

WDC Conservation Covenants Monitoring Report

Policy and Monitoring

May 2013

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Introduction

A conservation covenant is a voluntary agreement made between a landowner and an authorised body, for the purposes of protecting and enhancing the natural, cultural, historical and/or significant values of a site. The landowner continues to own the site, while meeting their responsibilities to ensure the values of the site are conserved.

Ecological monitoring of the covenant is carried out to assess the state of the covenant and offer advice to the land owners concerning management for protecting the ecological and/or other values. Conservation covenants within the Whangarei District date back to the 1980s. There are currently 875 covenants recorded, protecting 1,307ha of native bush and wetlands.

Conservation covenant monitoring was initiated in March 2005, and is intended to be carried out on an area-by-area basis. Over the last nine years 412 (47%) have been monitored.

Ecological monitoring of the covenants is preferably ten years from the date of agreement and then subsequently at 10 yearly intervals. Monitoring is carried out to assess the state of the covenant and offer advice to the land owners concerning management for protecting the ecological and/or other values.

The values of each covenant, to maintain and protect, are identified in the covenant document and are the responsibility of the property owner. A few of them are listed below:

- Undertake pest and weed management
- Maintenance of access tracks and perimeter fences
- Encourage the regeneration of native vegetation

The land owner is responsible for ensuring that the site is preserved. Any activities undertaken on or within the conservation area that contravene the preservation of the site will require the Councils' written approval.

Conservation covenants are a good example of members of the community working with Council to protect and enhance biodiversity values and habitat for threatened species within the district.

Summary of Conservation Covenants Monitoring in Whangarei District

A summary of the number of conservation covenants and the monitoring carry out over the last 9 years is displayed in Table 1, below.

Table 1: Summary of Monitoring, 2005-2013

Total number of covenants listed on WDC database	875
Total area of covenants listed on WDC database	1,307ha
Number of covenants monitored	412 (47%)
Total area of covenants monitored	663 ha (51%)
Range of covenant sizes	0.01ha – 62ha
Average covenant size	1.6ha

To date approximately half of the conservation covenants have been monitored across the Whangarei District. The average number of conservation covenants monitored over the last nine financial years is 45.7 per annum. Figure 1, below illustrates the number of covenants that have been monitored over the last nine financial years. No monitoring was carried out during 2007-2008 financial year, due to funding availability. The predominant protected habitat type in Whangarei District is broadleaf/podocarp forest, illustrated in Figure 2, along with an example of health forest understory.

Establishment and Area of Covenants

The annual Resource Consents Monitoring Reports have captured the number of conservation covenants established since 2001/2002. There has been a steady decrease in the number of covenants that have been established since 2002, with an increase over the 2007/2008 period, which coincides with an increase in subdivision applications during this period, illustrated in Figure 3. The number of covenants vested with Council peaked in 1998 and 2000, although there is a lag period of up to eight years once a covenant is consented before it is vested with the Council or alternatively a Queen Elizabeth the Second National Trust (QEII) Open Space Convent is established instead.

The vested covenants cover 1,307ha in area (0.5%) of the Whangarei District. The actual area of land that is covenanted varies from year to year depending on the number and the actual size of the area being protected. For example only one covenant was vested in 1981, approximately 58ha in size, compared with 1997 when 59 covenants were vested with an average size of 2.8ha.

