. It's a great opportunity to have your say and be heard by the people who govern and manage the fishery resource in our region on your behalf.

Visit the Wellington region webpages on www.fishandgame.org.nz and click on the 'About the Council' tab to find dates and venues for forthcoming meetings.



BACK TO THE BACKCOUNTRY

Amidst the Covid-19 uncertainty, one thing is certain about this season – there will be far fewer foreign anglers on our rivers and that means less pressure on the fish. Whether its anecdote or actuality, we regularly receive complaints from locals about overseas anglers “hogging” backcountry fisheries periodically over the summer. There are even claims about Nelson-based guides flying clients into the Tararua rivers because the wilderness fisheries in the top of the south are too crowded.

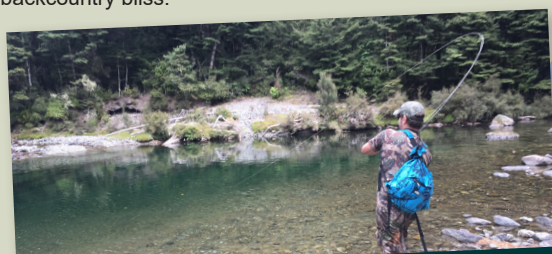
Some of our resident licence holders even go so far as to suggest they no longer fish the backcountry for fear of being dropped in on, having endured a long walk in for second-hand angling. Well, this season there are no excuses not to revisit the local Wellington Fish & Game backcountry fisheries.

From the Tararuas, to the Ruahines, to the Kaimanawas, there are some world-class wilderness fishing opportunities just waiting for our anglers. The great thing about living in the lower North Island is that unlike other regions, and particularly the South Island, you don't have to drive and hike vast distances to reach these isolated places – we really do have the backcountry on our back doorstep.

Make this the season you discover how good your local wilderness fishing is, with fewer anglers likely to be encountered when you're on the water. If you want to whet your appetite, scan the QR code to check out the recent Pure Fly episode featuring the best of both worlds – The hustle and bustle of the urban Hutt fishery and isolated Tararua backcountry bliss.



SCAN THIS CODE WITH YOUR PHONE TO WATCH THE EPISODE



Local anglers will have their fisheries to themselves this season. Photo: Hamish Carnachan



A backcountry beauty - Put yourself in the picture this season. Photo: Sam Crafter.

THE FIGHT TO PROTECT OUR SPORT FISH

Wellington Fish & Game is increasingly receiving requests to remove sport fish such as trout and perch from select waterways in the region. This is largely being driven by staff and contractors from within regional councils, many of whom are openly prejudiced against sport fish, and their ill-conceived actions to control introduced species often have the blessing of local iwi.

Sadly, the rationale for the sport fish removal is being driven by emotion and a very narrow viewpoint that anything introduced is inherently bad, rather than good science. While sport fish are vilified by the growing nativist movement for predating native species, it is becoming clear that many native fish are now heavily reliant on introduced species as a food source.

Fish & Game staff are discovering that the removals are having negative impacts on native species by reducing food availability and in some cases collapsing localised populations of endangered species such as long-fin eel.

Our ongoing research in the waterbodies surrounding Lake Wairarapa found that shortfin eel populations were over 900% higher where sports fish were present compared to areas where exotic fish had been removed by GWRC staff and contractors. Longfin eel populations were also 160% higher. Dr David Pontin, a research fellow on sabbatical to Fish & Game, puts it bluntly: “It appears that the removal of sports fish has decimated eel populations through a lack of food for the eels. Moreover, in any system where

food is lost, consumers will simply leave or switch to other food sources, in this case native fish,” he says.

“Removing a suite of species that have been in place 150 years and are entwined within these systems has had catastrophic impacts on the ecology of the area.” Unfortunately, the impacts of misguided fish removal projects on the terrestrial native species – like bittern, kotare, and shags, to name a few – that also rely on sports fish for prey have not been monitored and could have been equally dire.

Fish & Game is firmly of the view that the biggest gains towards restoring native fisheries is through habitat protection and improving water quality. Ironically, the authorities that are often leading the vilification of introduced sport fish are the ones who have failed abysmally to protect wetlands, water quantity and quality.

Fish & Game staff studying the diet of native fish to ascertain the impact of sport fish removal



A reach of the Mangahao River with plenty of potential.
Photo: Hamish Carnachan

FISHERY FOCUS - LOWER MANGAHAO RIVER

By Hamish Carnachan

The lower Mangahao River has seldom found favour in the wider angling community... perhaps a result of the poor review it received in John Kent's fly-fishing guidebook, maybe a feature of the dam in the headwaters. Whether or not the stigma is deserved is a moot point. Plenty of local Paihiatua anglers regularly fish the river, and personally I've caught some lovely fish in the easily accessible reaches when travelling between work in Palmy and home in Wairarapa.

It is fair to say the fishery can be hit and miss. Pools and runs that held trout on one visit can seem barren the next, reaches that previously were barren are then holding fish. Most certainly the dam has impacted the riverbed. A very fine medium dominates the substrate where normally you would find cobbles and boulders that provide habitat for invertebrates. This is a feature of the regular dam flushes that push the finer material downstream.

