Trial of a new 1080 meat bait to control feral cats and stoats in the Eyre Mountains 2026

Impact of Predators

Feral cats (*Felis catus*) arrived in New Zealand in 1779 with Europeans. Stoats (*Mustela erminea*) were introduced to New Zealand in the 1880s to control rabbits. Both species pose a significant threat to native fauna particularly threatened bird species including mohua, kiwi, takahē, and kākā as they will eat eggs, young and adult birds. Feral cats also spread toxoplasmosis impacting our marine species.

Limited tools

DOC needs to expand the toolbox for controlling and eradicating stoats and feral cats at scale. Conventional tools—trapping, shooting, bait stations—are labour-intensive and unsuitable for rugged terrain, large landscapes, or rapid island incursion responses. Aerial 1080 cereal operations can suppress stoats, but only when rodent numbers are high enough to act as toxin vectors.

Solution – New bait

DOC is working hard to find and implement new tools and methods to protect our precious species. This bait may allow us to control and eradicate feral cats and stoats at a landscape scale.

Proterma™ Predator Bait

DOC and Orillion have developed an 18g meat sausage bait that contains 4.5mg of the toxin sodium fluoroacetate (1080, 0.025%). Previous trials of this sausage bait have shown to be effective at killing stoats and feral cats and that there is a low chance of deer and native birds consuming it.

All trials to date have followed best practice methods for rodents and possums with a prefeed application of non-toxic bait used to cue animals onto the bait to reduce avoidance when the toxin bait is applied.

Feral cat eating a kākāriki on Auckland Island. Image: DOC.

Proposed Prefeed trial

This aim of this trial is to understand the importance of the prefeed application for knockdown of feral cats and stoats. If the new bait can be used effectively without prefeed then operational, logistical, and financial costs of any control operation would be greatly reduced.

The information gained this trial will be used to help progress bait registration – creating a new stoat and feral cat control tool for use in New Zealand.

Location & time frames

This trial requires two treatment blocks, one block will receive both a prefeed and a toxin application, whilst the other will receive only a toxin application.

We are planning for the trial to be in the **Upper Oreti** (3,716 ha) and **Eyre Creek** (3,868 ha) areas of the Eyre Mountains Conservation Park and Snowdon Forest Conservation Area in early February to March. The study sites have been chosen due to monitoring indicating a high number of feral cats and stoats and low numbers of native non-target species. The total treatment area is 7,584 ha.

Please do not kill any stoats or feral cats in the treatment blocks through to May 2026.

Baiting method

Bait will be deployed by helicopter on pre-determined flight lines at 1 bait per hectare on average.

We plan to pre-feed with a non-toxic version of the bait in only the Upper Oreti treatment block, followed by an application of toxic bait in both treatment blocks. Applications would be timed for fine weather and be approximately ten days apart.

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New Zealand Government

Proterma Predator Bait (0.025% 1080) to be used in the trial.

Following the toxic bait application, a caution period will be in place while pesticide residue might remain in baits or carcasses. Monitoring of baits and carcasses will inform when this caution period would end, which could be in place for more than six months.

Monitoring

To determine the success of this trial, monitoring will be undertaken to assess the abundance of feral cats and stoats before and after the operation using trail cameras. In addition to this, a number of feral cats within the treatment blocks will be captured and fitted with GPS collars to monitor their movement and survival rate through the operation.

A sample of baits will also be monitored with cameras to observe and record animals that interact with bait.

Please do not kill any stoats or feral cats in the treatment blocks through to May 2026.

Outcomes

This trial will help DOC determine

- Whether the prefeed application is necessary for knockdown of feral cats and stoats.
- Whether the trial has achieved a reduction in feral cat and stoat abundance.
- Whether other pest and non-target species e.g. rats, possums, and hedgehogs eat bait.

After the trial, we expect to see a significant reduction in the feral cat and stoat population in the treatment blocks.

Risk to the Environment

1080 is a manufactured, biodegradable toxin. Its active ingredient, sodium fluoroacetate is a salt that occurs naturally in poisonous plants in Australia, Africa and Brazil. It does not accumulate as it is broken down naturally by micro-organisms, fungi and plants into harmless compounds. Because of this it does not leave permanent residue in soil, water, plants or animals.

Managing risk

Visitors: DOC will place warning signs at key trailheads, information sheets at visitor centres, and online warnings immediately prior to toxin being deployed and additionally whilst leghold traps are being used to trap cats for collaring.

Landowners: DOC will consult with landowners to seek their permission prior to any bait being deployed.

Permissions: Trialling this bait follows and requires strict controls. Permissions will be gained from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) through Agricultural Compounds and Veterinary Medicines Group and from the Department of Conservation (DOC).

