

12 July 2024

Mark Thomas

[fyi-request-27436-dcde4784@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-27436-dcde4784@requests.fyi.org.nz)

Tēnā koe Mark

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation, received on 01 July 2024, in which you asked for:

*A full rationale for the banning of dogs and imposing an \$800 fine on the walking tracks crossing above Te Āpiti Manawatū Gorge.*

We have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982.

Dog access on public conservation land is controlled to help keep our protected wildlife and our pets safe, and to minimise the impact on other people visiting the area. Some areas allow dogs, others require a permit, and some do not allow dogs at all.

Under the Reserves Act 1977, dogs are not allowed to enter a reserve without authorisation from the Minister of Conservation or the administering body of the reserve. Authorisation for dog access to public conservation land is considered under Part 5C of the Conservation Act 1987, whereby land may be declared an open dog area, or a controlled dog area where access is managed by the issuing of a dog control permit.

Section 26ZV of the Conservation Act sets out matters which must be considered as part of the decision to allow dogs, including:

- Consistency with the purpose for which the land is held; and
- consistency with the management objectives for the area, including any requirements set out in the relevant conservation management strategy or plan; and
- risk of injury or disturbance to protected wildlife likely to be present; and
- consistency with any plans to reintroduce vulnerable protected wildlife onto the land.

The land that the Manawatu Gorge track and the Tawa Loop track are located is classified as a scenic reserve. Under Section 26ZT of the Conservation Act, scenic reserves cannot be declared open dog areas, meaning dogs may only be allowed by dog control permit.

The Department is not currently issuing dog control permits for the Manawatu Gorge Scenic Reserve. Dog control permits were issued for this reserve in the 1990s and early 2000s, but as collaborative efforts to protect and restore the area increased and it became more popular with visitors, a decision was made to stop issuing dog control permits, for several reasons:

- Risk to dogs - traps and toxins used to control predators can be very harmful to dogs. As part of the collaborative [Te Āpiti Manawatū Gorge](#) restoration project, extensive pest control now takes place so there is considerable risk to dogs.
- Risk to wildlife - while there are currently no ground dwelling birds such as kiwi known to be living in the area, many protected birds and lizards are known to feed, roost or nest in the area. Dogs may harm or even kill vulnerable wildlife, and even the presence of dogs can disturb and distress wildlife, causing them to leave their homes and their young unprotected. Dogs can also spread disease and pests (such as weed seeds). Furthermore, one of the aspirations for Te Āpiti is that it become a wildlife sanctuary. Dog access would be incompatible with this.
- Impact on other visitors - many people love dogs but not everyone does. Some recreational walkers like to have space that is not shared with dogs. This is particularly relevant on tracks in Te Āpiti Manawatū Gorge, where some sections are narrow, forcing walkers close together. This can prevent walkers who dislike or are afraid of dogs from being able to enjoy their walk. There are recreation reserves and parks nearby where dogs are allowed, including the Ashhurst Domain and Ferry Reserve at either end of Te Āpiti Manawatū Gorge. Council websites often have a list of places to exercise with dogs, for example: [Exercising your dog | Palmerston North City Council \(pncc.govt.nz\)](#).

In relation to the rationale for the imposition of an \$800 fine, it is an offence under section 105B of the Reserves Act to take a dog (or other animal) onto public conservation land without being authorised by the Minister of Conservation or the administering body of the reserve. Schedule 2 of the Reserves (Infringement Offences) Regulations 2019 sets the penalty for infringement offences under section 105B of the Reserves Act as \$800.

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) may be published on the Department's website.

If you would like to discuss this response with us, please contact Moana Smith-Dunlop, Operations Manager Manawatu by email to [msmithdunlop@doc.govt.nz](mailto:msmithdunlop@doc.govt.nz).

Nāku noa, nā



Alice Heather  
Director Operations  
Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*