There are still places where habitat is favourable and if you're an observant angler you will find it. The key is to cover plenty of ground – i.e. to be successful on the Mangahao you probably have to expect a fair amount of walking between fish. Places to target are where the river narrows, as this increases the water velocity and in high flow can blow the smaller pebbles through. Deep pools are also favoured territory and I've seen locals successfully pull trout out of these lairs when bait fishing (legal below the Marima Reserve Bridge).

Downstream of Ballance the river seems pretty sedate and somewhat featureless as it meanders across the plains until it meets the Manawatu. The most attractive water is upstream of the Marima Bridge and into the forest park but particular care is needed as flushing flows can be released without warning. There are numerous lay-bys and bridges from where you can access the river. If you're looking for new water this summer, and have time on your hands to explore, the often overlooked Mangahao could be worth a shot.

BAIT FISHING WITH WORMS - MORE THAN CHILD'S PLAY

Whether you're providing a fish for the table, or getting a novice angler into their first trout, very few methods preform as consistently as bait fishing with an earth worm. And while many of us cut our angling teeth using this method, successful worm fishing is much more than child's play.

Types of Worms

Not all worms are created equal and when it comes to a trout's favourite, red dung worms have the edge over grey and tiger varieties. The best place to find red dung worms is under a cow pat, around a woolshed or in some cattle yards.

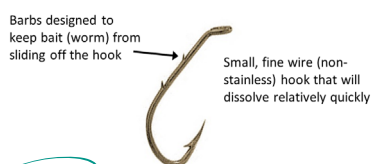
Hooks and rigs

A size 8 bait holder hook is perfect, tie it to the end of your line and then have about 50cm of 6lb nylon trace to your weight. Use just enough weight to cast your gear, too much and the setup will snag/not drift naturally, too little and you won't be able to effectively fish the water. Thread the worm carefully onto the hook and pull it up over the hook eye, this stops it from sliding down when you cast and conceals the hook. The attached graphics illustrate some different rigs for different conditions.

Good worm fishing conditions

The best worm fishing conditions are immediately after a fresh or flood as the water begins to clear. Early season is the most productive time as it rains more often, and flows are higher.

Bait holder hook



Where to fish

In rivers, heads of pools are a great place to start as fish congregate here to intercept food items washed down from upstream. Cast across the current and let your rig drift downstream and swing around with the flow. Keep in touch with the line and help it over boulders if required by gently raising your rod tip. Once the rig stops moving leave it there for a good five minutes before recasting or changing spots.

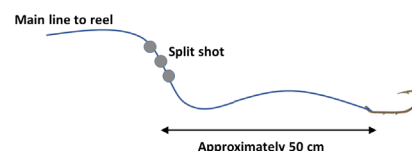
In lakes look for shallows free of weed where trout will be cruising looking for an easy meal. If weed is an issue you can use a bubble float instead of the weight to present your worm above weed. In still water trout have a lot longer to inspect your offering so a bit more care is required in the presentation.

There are plenty of waterways in the Wellington Fish & Game region where bait fishing is permitted, including, but not limited to, the following fisheries:

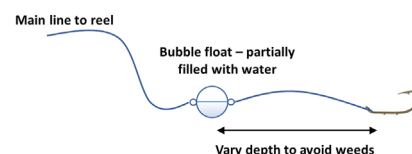
- **Hutt River** (by child licence holders)
- **Otaki Winstone Quarry lakes**
- **Otaki River** (below the Forest Park boundary)
- **Rangitikei River** (downstream of Mangaohane bridge)
- **Ruamahanga River** (below SH2)
- **Lake Wairarapa**
- **Hokowhitu Lagoon**
- **Manawatu River** (downstream of Maunga Rd bridge)

All these waterways happen to have good trout populations and therefore offer anglers an excellent chance of success, making them great places for novices or juniors to experience catching a fish. For more locations where bait fishing is allowed, check your regulations booklet.

