

Heritage or threat, conserve or destroy? The heritage plant management dilemma in protected landscapes

David C. Havell and Angela L. Scott

Department of Conservation, Private Bag 68908, Wellesley Street, Auckland 1141, New Zealand
(DHavell@doc.govt.nz)

Summary Many cultural heritage sites including archaeological site schedules and historic landmarks are protected in New Zealand by specific legislation administered by Heritage New Zealand and the Department of Conservation. Local authorities such as district councils protect cultural heritage and also maintain lists of protected trees, usually trees with significant horticultural and cultural merit. Under New Zealand law, cultural heritage includes trees, places and their setting, (the cultural heritage landscape). Protected natural areas in New Zealand such as national parks, conservation parks and nature reserves often contain cultural heritage sites sometimes dating back several hundred years. Associated with heritage sites are often a suite of exotic plants from multiple cultural periods which contribute to the heritage character of the site. Historic plants may also provide significant scientific archaeological evidence. However, some heritage

plants are known to be invasive or left unmanaged may form extensive thickets. Consequently, there is some tension between teams over management of heritage plants. Biodiversity staff may be unaware or have little sympathy for cultural heritage. The best outcomes have been obtained where there is active engagement between both heritage and biodiversity teams, and where there has been a weed risk assessment and strategy, as clearly not all heritage plants threaten biodiversity values, and not all significant heritage plants are safe to leave in natural areas. Tactics to maintain the heritage character of sites when invasive heritage plants have been removed include extensive data gathering, interpretative signs or monuments, using less invasive cultivars, and transferring plants to heritage gardens.

Keywords Heritage plants, environmental pest plants.