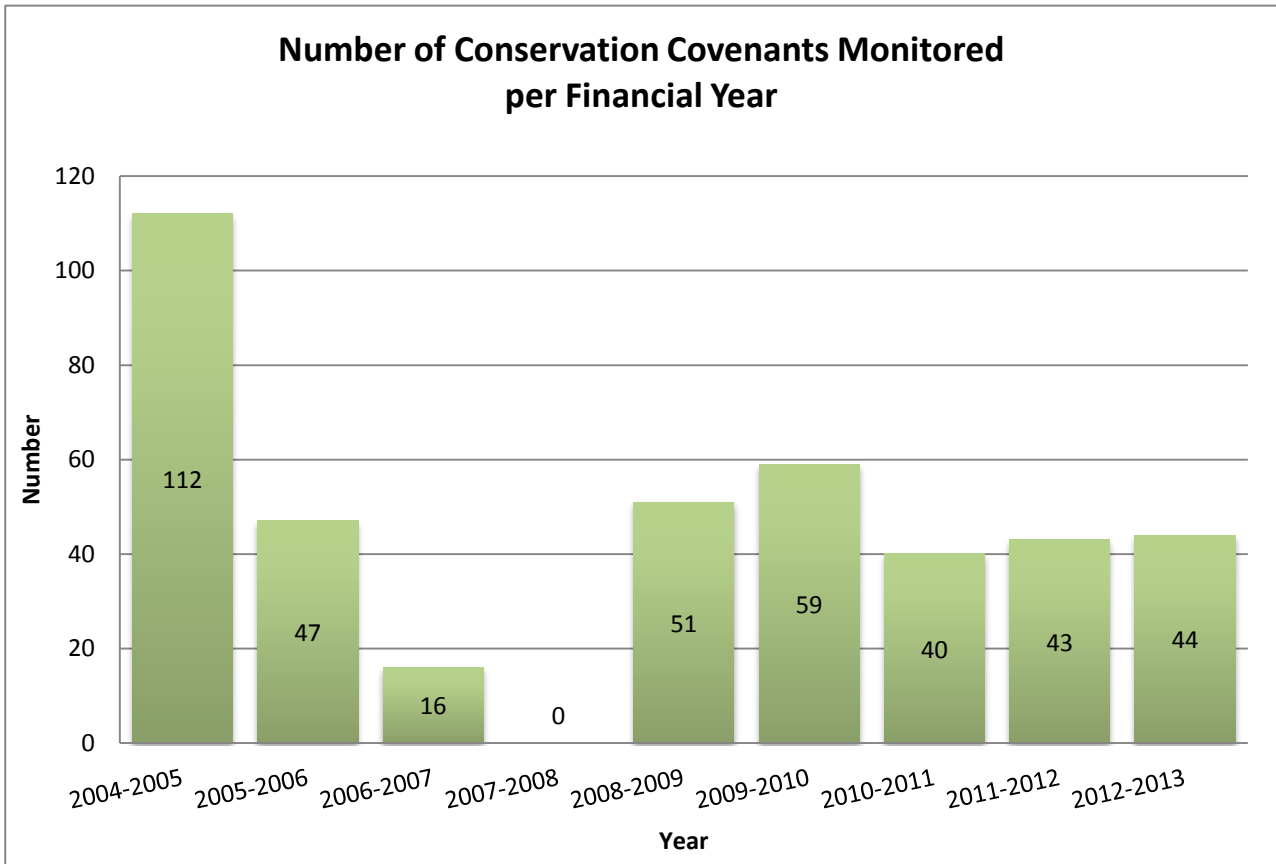


Figure 1: Conservation Covenants Monitored per Financial Year



Figure 2: Regenerating Broadleaf/Podocarp Forest (left) and an Example of Forest Understory (right)

