

Wetlands you can visit in the Northland Region

The Northland Region tapers to a long remote peninsula at the top of the North Island, representing, in Maori mythology, the tail of the great fish hauled up by the demi-god Maui.

The region has nine main types of wetlands including; bogs, fens, salt marshes, swamps, shallow lakes, marshes, gumlands, seepages and ephemeral (seasonal) wetlands.

The 1,700 km coastline is indented with several extensive, shallow harbours and estuaries. Peninsulas are dotted with dune lakes (over 400 of them). They are often edged by marsh wetlands and support a large diversity of native plants and animals, including the Northland mudfish, a rare freshwater fish found only in Northland.

Gumland wetlands occur on areas of strongly leached soils with poor drainage often on gentle hilltops, characterised by an endemic grass tree (*Dracophyllum*), mānuka, sedges, native orchids and tangle fern. Being infertile, they share many species with bogs. Most have been cleared or developed.

Northland also has many inland wetlands, the most significant being Ngawha Springs, Motatau wetlands, Waitangi wetland complex, Maitahi fen, Kaihu Swamp Forest and Mangonui River wetlands.

The area includes:

- **Aupouri and Pouto Peninsulas**, extensive wind-blown dunes with many dune lakes, swamps and ephemeral ponds.
- **Ahipara Massif and Epikauri Gumfield**, Northland's best and biggest gumland.
- **Kaimaumau/ Motutangi Wetlands** an extensive band of parallel sand dunes, peat bogs and gumlands.
- **Lake Ohia**, an ephemeral lake with gumland pavement and studded with sub-fossil kauri tree stumps.
- **Te Paki and Parengarenga Harbour**, extensive swamps, bogs, gumlands, shrublands and dunelands with salt marshes, mangroves and sand flats.

Many smaller wetlands are being restored or enhanced by agencies and community groups working in partnership.

Northland once supported over 25,000 hectares of wetlands, today around 5% remains. Some are still in a very natural state and provide habitat for endemic and threatened species, including brown teal (pateke), banded rail, NZ dabchick, marsh crake, North Island fernbird, Australasian bittern, black mudfish, banded kokopu, short jawed kokopu and locally endemic Pouto dwarf inanga and Northland mudfish.

The Northland Wetland Directory is sponsored by the Northland Regional Council



Rare wetland plants found here include milfoil *Myriophyllum robustum*, the tiny water lily *Trithuria inconspicua*, buttercup *Ranunculus urvilleanus*, marsh fern *Thelypteris confluens*, and the sand spike sedge *Eleocharis neozelandica*. Hikurangi Swamp is the only known NZ location for the bittercress herb *Rorippa laciniata* and is one of the strongholds for heart leaved kohuhu *Pittosporum obcordatum*.

The area offers a diverse range of hunting and fishing options with 10 game bird species. Contact Fish & Game for further information and permits.