Poisoning risks

The toxin is poisonous to animals – this includes humans and domestic animals. Dogs are particularly susceptible to sodium fluoroacetate.

Warning signs will be placed at points of access. Please observe the following rules when you see warning signs as they indicate that pesticide residues may remain in baits and carcasses.

Always remember:

- DO NOT touch or eat the bait
- WATCH CHILDREN at all times
- DO NOT EAT animals from this area
- Toxic baits and carcasses are DEADLY to DOGS.

If you suspect poisoning always contact:

- Your local doctor or local hospital or the National Poisons Centre: 0800 764 766 or dial 111.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns then please feel free to contact us:

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Eyre Mountains Conservation Park & Snowdon Forest Conservation Area, Southland

Maps showing the proposed study treatment area (7,584 ha) across two treatment blocks in the Upper Oreti catchment (3,716 ha), and Eyre Creek catchment (3,868 ha), Eyre Mountains Conservation Park & Snowdon Forest Conservation Area. The boundaries of this treatment area are subject to consultation and operational planning requirements.

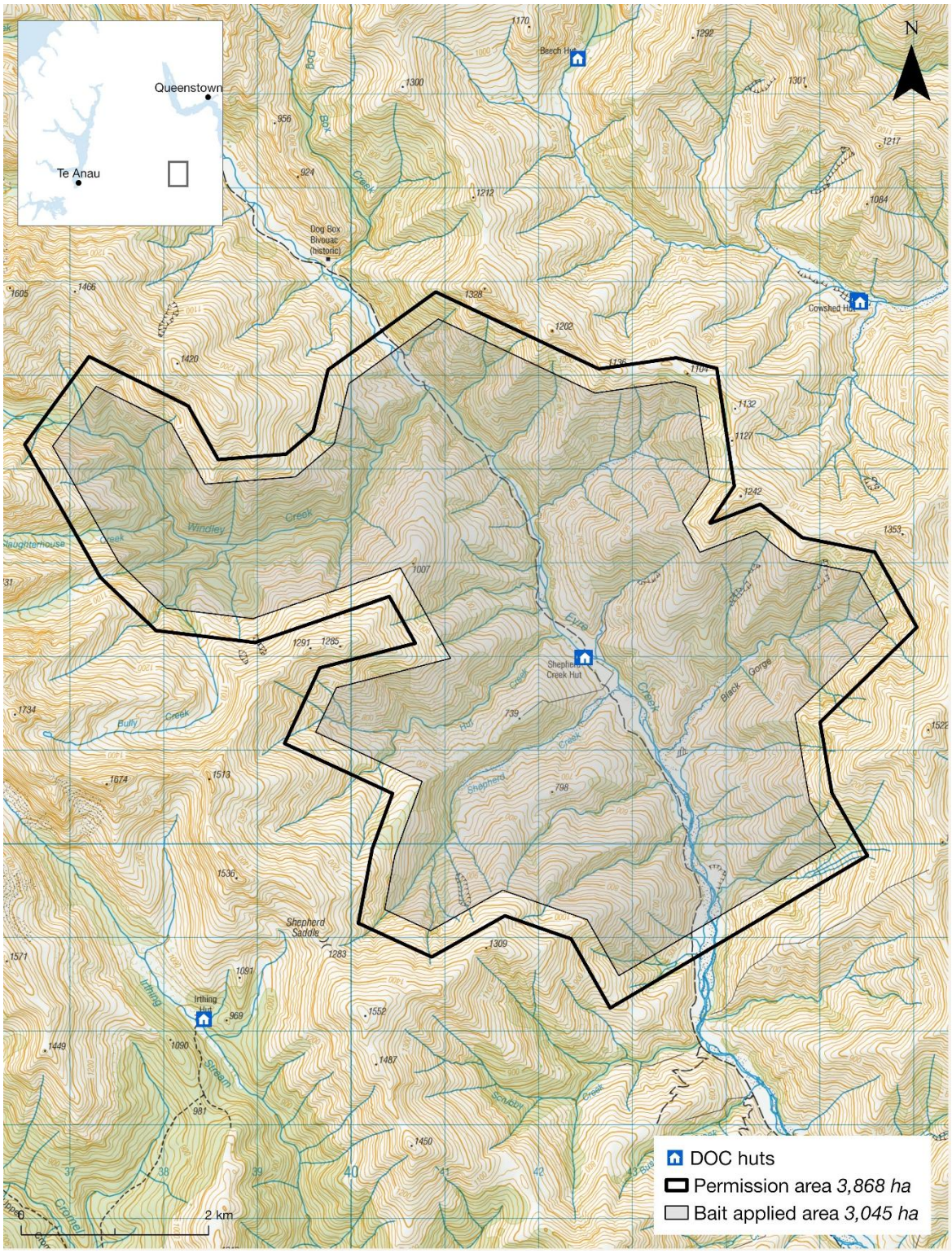

Figure 1. Eyre Creek treatment block which will receive only a toxin application that will coincide with the toxin application at Upper Oreti treatment block. This bait application will be aerially applied at 1 bait per hectare on average.