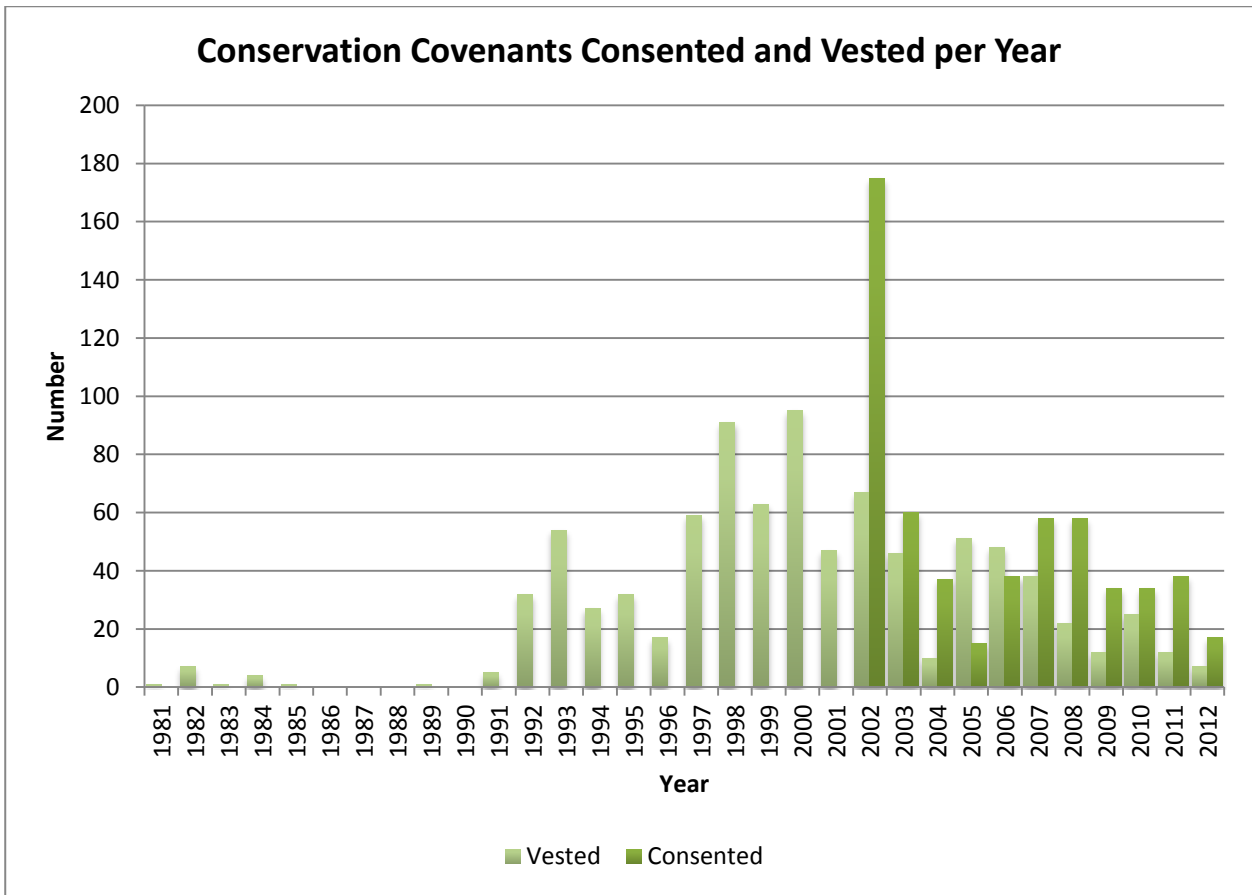


Figure 3: Conservation Covenants Consented and Vested per Year with Whangarei District Council

