


# Mid Dome Wilding Conifer Management Strategy 2023 – 2033

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reclaiming Mid Dome – We Are Halfway There!



**Cover photograph:** Aerial view of the mid Tomogalak catchment (Five Rivers 2 operational area), showing the scale of prior, recent and future wilding control. The ‘brown ring’ of sprayed conifers (middle distance) surrounds the aerial control loading site, which has created significant operational efficiencies since it was located here in 2016. Photo source: BBSL, Nov 2022.

<b>Reference:</b> Mid Dome Wilding Conifer Management Strategy 2023 – 2033. Reclaiming Mid Dome – We Are Halfway There!		
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<p><b>Reading this strategy</b></p> <p>Although a standalone document, this Strategy should be read in conjunction with the New Zealand Wilding Conifer Management Strategy (2015–2030) and the operative Southland Regional Pest Management Plan (2019-2029), for a broader context.</p>		
		

Disclaimer

This Strategy has been prepared and written by Better Biosecurity Solutions Ltd (BBSL) for the Mid Dome Wilding Trees Charitable Trust. It is intended to provide accurate and adequate information on the subject matters. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information supplied is accurate and the authors have exercised all reasonable skill and care in its preparation. BBSL does not accept any responsibility for fact omission or errors, or legal liability whether direct or indirect, nor for the consequences of any decisions based on this information.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the third Mid Dome Wilding Conifer Management Strategy (the Strategy) and covers the period 2023 to 2033. The Strategy has been prepared for the Mid Dome Wilding Trees Charitable Trust (the Trust) to help deal with significant changes in their operating environment over the next decade. The Trust has made much progress in both initial and maintenance control of wilding conifers at Mid Dome over the past 17 years. However, the project is only half way completed. This work needs to continue until seed banks are depleted and the way ahead has been prepared for the full transition of control to land occupiers.

This Strategy's overarching goal is that *Wilding conifer infestations are at zero density (being no coning trees present) across the Mid Dome operational area by July 2033*. In the next decade significantly more maintenance control work will have occurred, building on prior years of successful control, and the majority of ongoing conifer management (of up to conifer 11 species, including *Pinus contorta*, *Pinus mugo*, Corsican pine and Douglas fir) across the 70,000 hectare operational area will have transferred to land occupiers.

The cost for completing this work is approx \$20.5 million (not inflation adjusted). This is additional to the \$17 million expended prior (2006 to 2023). The project is half way completed and we need to 'finish the job'. Six key issues impact on the work that lies ahead:

1. Adequate national and regional funding is required to maintain the gains of extensive prior control to see the project through to completion (that is, handing back of all maintenance control obligations to respective land occupiers).
2. Reinvansion by wind-blown seeded wildings, particularly Douglas fir, from forestry plantations outside the management area, is already undermining control efforts by the Trust. Addressing the risk of further spread from these plantations and shelterbelts is a priority to investigate further.
3. Transitional arrangements need to be developed to enable movement from initial and maintenance control by the Trust to full maintenance control by occupiers, via practical and individually prepared Biosecurity Management Plans (BMPs) under the Southland Regional Pest Management Plan (RPMP).
4. Working with Environment Southland (ES) is essential to ensure that the Council embraces their biosecurity leadership responsibilities of occupier engagement and advocacy, monitoring to ensure RPMP rules are being followed, and instigating enforcement action when required.
5. Balancing environmental and operational requirements, such as considering reducing setback requirements from water courses, case by case, to allow more efficient aerial boom spraying, and better identification and mapping of significant biodiversity sites on public conservation land to allow for more targeted control of wildings in these areas.
6. Maintaining the capacity and capabilities of efficient aerial and ground control contractors to carry out the required work.



Despite many achievements there are significant challenges ahead which need to be addressed:

- No surety of ongoing national funding post 2023.
- Maintaining landowner engagement to continue 100% commitment to the programme and ensuring they don't become exacerbators with forests or shelterbelts on their land.
- Supporting ES to develop a robust monitoring programme for land that has transitioned to land occupiers and putting time into BMP development with occupiers.
- Lifting the public profile and re-galvanising local support for the project. More iwi dialogue is also needed, especially around support for maintaining funding levels.
- Development of practical 'handover to landowner' control protocols.
- Agreements with commercial forestry on their responsibilities for wilding conifer control.
- Regulatory powers in the Southland RPMP regarding wilding conifers are untested.

This Strategy is aspirational and sets new goals and objectives, primarily around anticipated and progressive completion of work in the 22 operational areas, and importantly provides a set of financial projections for the next project period. The preferred funding scenario to 'complete the job' is \$20.5M. Eighteen recommendations are made which are grouped into four issues (relationships, funding and strategy, operations and internal matters), including:

- The need for multi-year funding commitments from stakeholders – MPI, DOC, LINZ and ES to ensure that the preferred model is budgeted. *Without the ideal scenario level of support it is inevitable that control objectives and momentum will slip.*
- Lobbying / engaging with plantation forestry interests (commercial and farmer based) in Southland District impacting on or likely to impact Mid Dome operations.
- The need for more formalised landowner transition plans to be developed by ES that outline the conditions of maintenance obligations on landowners/occupiers.
- Maintain contractor resources and quality assurance in contracting processes.
- The need for MPI to urgently finalise transitional control criteria coupled with the need for a long term post transition regime to ensure that the wilding problem does not remerge from other sources. Government and regional agencies need to lead this.

In conclusion, the consequences of not completing the project, or underfunding it, are dire, not just for Mid Dome but also inter-regional (and national) impacts from the potential spread of seedlings far beyond the 70,000 ha. project area. These effects would be felt on pastoral production, natural biodiversity values, water yield, increasing risk of fire and numerous social and cultural values. If the significant tussock grasslands, mountain range vistas, and biodiversity of northern Southland are to be preserved, addressing the ongoing and new wilding conifer threats at Mid Dome must be stepped up with some urgency.

This Strategy looks toward a definite end point for the Project and provides direction for this to occur. Projected costings and timings are made on the basis that the resources needed will be available – ie. a best case scenario. The Trust has come a long way since 2008, and *“while we are half way there, this document is a clear plan as to how we will complete the job”*.