

# Ecological benefits- a sometimes surprising and unintended by-product of infrastructure maintenance

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There is an emerging recognition that ecological benefits can be an unintended by-product from maintaining infrastructure corridors. Research in New Zealand has shown that some active water race corridors provide habitat for indigenous flora and fauna in production landscapes. Several international studies have demonstrated that electricity transmission corridors, railway embankments and roadsides, all maintained for solely management purposes, can provide valuable habitat for a variety of organisms. The ecological potential of areas containing maintained infrastructure corridors is considerable. These areas are often better protected than freehold land and have a stable and long term management regime. Their often linear form means they can or have the potential to act as ecological corridors.

With examples such as the road reserves adjoining the over 90,000km of state highways and local roads and the approximately 18,000ha of maintained railway network, in common with many countries New Zealand has large areas of maintained infrastructure corridors. However, studies of what ecological benefits such corridors provide are still limited, while recognition in policy that these benefits be subsequently sustained is rarer still.

This presentation firstly details a Swedish study where I compared both the abundance and diversity of pollinators within maintained electricity transmission corridors and the maintenance cost of these areas with other habitat types (including grasslands and maintained roadsides) that are acknowledged as potentially valuable pollinator habitat.

I will then describe how the Greater Wellington Regional Council has recognised in some of its statutory and non-statutory plans the production and sustaining of ecological benefits in some of its maintained infrastructure corridors and other areas it actively manages. I'll conclude by identifying opportunities for future work by the Council and others in this area.