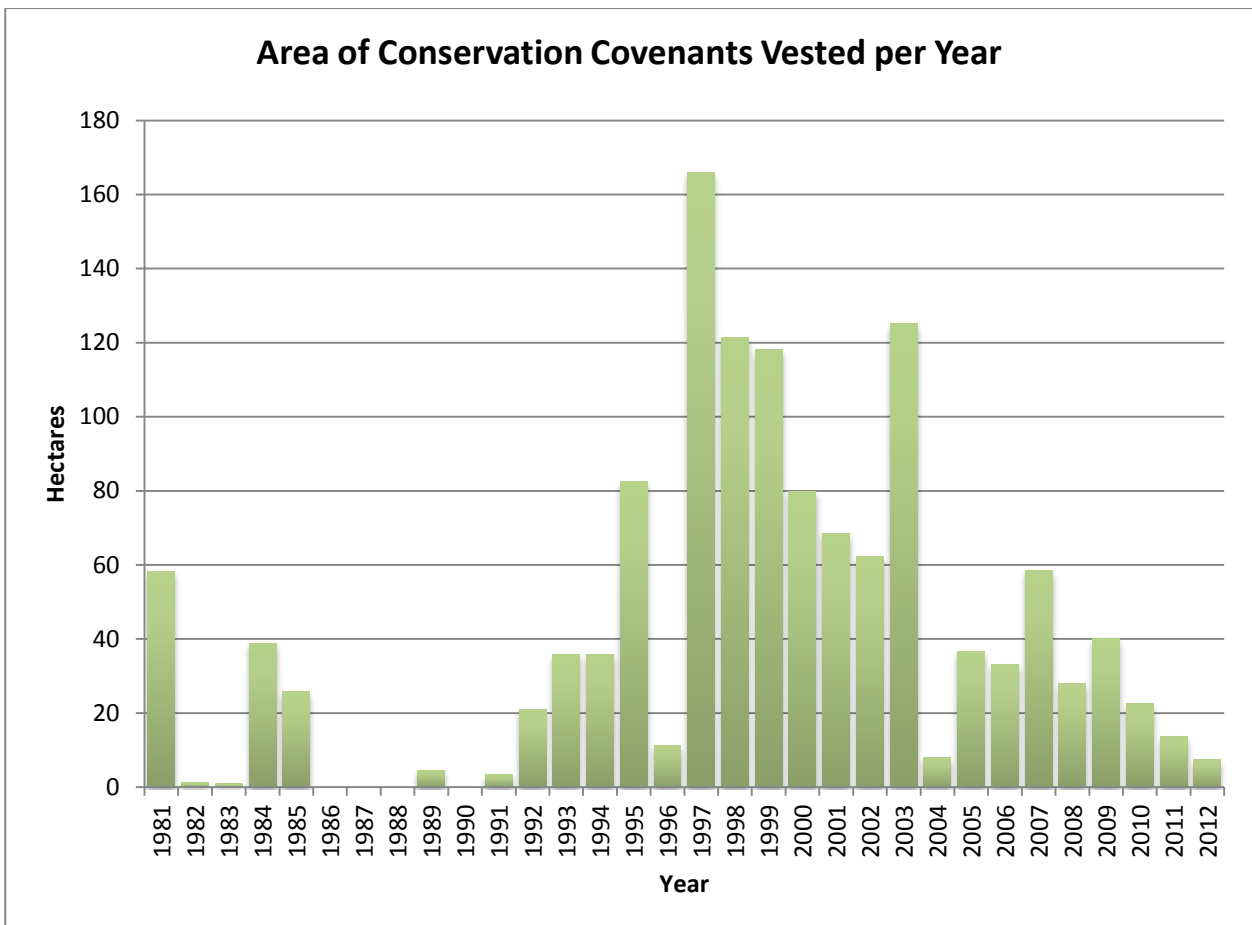


Figure 4: Area of Conservation Covenants Vested with Whangarei District Council per Year

Geographical Distribution

Geographically the conservation covenants are located within 27 of the 34 surface water catchments in the Whangarei District, Figure 5. There are currently no conservation covenants recorded in Hikurangi, Kawakaka, Lower Mangakahia, Mangahuru, Millbrook, Puwera or Waiariki catchments.

The Whangarei Tutukaka catchment is the largest catchment in the Whangarei District, containing one third of the conservation covenants, and approximately 40% of the total covenanted area in the district, Table 2. Raumanga catchment has the largest percentage coverage out of the 27 catchments with 2.55% covenanted.

