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Thornton Kānuka

Thornton kānuka forest is a unique ecosystem along the coastal area of Thornton. It is home to a rare, endemic species of kānuka (*Kunzea toelkenii*, or Thornton kānuka*) that is only found in two sites in the Eastern Bay of Plenty – the last two remaining places in the world. It is important that we protect this remnant forest before it is too late.

Why is it important?

This rare and distinctive coastal community was historically widespread from Pāpāmoa to Thornton, and through to Ōhiwa Harbour.

It is now limited to two locations: A small strip of active, stable sand dunes between Tarawera River and Rangitāiki River (Te Wahieroa), near Thornton, and on Whangakopikopiko Island, a small barrier sandspit within the Ōhiwa Harbour.

Woody plant communities are rare on coastal sand dunes in New Zealand and the forest is home to a number of other native species. This includes occasional karo *(Pittosporum crassifolium)*, coastal mahoe *(Melicytus novae-zealandiae)*, akeake *(Dodonaea viscosa)* and mingimingi *(Leucopogon fasciculatus)*. It also provides habitat for a number of endemic species including birds, lizards and insects.

Thornton kānuka is endemic to the rohe and is ranked as Threatened – Nationally Critical. Because this species is so rare, it is inherently valuable.

How can I identify Thornton kānuka?

This semi-prostrate kānuka is characterised by its distinctive contorted trunk, 'candelabra' growth habit, and wide-topped crowns. The bonsai-style of the tree means it bears numerous trunks, which bend and twist in the wind, creating pockets and caves under its canopy.

Thornton kānuka and flower.

Shrubs typically grow anywhere between 4m x 6m; 'juveniles' usually prostrate and can trail up to 4m in diameter across the ground. Branches are often very leafy, with clusters of small white flowers.

*Bay of Plenty kānuka is the species common name. It is more commonly known as Thornton kānuka due to the remaining populations located at Thornton.

What are the threats to the kānuka forest?

- Animals, including rabbits, hares, horses and stock, eat and disturb plants.

- Clearance from farming and development activities.

- Humans can cause damage by firewood harvesting, using offroad vehicles, riding bikes, trampling, camping, and lighting fires in and around the forest.

- Fire removes all vegetation and increases chances of weed establishment.

- Weeds with the ability to grow in lower nutrient and dryer environments, include boxthorn and lupin.

- Myrtle rust *(Austropuccinia psiddi)* is an invasive fungus which threatens native myrtle species, including kānuka.

Candelabra Thornton kānuka trunks.

Protect and enhance kānuka forest:

If you have Thornton kānuka on your land, we encourage you to take action to support its survival.

Here are a few ways you can help:

- Protect existing areas of Thornton kānuka on your property by fencing permanently to remove stock.

- Do not light fires near Thornton kānuka.

- Keep to existing tracks in dunes (do not walk, drive vehicles, bikes or ride horses in the forest).

- Control pest animals (possums, rabbits and hare).

- Spread the knowledge of this special plant and intriguing forest type.

- Plant more Thornton kānuka.

Bay of Plenty Regional Council can provide advice and support with protection of Thornton kānuka forest on your land. Support may include grant funding for management actions, such as fencing, animal and plant pest control, and planting.

Together, we can help protect this unique and threatened ecosystem and the rare, endemic species that call it home.

Other helpful resources:

New Zealand Plant Conservation Network

nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/kunzea-toelkenii

Manaaki Whenua (Landcare Research) - Stable sand dunes

landcareresearch.co.nz/publications/naturally-uncommon-ecosystems/coastal/stable-sand-dunes/

Talk to our team today:

For more information, or to discuss the Thornton kānuka forest on your property, please contact Land Management Officer Kendall Smith.

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Visit: **boprc.govt.nz/land-management-officers**

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