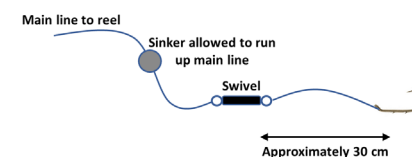
Shallow water split-shot rig

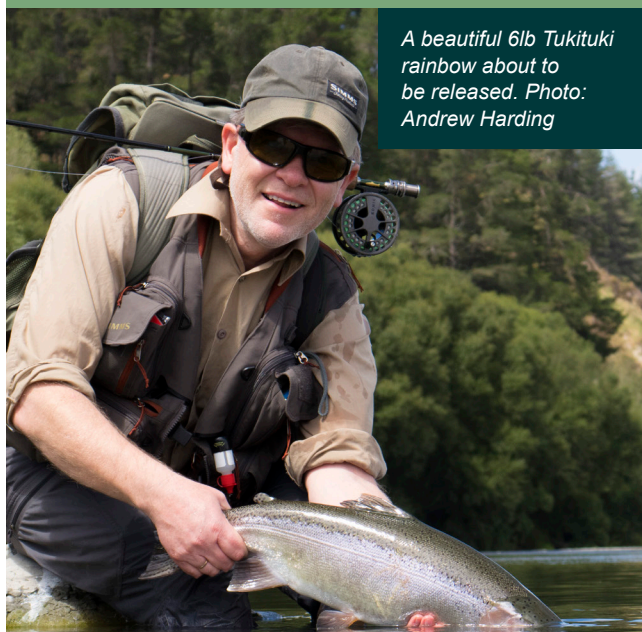


Float for fishing over weed beds



Deep water heavy sinker rig





A beautiful 6lb Tukituki rainbow about to be released. Photo: Andrew Harding

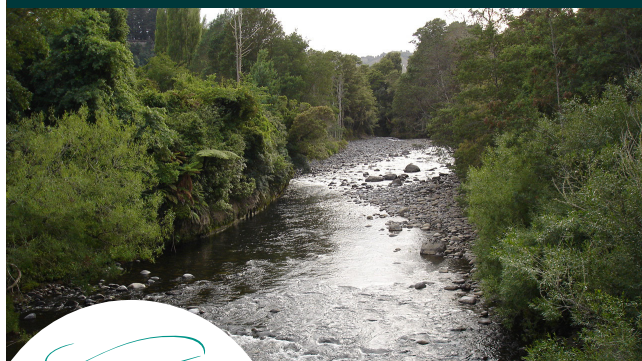
CHECK IN ON THE NEIGHBOURS

Lower North Island anglers have some amazing fisheries with a wealth of nearby and easily accessible rivers to choose from right throughout the Wellington Fish & Game region. The beauty of a Whole Season Licence though is that it allows you to fish anywhere in New Zealand, not just your local water. It so happens that just across the 'border' into neighbouring Taranaki and Hawke's Bay there are wonderful fisheries too.

If you find yourself on the road this season or when travelling over the Christmas holiday period, why not check in on what the neighbours have to offer in terms of their fishing resource? There are some wonderful streams in the Taranaki Fish & Game region, particularly the cool clear waters flowing from Ruapehu with the Manganuioteao being a top pick - head to the scenic Ruatiti Domain and you'll find an idyllic campground and a good population of hard-fighting rainbows.

Not far from our north-eastern boundary, Hawke's Bay is home to the Waipawa and Waipukurau rivers which fish really well up to late January. And the Tukituki is an amazing river with some surprisingly large rainbows in residence.

The Manganuioteao River is very scenic but also has a good population of rainbow trout.



WORKING FOR OUR ANGLERS TO IMPROVE THE FISHERY

Here's a very brief overview of what we've been doing for the fishery and anglers in the Wellington Fish & Game region over the past year:

SPECIES MONITORING -

Counting and measuring

- Research into spawning value of tributary streams and recruitment in key river catchments, including the Hutt, Ruamahanga and Rangitikei.
- Drift diving to help ascertain trout populations in core fisheries.
- Peer review of Greater Wellington Regional Council's sport fish removal trials to ensure the research is robust and to keep the scientists honest.

ADVOCACY -

Enlightening others about our issues

- Attending meetings with regional council and other local authorities.
- Highlighting the adverse impacts of irrigation on fisheries and water quality.
- Working with GWRC to try and minimize the impact of their river bulldozing activity.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACT -

Protecting trout habitat

- Attending hearings and submitting on regional plans.
- Ensuring Horizons Regional Council implements the One Plan to improve water quality outcomes while also protecting farmers' livelihoods.
- Submitting on Greater Wellington Regional Council's planning processes to ensure positive outcomes for our fisheries and the environment, including opposition to the planned removal of trout in the upper Wainuiomata catchment.



ACCESS -

Maintaining access for angling

- Working with Walking Access Commission to better deliver access information to anglers.
- Keeping a watching brief on overseas sales of land to ensure access to public fishing and hunting resources is maintained.
- Producing access pamphlets and maintaining angling access signage throughout the lower North Island.
- Working with landowners to maintain and open access to fisheries.
- Opposition to South Wairarapa District Council's blocking access to the Ruamahanga River behind Greytown.
- Ongoing lobbying of NZ Defence Force to overcome access impasse to upper Rangitikei River.

INFORMATION TO LICENCEHOLDERS -

Keeping you informed

- Newsletters like this one as well as our Weekly Fishing Reports.
- Producing resources each year, such as the Lake Wairarapa Fishing Guide and 'How-to' pamphlets to help you catch more fish!

JUNIOR/NOVICE PARTICIPATION -

Getting others involved

- Teaching kids about the importance of water quality and introducing them to fishing.
- Assisting with Kids' Fish Out Days in Manawatu and Wellington.

COMPLIANCE AND REGULATIONS -

Keeping everyone honest

- Checking licences and, where required, prosecuting offenders.

More details of Wellington Fish & Game's work stream and achievements can be found on our website under the 'Council Downloads' section where meeting minutes and end of year reports are published.