Northland Wetland Agencies

Northland Regional Council
www.nrc.govt.nz

Department of Conservation
www.doc.govt.nz

Fish & Game New Zealand
www.fishandgame.org.nz

Name	Activities / Facilities ¹	Access, further information
Kai Iwi Lakes ★ ★ ★ ★	<p>Three clear, blue, rain-fed dune lakes with white sand beaches, surrounded by gumland, wetland and shrubland. The deepest dune lakes in the country, they support dune lake galaxias fish and the tiny water lily relative - <i>Trithuria inconspicua</i>, as well as freshwater crayfish, crabs and mussels, eels, and rainbow trout, NZ dabchick, grey duck, grey teal, and other waterfowl. Camping, swimming and powerboat access in Taharoa. Toilet facilities and picnic areas and a summer shop. Strictly no pets. Enjoy bush, lakeside and open country walkways and cycle trails.</p> 	<p>Contact Kaipara District Council for more information and to book campgrounds (09) 439 7059 www.kaipara.govt.nz/residents/parks-and-public-spaces/campgrounds/kai-iwi-lakes-taharoa-domain-2</p> <p><i>45 mins drive (35 kms) NW of Dargaville. Taharoa Domain access via State Highway 12 to the junction of Omamari Road, go 11 km along Omamari Road and then Kai Iwi Lakes Road to the Domain.</i></p>
Arethusa Wetland ★ ★ ★ ★	<p>Wetland areas (14 ha) and a shallow lake with excavated ponds. Home to grey duck, black swan, pied cormorant, pukeko, kingfisher, paradise shelduck, spotless crane, and eels. Planted native and exotic plants.</p> 	<p>Managed by Forest and Bird Protection Society – see their website for contact details and to book lodge accommodation. www.forestandbird.org.nz/projects/arethusa-reserve-northland www.forestandbird.org.nz/our-community/lodges/arethusa-lodge <i>Lamb Road, Pukenui</i></p>
Lake Ohia ★ ★ ★ ★	<p>Other-worldly 500 ha site of charred stumps and gumland scrub in a former lake bed which is dry over summer, wet in winter. The site of a drowned forest, with a maze of 30,000 year old kauri tree stumps exposed when the lake was drained earlier this century for gum-digging. Classified as a gumland wetland, now important habitat for rare ferns, mosses and orchids. The surrounding swamps and shrubland contain threatened fish and bird species. Not suitable for swimming, this is a dry lake bed. The Gumhole Reserve Walk is a 10 min loop track through manuka passing a series of holes excavated by gum diggers (keep to the tracks as the area is potted with gumdigger's holes).</p> 	<p>www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/northland/places/karikari-peninsula/ www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/northland/places/karikari-peninsula/things-to-do/lake-ohia-gumhole-reserve-walk/</p> <p><i>Base of Karikari Peninsula, a 40-minute drive northeast of Kaitaia. Turn off State Highway 10 onto Inland Road, the Lake is just off Inland Road. The track to Lake Ohia is on the left, 1 km north.</i></p>

KEY



Walks



Birdlife



Boating



Fishing



Highly scenic



Info centre



Interpretation panels



Lookout/bird hide



Picnic area



Accommodation



Swimming or snorkelling

2 ★★★★★ Must see ★★★★★ Worth a special visit ★★★ Worth a short detour ★★ Plan to visit if passing ★ Short stop if passing

