

Protecting our wild & scenic waterways

Crafted by nature. Delivered by the clouds. Aged in the mountains.
Protected in perpetuity by a Water Conservation Order (WCO).

A WCO is the highest level of protection that can be afforded to any water body, preserving its outstanding natural values for freshwater fish, wildlife, and outdoor recreation for future generations to enjoy.

Fish & Game is directly responsible for securing 12 of these 16 precious waterways for anglers, game bird hunters, and all New Zealanders.



North Island

1 Motu River

The Motu River was the first New Zealand 'wild and scenic' river to win protection from a Water Conservation Order in 1984. The river is used widely for adventure tourism and is to be preserved in its natural state.

2 Mohaka River

The WCO was granted in 2004 over the Mohaka and its tributaries in recognition of its outstanding trout fishery above the SH5 bridge. The order also covers the river's outstanding scenic characteristics and value for water-based recreation.

3 Manganui o te Ao River

The Manganui o te Ao River catchment is recognised as an outstanding recreational fishery and a key site for endangered blue duck (whio) recovery efforts.

4 Rangitikei River

The WCO passed in 1993 recognises the river's outstanding wild and scenic characteristics, recreational fisheries and wildlife features. The river is internationally regarded as one of the finest trout fisheries in the world.

5 Lake Wairarapa

The lake is the third largest in the North Island, fractionally smaller than Lake Rotorua. The WCO, which passed in 1989, seeks to protect the wildlife and wetland habitat particularly on the eastern lakeshore which is important for waterfowl.



South Island

6 Motueka River

A Motueka River WCO came into force in 2004 in recognition of outstanding recreational, wild and scenic characteristics, along with fisheries and wildlife habitat features. The order included restrictions on damming or altering river flows to protect spawning by brown trout.

7 Te Puna Waiora o Te Waikoropupū Springs

The largest cold-water springs in New Zealand. The springs' clarity is attributed to the filtration that occurs as water moves through the Wharepapa Arthur Marble Aquifer.

8 Buller River

The WCO came into force in 2001, listing the waters of the Buller River and tributaries to be retained in their natural state or protected because of outstanding wild and scenic characteristics, fisheries and habitat features, and scientific values.

9 Grey River

The river was given WCO protection in 1991 for an outstanding natural characteristic in the form of a meandering incised river gorge, along with outstanding scenic features. It is also a high quality trout fishery.

10 Lake Ellesmere

A WCO was granted in 1990 to preserve its wetlands and fish, and recognise it as a habitat for wildlife, and of significance to Maori.

11 Rakaia River

The Rakaia River is a celebrated salmon fishery. The Rakaia is also known for its large wrybill population. Other important bird species known to be found in the riverbed are the black-fronted tern and banded dotterel.

12 Rangitata River

A WCO was passed in 2006 identifying the outstanding characteristics and fishery values of the Rangitata River. The order lays down constraints on damming, alteration of river flow and form and water quality, and maintenance of fish passage.

13 Ahuriri River

The WCO passed in 1990 recognises the river and its tributaries as an area of outstanding wildlife habitat and fisheries, with "outstanding angling features".

14 Kawarau River

A WCO protects the river and wider catchment for its wild and scenic character, natural characteristics, angling, scientific values and recreational use. No damming is allowed and the water must be maintained to a specific standard.

15 Mataura River

The Mataura is internationally-renowned for its brown trout fishery. The WCO was passed in 1997 in recognition of "outstanding fisheries and angling amenity features".

16 Oreti River

The order, passed in 2008, recognises the brown trout habitat and angling amenity of the river and its tributaries, its black-billed gull habitat, along with the tikanga value to Maori.