

Trial of new aerial bait to control feral cats and stoats, Macleannan Range.

The Department of Conservation will trial a new bait for reducing feral cat and stoat numbers in the Macleannan Range in August-September 2025.

Why control feral cats?

Feral cats are a significant threat to New Zealand's native species and are known to kill native birds, lizards, bats and insects. Currently our tools for controlling feral cats and eradicating them on offshore islands are limited, expensive and ineffective. There are only two feral cat baits registered for use in New Zealand, however they are too labour intensive to be used over large areas, and their effectiveness has been mixed.

DOC is developing a new bait to control feral cats and protect native species. Building on recent trials, we are furthering our understanding of the best ways to use this new bait and testing its effectiveness in different habitat types. DOC and Orillion have developed an 18g meat bait that contains 4.5mg of sodium fluoroacetate (1080). DOC has carried out research trials with both toxic and non-toxic versions of this bait that show it is highly palatable to feral cats and stoats, and low risk to native species. To use this bait effectively on a landscape scale and provide protection to native species the bait needs to be able to be aerially applied. This trial will build on this research.

Method and Timeframe

DOC are planning a trial of the aerial application of the readymade predator bait over 4969ha of the Macleannan Range, Catlins Conservation Park, in August -September 2025. Bait will be distributed from a helicopter along pre-defined bait lines.

Bait will be sown at a density of up to three 18g baits per hectare per application (about three baits per rugby field). The operation begins with a pre-feed of a non-toxic version of the bait, followed by an application of toxic bait. Applications will be timed for fine weather and be approximately ten days apart. Following bait application, a caution period will be in place while pesticide residue might remain in baits or carcasses. Monitoring of bait 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 site have been 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.

Outcomes

The trial will allow DOC to determine:

- Fate of collared feral cats
- The reduction in feral cat and stoat population size
- What other predators (e.g. rats, possums) eat bait
- If any other animals eat bait
- Whether the baiting regime is effective for reducing feral cat and stoat populations in a wet podocarp habitat





Readymade predator baits

Risk to Native Species & Environment

1080 is a manufactured, biodegradable toxin which 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

Based on previous research there is a low risk to native species, with trail camera monitoring across seven completed trials observing few native species consuming bait. The MacLennan Range site was deliberately shortlisted due to the low risk to native species present at the site in combination with moderate-high feral cat and stoat numbers. This trial follows strict controls and permissions set by regulatory authorities.

Managing Risk

1080 is toxic to humans and domestic animals, different animals have different levels of susceptibility. Poisoning could occur through eating baits or poisoned animals. If any animal does consume a sub-lethal dose the animal will metabolise the toxin and recover in a number of days. Previous trials have shown there are low risks to deer from this bait with camera monitoring showing deer have not consumed bait when they encounter it, however feral pigs may consume the bait.

Dogs and pet cats are particularly susceptible to 1080, and poisoning could occur through consuming bait or scavenging carcasses. The risk to dogs from 1080 residue in carcasses will remain until they have decomposed, which can take more

than six months. While this risk is still present dogs should not be taken into the study area.

Public warning signs will be placed at access points to the study site. Warning signs indicate that pesticide residues may still be present in baits or animals. They will remain in place for the duration of the caution period.

Risks can be eliminated by following these rules while warning signs are present:

- **DO NOT** touch bait
- **WATCH CHILDREN** at all times
- **DO NOT EAT** animals from this area or within the buffer zone outside the treatment area
- Remember, poison baits or carcasses are **DEADLY to DOGS**

When signs are removed, this means that you can resume normal activities in the area. If in doubt, check with DOC.

Consultation and consent outcome

DOC has consulted with hapū, iwi and key stakeholders including landowners adjacent to the treatment area. This involved discussing the operational plan, listening to any concerns and considering ways to mitigate them. In response to this the boundaries have been adjusted slightly to ensure the treatment area is set-back a minimum of 1km from private property boundaries.

Next steps

Adjoining landowners and other stakeholders are being notified and there will be a public notice in the local newspaper/s. There will also be warning signs placed at entrances to the treatment area immediately prior to the operation.