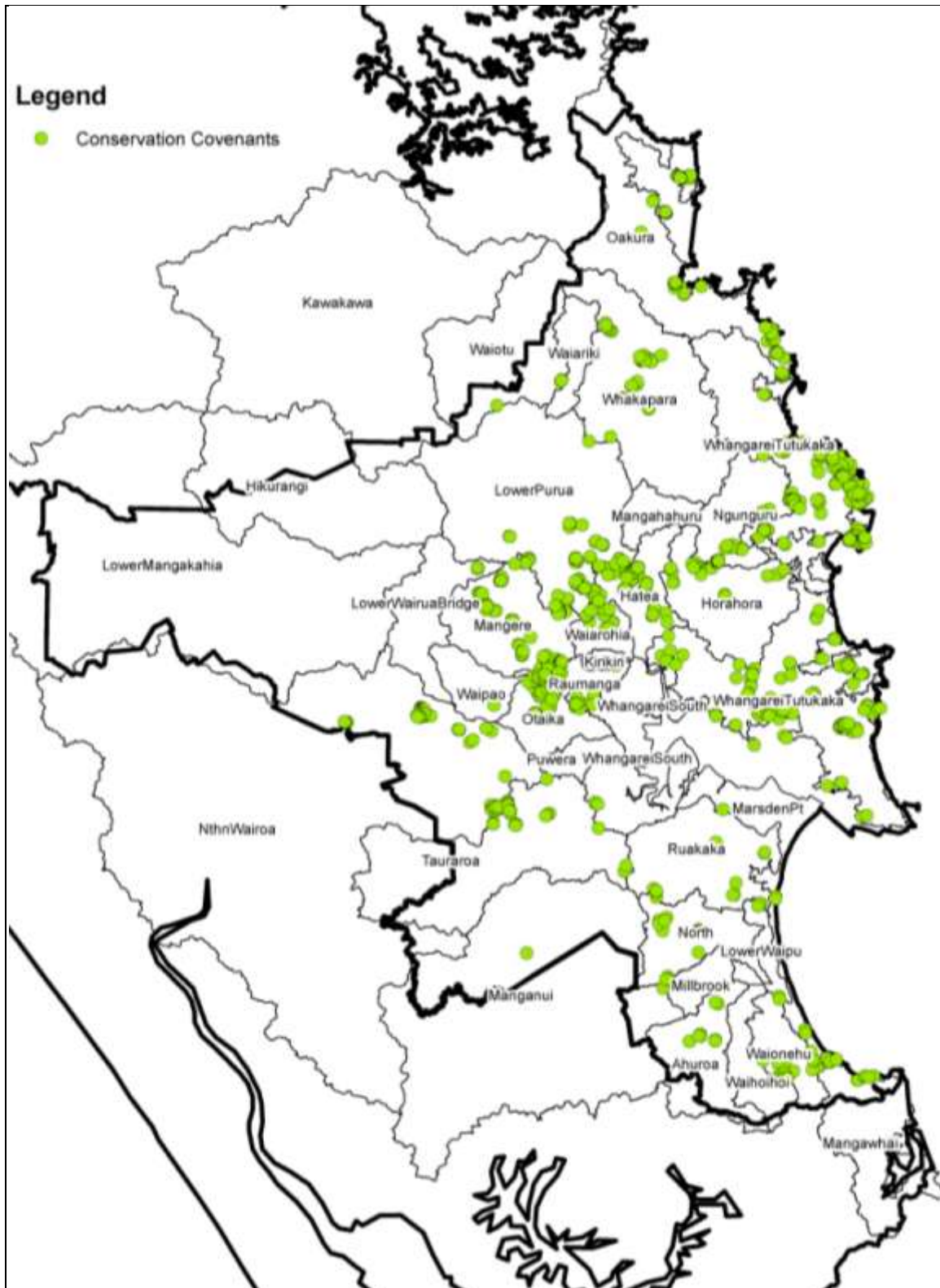


Figure 5: Conservation Covenants and Surface Catchments within Whangarei District.

Table 2: Number and Area of Conservation Covenants Located within the Surface Water Catchments of the Whangarei District.

Catchment	Number of Covenants	Area (ha)	% of Catchment Area
Ahuroa	8	15.819	0.25
Hatea	84	68.355	1.51
Horahora	15	21.319	0.27
Kirikiri	10	0.039	0.01
Lower Purua	64	44.499	0.21
Lower Waipu	1	3.798	0.23
Lower Wairua Bridge	3	1.059	0.02
Manganui	1	1.316	0.01
Mangawhai	16	18.329	0.23
Mangere	46	89.005	1.16
Marsden Point	1	13.992	0.37
Ngunguru	36	59.193	0.61
North	19	40.661	1.09
Northern Wairoa	44	43.415	0.05
Oakura	62	53.247	0.31
Otaika	39	40.406	1.36
Raumanga	28	13.105	2.55
Tauraroa	16	45.252	0.15
Waiarohia	19	13.071	0.71
Waihoihoi	5	10.061	0.31
Waionehu	20	63.730	1.97
Waiotu	4	5.844	0.05
Waipao	1	0.514	0.02
Whangapara	29	93.978	0.57
Whangarei South	4	1.404	0.02
Whangarei Tutukaka	286	513.878	1.89
Total	875	1,307	