Name	Activities / Facilities ¹	Access, further information
<p>Sweetwater Lakes</p> <p>★★★★</p>	<p>Community group Bushland Trust, iwi, NRC, DOC and community are restoring a cluster of dune lakes using filters and native plants. An easy walking track (1 hour) leads you around the edge of Lake Ngatu, which is situated within a Recreation Reserve. A longer (10 km) path goes around Lake Ngatu and down to Sandhills Road via Lake Heather and Lake Rotoroa. It takes approx. 2 hours to walk. Frequented by Australasian bittern, NZ dabchick and Caspian tern. Ngatu is a very popular swimming lake and power boats are banned.</p> 	<p>www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/tracks-and-walks/northland/kaitaia-area/lake-ngatu-track</p> <p>www.bushlandtrust.com/</p> <p><i>5 km north of Awanui. Travel 3 km north of Awanui, turn left onto Waipapakauri Road, and left again on Sweetwater Rd, Look for the Department of Conservation sign for Lake Ngatu. There is parking at several different spots around the lake but the most common sites are at the northern and southern end of the lake where there are toilet facilities.</i></p>
<p>Te Werahi Wetland</p> <p>★★★★</p>	<p>One of the largest raupo swamps in Te Pahi near the tip of New Zealand. The landscape is remote and highly natural and scenic. The wetland can be accessed via boardwalks 1.5 km down the Twilight–Te Werahi Loop Track. The full 16 km loop track takes 4-5 hours – take water and food - and passes through farmland, swamp, dunes, shrubland and coastal wetlands. Links to 3 day Cape Reinga Coastal Walkway. Very important site for waterfowl and a regionally important moulting site.</p> 	<p>www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/tracks-and-walks/northland/kaitaia-area/twilight-te-werahi-loop-track/</p> <p>http://nzwalksinfo.co.nz/tracks/159-twilight-te-werahi-loop-track</p> <p><i>Access from the Te Werahi Gate car park on State Highway 1, signposted about 4.5 km before Cape Reinga, 60 km north of Kaitaia.</i></p>
<p>Flaxmill Wetland</p> <p>★★★</p>	<p>Former flax growing operation, since converted back to wetland. Abounds with waterfowl as well as native species including grey duck, paradise shelduck, NZ shoveler and black swan. Awakino Wetland next door contains the threatened sedge <i>Machaerina complanata</i>. A number of other wetlands in the region are administered for game bird hunting. Contact Northland Fish & Game. There is a stop bank around much of the wetland to maintain water levels.</p> 	<p>https://fishandgame.org.nz/northland/game-bird-hunting-in-new-zealand/northland-hunting-locations-and-access/</p> <p>Contact Fish & Game Northland for permission to access 09 438 4135</p> <p><i>15 minutes NW of Dargaville on Waihue Rd.</i></p>
<p>Houhora Harbour and Rangaunu Harbour</p> <p>★★★</p>	<p>Two large estuaries that support major concentrations of national and international migratory waders including bar-tailed godwit, lesser knot and ruddy turnstone. Other birds recorded here include the New Zealand dotterel, reef heron, Australasian bittern, banded dotterel, wrybill, pied stilt, royal spoonbill, white heron, and in the coastal shrub, large numbers of NI fernbird. White heron visit both harbours and royal spoonbill breed at Rangaunu. The wetlands also support a high number of endangered endemic plants.</p> 	<p>www.doc.govt.nz/templates/page.aspx?id=33701</p> <p>DoC. Northland Conservancy Office, Whangarei, (09) 470 3301</p> <p><i>Rangaunu is 24 km north of Kaitaia on Kaimaumau Rd whilst Houhora Harbour is a further 17km north on SH1 at the small township of Pukenui.</i></p>