After the operation, DOC will contact iwi, hapū, and stakeholders about the results of the operation. We also aim to share insights about the results overtime.

More information

Please contact:

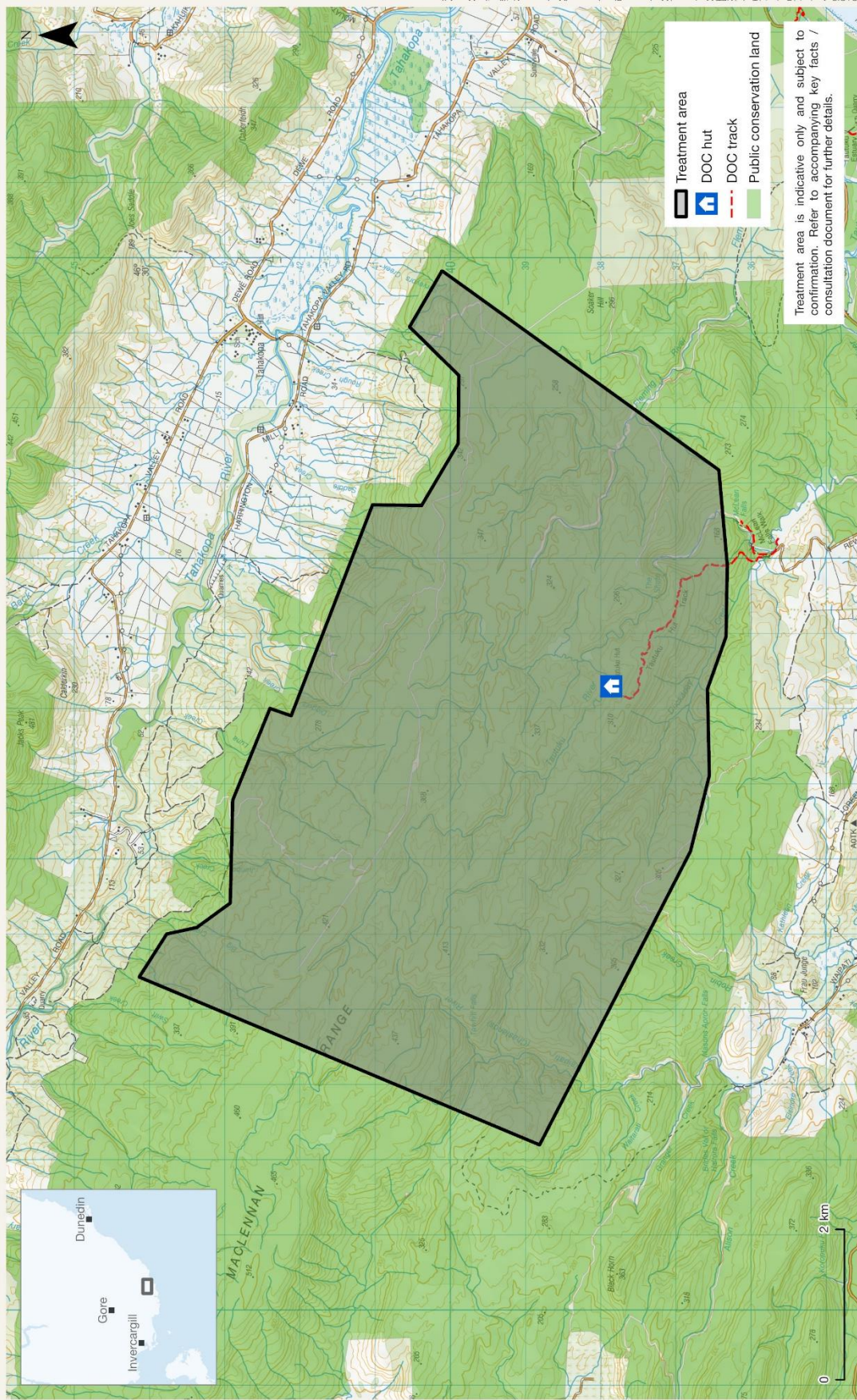
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Macleannan

Aerial Predator Control 2025

Treatment area: 4,969 ha