Monitoring Summary for 2012-2013

Monitoring for 2012-2013 financial year was carried out during May. Whangarei Heads, Parua Bay and Pataua South were selected to be monitored this year, as they are located within the 'Kiwi Coast' project area, which will also contribute to the biodiversity values of the area. Forty four conservation covenants were monitored over the 2012-2013 financial year.

The covenants are given a value which considers; ecological/habitat values (e.g. canopy and lower tier condition, wildlife observations), protection (e.g. stock access, fencing conditions), pests (e.g. presence of pest plants, animals pest sign) and covenantor's attitude (e.g. compliance, support). The mean score across the covenants to date is 4.2 out of 5. More than 95 per cent of covenant owners meet or exceed covenanting requirements with a resulting increase in biodiversity and sustainability of land and resources.

The predominant habitat type that is protected by covenants is broadleaf/podocarp forest followed by Kauri/broadleaf/podocarp forest. Table 3 and Table 4 provide a full summary of the covenanted habitat types in the Whangarei District.

Table 3: Summary of Primary Habitat Types

Habitat Types Assessed	Number of Covenants	Area (ha)	% Area Monitored
Broadleaf/podocarp forest	185	285.0615	43
Coastal forest	32	18.17	2.7
Kauri/broadleaf/podocarp forest	92	235.468	35.5
Manuka/kanuka shrubland	29	80.665	12.2
Recent planting	8	3.91	0.6
Riverine forest	10	6.3	1
Volcanic/broadleaf forest	22	15.01	2.3
Wetland – flax/sedge/reedland	13	17.27	2.6
Individual trees	21	1.34	0.2
Total	412	663.1945	100

Table 4: Summary of Secondary Habitat Types

Habitat Types Assessed	Number of Covenants
Broadleaf/podocarp forest	34
Coastal forest	13
Kanuka/manuka	4
Kanuka/totara shrubland	1
Kauri/broadleaf/podocarp forest	4
Manuka/kanuka shrubland	82
Recent planting	1
Riverine forest	13
Sedge/kahikatea wetland	1
Wetland - flax/raupo/reedland	6
Wetland - flax/sedge/reedland	4
Wetland forest	8
Total	171

Comparison of Covenants in the Whangarei District

Along with conservation covenants which are established under the Reserves Act 1977, there are also the following types of covenants located in the Whangarei District:

- Queen Elizabeth II National Trust Open Space Covenants (QEII), under the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust Act 1977, and
- Nga Whenua Rahui Agreements, which are established under the Conservation Act 1987, Reserves Act 1977 or the Te Ture Whenua Maori Act 1993

The Northland Region has the highest number of registered QEII covenants at 593, and was ranked 8th in regional area, in 2012. There are 298 QEII covenants in the Whangarei District, covering an area of 2,426.63ha, 0.9% of the Whangarei District. Monitoring of QEII covenants is carried out by a QEII representative, biennially, with an overall compliance of 95.1% for the country.

There are five Nga Whenua Rahui covenants covering an area of 76ha in the Whangarei District. These covenants are created under the Te Turi Whenua Maori Act 1993 (Part 17) and administered by The Department of Conservation.

Figure 6 illustrates when the Conservation, QEII and Nga Whenua Rahui Covenants were established over the last 32 years, in the Whangarei District.

