

Wilding conifers

What are wilding conifers?

Wilding conifers (also known as wilding pines) are introduced conifer trees which have self-seeded or established by natural means and have not been intentionally planted. “Conifers” refers to species of fir, larch and pine trees, and wilding conifers can be any species of introduced conifer.

Why are they a pest?

If left uncontrolled, wilding conifers can have a huge impact on the environment. They can quickly develop into dense forests, with the potential to permanently alter ecosystems and landscapes, reduce water yields and land productivity, and limit future land use options.

Otago’s iconic landscapes are vulnerable to the invasion of wilding conifers, with around 70% of the region estimated to be “very highly vulnerable” to infestation. Particularly at risk are the high country and tussock grasslands — environments that tend to have short plants and sparse vegetation, as well as being lightly grazed.

Māori cultural values can also be impacted through physical changes to culturally important landscapes, landforms, and sites; impacts on mahika kai; and potential impacts on the mauri of wetlands and waterways.

How do they spread?

Wilding conifers establish through natural seed spread, either from mature wilding conifers or from planted conifers. Seeds are mainly spread by wind but can also be moved by stock, vehicles, and machinery.

Although most conifer seeds will fall within a few hundred metres of the parent tree, the seeds of some species can be blown very large distances in high wind. Consequently, wilding conifer infestation is often characterised by scattered trees over large distances, as well as more dense growth close to the parent tree(s).

Early detection and control are important, as control costs escalate exponentially as infestations become established.



Common name:

Wilding conifer

Management programme:

Progressive containment

The progressive containment programme aims to stop a pest from spreading and/or contain it to a certain area.

Which parts of Otago are most infested with wilding conifers?

The western, central, and northern areas of Otago have various levels of wilding conifer invasion.

Many affected areas contain scattered trees, but heavily infested areas exist in western inland locations that have a smaller amount of vegetation and are lightly grazed. The infestation is somewhat less in central areas and increases slightly in the north-east.

Wilding conifers are a significant issue in the Queenstown Lakes district, where dense infestations are associated with historical plantings around settlements, eroding slopes and recreation areas, as well as commercial plantations and woodlots.



Who is responsible for control?

Wilding conifers are included in the Otago Regional Pest Management Plan (2019-2029; RPMP) under a Progressive Containment Programme. Land occupiers are ultimately responsible for controlling pest conifers on their land and have a legal obligation under the RPMP and the Biosecurity Act to prevent their spread. For a full list of the rules, visit our Pest Hub at orc.govt.nz/wildingconifers

What should I do?

Preventing the spread of wilding conifers is one of the most important actions landowners and occupiers can take to protect Otago's unique landscapes, primary industry, tourism, and the economy from the impact of wilding conifers.

However, achieving the RPMP and national objectives for wilding conifers will require landowners and occupiers, community groups, industry, researchers, and local and central government to work together.

And although land occupiers are responsible for controlling wilding conifers on their land, there is a role for all New Zealanders to be aware of this expanding issue, and support taking action.

What's being done?

In 2016 the National Wilding Conifer Control Programme (NWCCP) was established to ensure a collaborative, coordinated and effective approach to wilding conifer management.

The programme is led by Biosecurity New Zealand in partnership with regional councils and unitary authorities who coordinate the activities regionally and support a wide range of stakeholder groups and community groups involved in delivering the control work.

Community groups have been established with a focus on the control of wilding conifers:

Wilding Pine Network
wildingpinenetwork.org.nz

Whakatipu Wilding Control Group
whakatipuwilding.co.nz

Central Otago Wilding Conifer (Control Group)
centralwildingconifers.co.nz

Upper Clutha Wilding Tree Group
uppercluthawildingtreegroup.co.nz

For more information, visit orc.govt.nz/wildingconifers