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Fencing to exclude stock and wild animals

Keeping stock and wild animals such as deer and goats out of your bush block, dune or wetland may be your top priority. The only realistic option for control of stock is with a fence although not all areas require a fence or are able to be fenced.

WHY ARE STOCK AND WILD ANIMALS A PROBLEM?



Grazed waterway, Tawharanui. Photo by Bec Stanley.

Stock and wild animals will affect natural areas by:

- Compacting and eroding soil
- Browsing and trampling seedlings, reducing or even preventing natural regeneration
- Damaging tree bark and roots
- Changing the forest environment by opening up the understorey and creating gaps
- Introducing weeds by depositing seeds through their hooves and dung
- Increasing soil fertility, which favours introduced weeds rather than native plant growth.

Some areas may have been grazed to reduce fire risk or weed growth. However, in the long term, grazing can increase the risk of fire by creating a more open, dry understorey with more broken and dead branches. Grazing can also increase weed growth by introducing seeds and creating more gaps where weeds can take hold.

FENCING CAN MEET MULTIPLE NEEDS

When you're deciding where and how to fence off your natural area, there may be opportunities to achieve several goals at once. Before you decide where to put your fence, think about whether you could also:

- Use your fence to improve subdivision of neighbouring paddocks and enhance your farm business
- Maximise the potential of fenced bush areas to provide shelter and shade to stock in neighbouring paddocks
- Include nearby areas of native forest and scrub or exotic trees into the fenced area, with the aim of planting in between to link the areas
- Include areas of low productivity and difficult for stock management, such as steep eroding gullies, awkward corners or wet spots
- Include streams or wetlands in your fenced area to protect them from stock and reduce stock losses in dangerous areas
- Fence off a buffer area on the windward side of the bush to plant it up in indigenous species or forestry or tree crop species that will also provide shelter (make sure you use non-invasive species - check with Regional Council Pest Plan or Department of Conservation officers)
- Link the fenced area to shelter and other plantings to create corridors for native plants and animals to move between.

THE RIGHT FENCE FOR THE JOB

A sturdy well-maintained fence designed to suit your stock types is essential (see **Box 1**). A single sheep or cattle beast getting through your fence can undo years of regeneration.

If you're running sheep or goats or if feral goats are a problem, you will need a conventional 7 - 8 wire post and batten fence or netting fence. Ideally, it is best to run goats in paddocks away from bush, because they are notoriously difficult to contain, or add a mains-powered electrified outrigger to prevent jumping.

A conventional post and batten fence is also the safest option for cattle. A well-maintained three-wire electric fence can be a cheaper option



Netting tie-off at the South Chatham Conservation Covenant on the south coast of Chatham island. Photo by Amanda Baird

for dairy cattle, providing your power source is consistent and you check the fence regularly. Some farmers recommend avoiding battens around bush blocks to reduce maintenance associated with fallen trees and branches.

An electrified outrigger can be a good idea for both cattle and horses to reduce fence damage from rubbing and leaning. If you are running deer, you will need a more expensive 2 metre high mesh deer fence.

THINKING ABOUT COSTS

The cost of your fence will vary depending on terrain and the cost of materials.

It is a good idea to shop around for materials, as price variations can be significant. Bulk orders can lead to substantial discounts but make sure you always use good quality materials. If you plan to use a contractor for the job, make sure you get several quotes. Prices also vary regionally and are often more expensive near big cities or in remote locations.



Electric outrigger used to protect fences from being pushed over by cattle. Image taken on Pitt Island. Photo by Amanda Baird.



Rabbit scratching near fence post, Redbank Scenic Reserve, Macraes Flat, Otago. Photo by Bruce McKinlay.

The following guide describes effective fence designs that provide protection for natural areas. As well as materials and labour, factors that affect costs include stocking regime, terrain, climate, soils and location. The less complicated the fence, the lower the labour costs. Post digging, battens, electric outriggers and electric wires all add to labour costs.

Based on Queen Elizabeth II National Trust's "2007 Guide to Covenant Fencing", *Open Space* newsletter, Issue 71.



Electric Fence at Cape Foulwind (semi-coastal wetland).
Photo by Mike Copland.

ELECTRIC

This is the cheapest type of fence to erect.

Uses

- Where a dairy/cattle stocking regime is in place
- On flat country
- For forest in good condition
- Around wetlands
- In easily monitored areas

Points

- A maintenance programme is needed to keep wires, posts and connections in good condition
- The fence voltage needs to be checked regularly
- To limit short-outs, spray or slash vegetation off wires. Fewer wires (2–3) allow stock to trim vegetation through fence.
- It is best to use only where common on rest of farm (as stock are trained to them)



Netting fence in Geraldine (surrounding beech-podocarp-hardwood-forest). Photo by Lorelee Hyde.

NETTING

This type of fence is moderate in price.

Multiple uses

- Most often used in sheep stocking regimes.

Points

- They discourage pests such as pigs, goats or deer
- It is suitable to use with Y posts in drier areas
- Barbed or electric wire reduces stock pressure
- They may corrode in coastal situations
- They are less suitable for strongly undulating terrain



Y post fence, beside Onoke Scenic Reserve, Northland. Photo: John Sawyer.

Y POST

This type of fence is moderate in price.

Uses

- In high country situations
- On rocky soils
- In drier areas
- Where there is a sheep stocking regime.

Points

- Reduces the need to dig post holes
- Easy to electrify
- Suitable to use with netting
- Easy to use as tie-downs
- Will not burn in a grass fire
- Electric outriggers or barbed wires discourage cattle pressure
- Can pull or loosen in wet soils
- Can corrode in coastal situations



Eight wire post and batten fence surrounding Te Marua Bush, Upper Hutt. Photo by Jeremy Rolfe.

POST AND BATTEN

This is the most expensive type of fence to erect to prevent stock intrusion.

Uses

- Sheep stocking regime
- High stock pressure
- Vulnerable rare/threatened plants.
- Remote locations.

Points

- Wires must be on the outside of the posts (the animal side).
- Electric or barbed wires can deter stock pressure.
- Around bush it is easier to repair a fence without battens, especially when damaged by a treefall.
- May not be suitable for unstable ground.
- Having more wires e.g., 8–9 is cheaper than using battens



Cape Kidnappers predator-proof fence. Photo by John Sawyer.

PREDATOR FENCE

A predator fence is the most advanced way to fence out stock and wild animals from your natural area. For that reason it is the most expensive type of fence.

Uses

- To create predator-proof areas
- To protect vulnerable rare/threatened birdlife and fauna (lizards and insects).

Points

- Can be extremely expensive to build and maintain
- Monitoring will still be required behind the fence to ensure incursions of wild animal pests are not occurring.