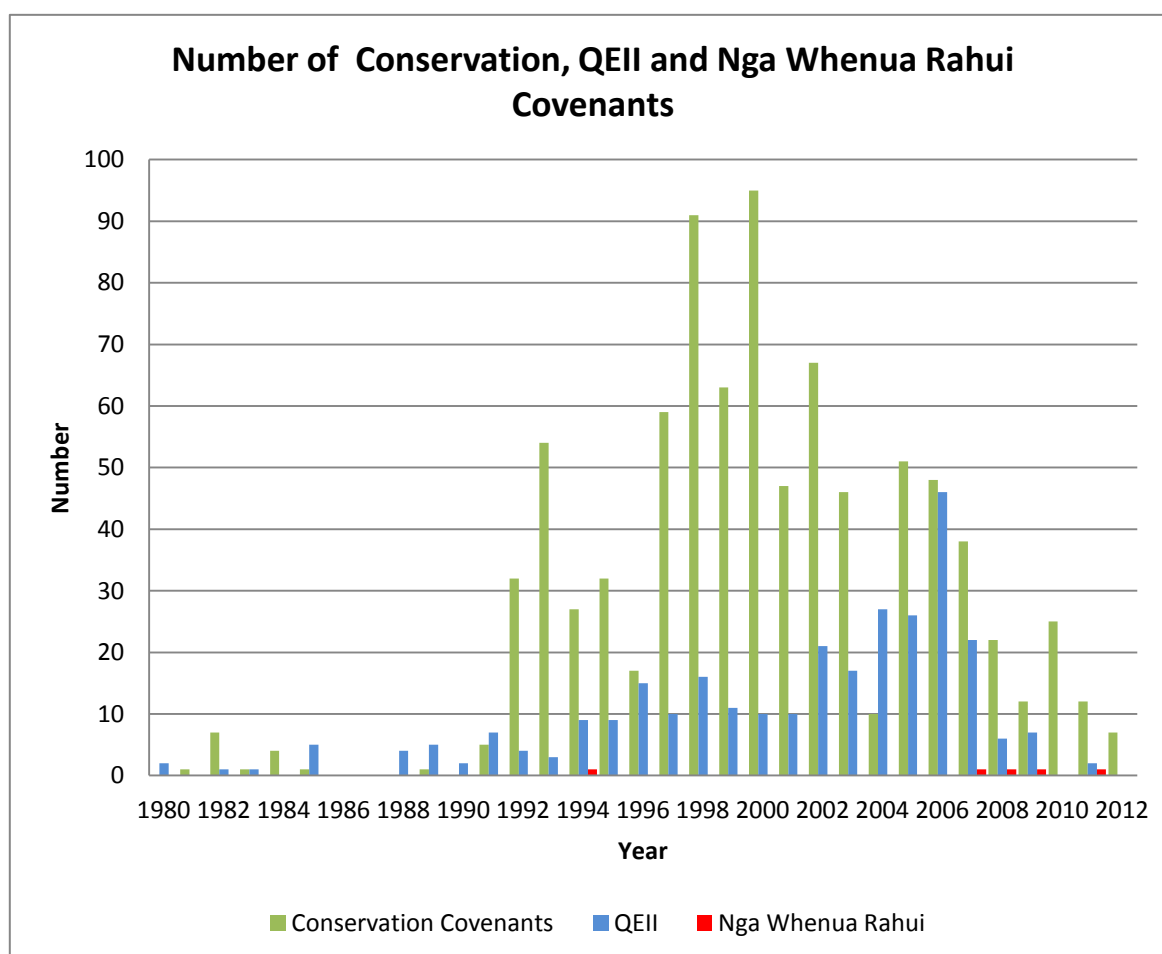


Figure 6: Number of Conservation, QEII and Nga Whenua Rahui Covenants in the Whangarei District

Conclusion

Prior to 2005, conservation covenants established by the Whangarei District Council were not monitored. Since 2005 around 45 covenants have been monitored annually (except for 2007/2008 year). Around half of the 875 covenants in the district have now been monitored once.

The monitoring programme shows that on the whole owners are looking after their covenants and appreciate Whangarei District Council taking an interest in the state of the covenant. The owners are provided with a copy of the report and suggestions for improving ecological health of the covenant.

The establishment of covenants in the Whangarei District are assisting in the protection of biodiversity and other natural values.