

Notification of trial of a new bait to control feral cats in the St James

The Department of Conservation is trialling a new bait to reduce feral cat numbers over 5879ha in the St James Conservation Area (see attached map).

Project Summary

The Department of Conservation will trial a new bait to protect native animals from feral cats in the Edwards Valley of the St James Conservation Area in winter 2024. This trial will build on knowledge gained in two previous trials where bait was laid by hand. During this trial the meat bait will be applied by helicopter in the 5879ha treatment area, and the feral cat population monitored to determine how effective the level of control was. This site has been chosen as it has high numbers of feral cats and the risk to native wildlife is low, with no kea present.

Why control feral cats

Feral cats are a significant threat to New Zealand's native fauna – they predate native bird, lizard, bat and invertebrate species. There are currently only two baits registered for feral cat control in New Zealand and neither of these are able to be used at large scale to provide effective control of feral cats and protect native species.

Important information

The bait is an 18g meat bait that contains 4.5mg of sodium fluoroacetate (1080). 1080 is poisonous to humans and domestic animals. Dogs are particularly susceptible to 1080 and at risk until poisoned carcasses have disintegrated. Dogs must not be taken into the treatment area until the caution period is over and warning signs have been removed. Monitoring will be carried out to determine when the caution period can be lifted.



Feral cat preying on a kakariki on Auckland Island.
Source: Department of Conservation

Risks can be eliminated by following these rules:

- DO NOT touch bait
- WATCH CHILDREN at all times
- DO NOT EAT animals from this area or within the buffer zone outside this area. The standard buffer zone is 2km for deer and pigs, 200m for rabbits and 1km for hares and possums.

Poison baits or carcasses are **DEADLY** to **DOGS**

DO NOT take dogs into or near the operational area while warning signs are in place.

The presence of warning signs indicate that pesticide residue may still remain in baits and carcasses and these rules should be observed. The removal of signs will tell you that you can resume normal activities in the area. If in doubt, check with DOC. Always report suspected vandalism or unauthorised removal of signs.

If you suspect poisoning, please contact:

- Your local doctor or hospital
- The National Poisons Centre: 0800 764 766 (urgent calls) or 03 479 7248 or dial 111
- Seek veterinary advice for suspected poisoning of domestic animals

How it is happening

The bait is a rabbit meat sausage containing the pesticide sodium fluoroacetate (1080, 0.025%). This trial follows on from two previous hand laid trials which have shown that feral cats eat it while animals like native birds and deer did not. This trial aims to test the effectiveness of the bait at controlling feral cats when aerially applied as well as assessing the risk to non-target species.

This bait will be applied from a helicopter at the density of one bait per hectare over the treatment area (see map). Toxic baits are dyed green, non-toxic prefeed sausages are undyed.

The effect of this trial on feral cats will be monitored by following GPS-collared cats throughout the trial as well as monitoring the abundance of feral cats in the site. Trail camera footage will be used to observe and record how animals interact with the bait. DOC will compare the results from the trial site before and after the bait application to establish the effectiveness of the trial. After the trial, we expect to see a significant reduction in feral cat populations at the site. This trial is carried out under permissions from the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), Ministry of Primary Industries Agricultural Compounds and Medicines (ACVM) and DOC Animal Ethics Committee.

Timeframe

The application of a non-toxic pre-feed bait is planned to occur in good weather from the 1st August. Approximately ten days subsequently, one application of toxic bait will occur. The exact timing of this is weather dependant.

Key facts about 1080

1080 is a manufactured, biodegradable toxin. Its active ingredient, fluoroacetate, is found in poisonous plants around the world, and low levels of it are found in some native plants in New Zealand.



New feral cat bait for toxic trial.

Source: DOC

The 1080 bait is broken down in the environment by microorganisms, fungi and plants into harmless compounds. It does not leave permanent residue in soil, water, plants or animals.

Next Steps

Iwi, stakeholders and affected parties are being notified and there will be a public notice in the local newspaper/s. DOC will contact all neighbours and place warning signs at entry points to the treatment area immediately prior to the operation starting. After the operation DOC will share results of the operation.

If you want to be notified again immediately prior to the operation then please contact us via details below.

For more information

National Eradication Team
 Eradication Technician
 Phone: 0800 DOC HOT (0800 362 468)
 Email: nationaleradicationteam@doc.govt.nz

This map outlines the 5879ha treatment area where the feral cat bait trial will be carried out in the St James Conservation Area. The proposed treatment area is indicative only because boundaries may change due to operational requirements.