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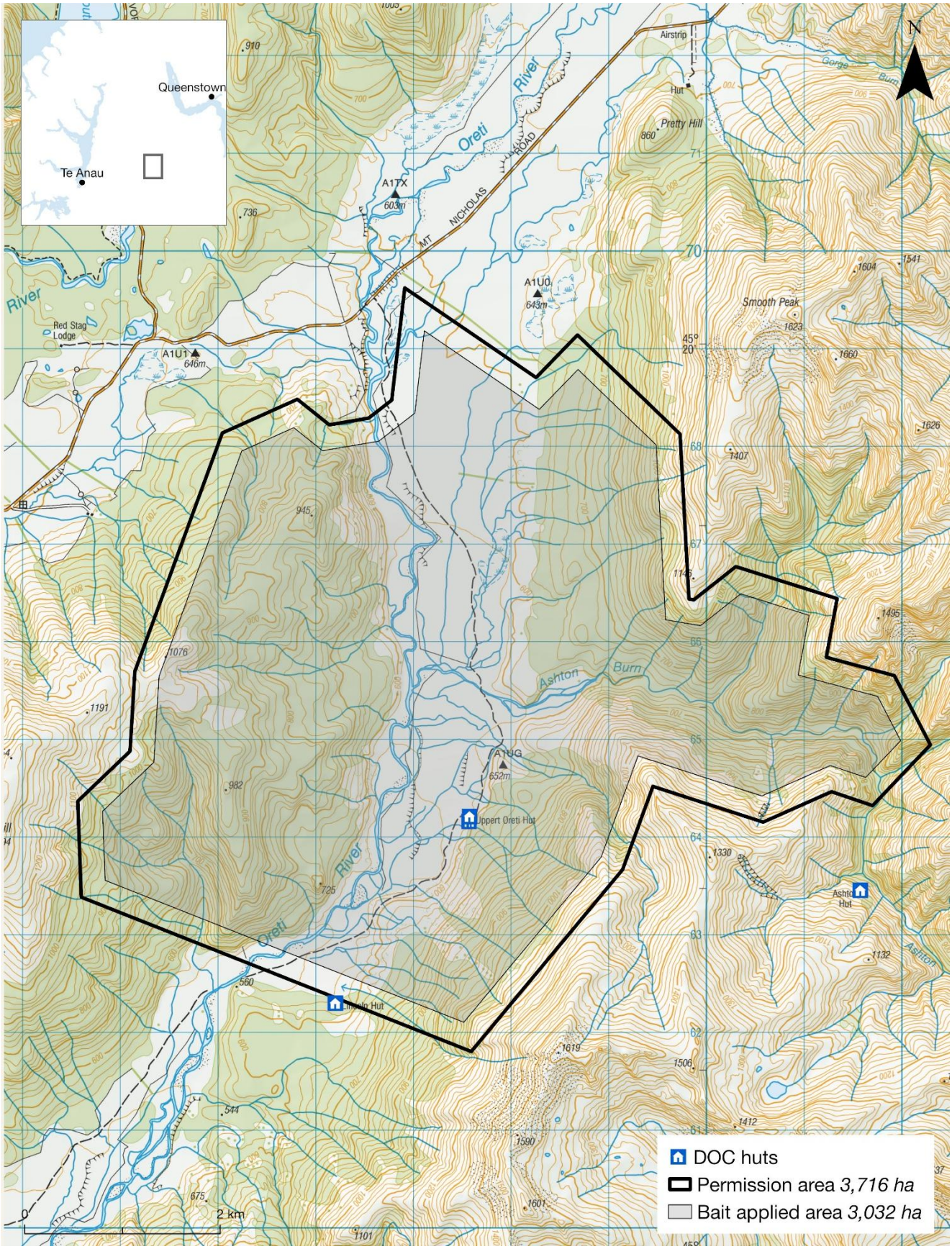

Figure 2. Upper Oreti treatment block which will recieve both a prefeed applicaiton of non-toxic baits followed aproximately 7-10 days (weather permitting) by a toxin application of baits. Both applications will be aerially applied at 1 bait per hectare on average.

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