Name	Activities / Facilities ¹	Access, further information
<p>Lake Waiparera</p> <p>★★★</p>	<p>The Aupouri Peninsula has numerous lakes, bogs and swamps, with a range of endemic and threatened species. Lake Waiparera is the most accessible dune lake on the peninsula, with a small lake-side reserve. The lake is fully fenced and NRC, iwi, DOC and landowners are working on a programme to replant margins, control weeds and restore water quality in the lake. The lake is an important waterfowl moulting site and habitat for NZ dabchick, Australasian bittern, black swan, paradise shelduck, grey teal, NZ scaup, pukeko, pied stilt, southern black-backed gull, welcome swallow, NI fernbird, white-faced heron, and several species of cormorant (including little black, little, and pied shags).</p> 	<p>DoC. Kaitaia Office, Kaitaia (09) 408 6014</p> <p><i>Lake Waiparera is accessible from SH1, 70 km north of Kaitaia. Parking area and toilet.</i></p>
<p>Limeburners Creek Estuary & Waimahanga Walk</p> <p>★★★</p>	<p>Extensive estuary in Whangarei Harbour with mangroves, saltmarsh, and mud flats with lush eelgrass beds. Two flat, all-weather walks, Limeburners Creek (1.3 km, Interpretation panels and boardwalk) and Waimahanga walkway (2 hours, along an old railway line and through mangroves swamps, shorter sections can be walked). Banded rail may be seen quietly moving through the mangroves</p> 	<p>www.wdc.govt.nz/FacilitiesandRecreation/WalksTrails/Pages/default.aspx Whangarei District Council (09) 430 4200</p> <p><i>Limeburners Bay access off Kioreroa Road (opposite #143) in Whangarei. Waimahanga Walkway via Waimahanga Rd, George Point Road, Waverley Street or Cockburn St at Onerahi.</i></p>
<p>Ruakaka Estuary & Waipu Estuary</p> <p>★★★</p>	<p>Two high value estuaries with a diverse range of vegetation types and threatened bird species. The Ruakaka Wildlife Refuge is located at the Ruakaka River Mouth. This is a breeding area for New Zealand dotterel and variable oystercatchers. It is a major habitat for godwits. The Waipu GP Wildlife Refuge is one of only a few breeding sites for the critically endangered NZ fairy tern.</p> 	<p>www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/northland/places/waipu-area/?tab-id=other-activities</p> <p><i>For Ruakaka start at Surf Club at low tide. Walk north toward the Power Station. Turn in at the river mouth and follow around. Come out through Reserve Camp. For Waipu, near the end of Cove Road, walk cross the estuary at low tide and walk down beach. Stay on shore line or tracks. Please do not disturb native birds</i></p>
<p>Wairua River (Hikurangi Swamp)</p> <p>★★★</p>	<p>Formerly part of the original Hikurangi swamp, this area is crown land co-managed by the Ngati Hau Trust, Department of Conservation and Northland Fish and Game. It is one of the last remnants of divaricating floodplain shrubland, marshes and fens associated with the Wairua River, which was straightened to allow for flood management. Species such as mallard, grey duck, paradise shelduck, pukeko, pheasant, quail, Australasian bittern, NI fernbird and banded rail. Large population of black mudfish. Several highly threatened plants including an unnamed hebe and the heart leaved kohuhu <i>Pittosporum obcordatum</i>. A network of grass tracks is open to the public but may be wet in winter. Used by game bird hunters in season (May- August).</p> 	<p>www.fishandgame.org.nz/Site/Regions/Northland/huntingAccess.aspx</p> <p>https://fishandgame.org.nz/northland/ https://fishandgame.org.nz/northland/game-bird-hunting-in-new-zealand/northland-hunting-locations-and-access/</p> <p><i>Access across via a farm land track from the gate next to the Ngati Hau / DOC / Fish and Game sign on Swamp Road, 6 km inland from Hikurangi</i></p>

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William Upton Hewett Memorial Reserve ★★★	Regenerating shrubland and gumland with a large kahikatea swamp along the eastern stream boundary with kowhai, cabbage tree, raupo, flax and swamp maire. Contains possibly the largest population of North Island NI fernbird in the Whangarei area. There is a small kiwi population as well as grey warbler, kingfisher, kereru, pied tit, morepork, pied stilt, pukeko, spotless crane, fantail and tui. Loop tracks up to 2-3 hours. The track skirts the edge of the swamp via a boardwalk. 	www.nftrt.org.nz/reserves/william-upton-hewett/ Notice board at reserve entrance. Managed by NZ Native Forests Restoration Trust <i>North-west of Whangarei on Wright Rd. The entrance is on the eastern side of Wright Rd where there is a carpark and noticeboard</i>
Matapouri Estuary ★★	A stunning underwater experience of mangroves and the creatures that live within them. Renowned for snorkelling and underwater photography in the clear estuarine waters. 	<i>For a snorkel drift, access from the first bridge at the southern end of Matapouri Bay 1 hour before high tide to drift up the estuary and back with the ebbing tide.</i>
Ngunguru mangrove walk ★★	A 20 min easy urban stroll along wheelchair accessible mown paths and boardwalks through bush and mangroves, with views of saltmarsh. Look for secretive birds like banded rail. Seating is provided along the way. For a longer walk, start at the shops/cafe at Ngunguru and walk along the estuary to the walkway. 	<i>Access the walkway either beside the Ngunguru Library or from Munroe Place, return the same way.</i>
Parengarenga Harbour ★★	A large (6,500 ha), relatively unmodified estuary with sand flats, mangrove forest, eel grass beds, and reed-beds. Several threatened species. Major staging area for migratory shorebirds and international waders, supporting up to 20,000 birds from over 80 species. Major breeding area for NZ dotterel. Home to 2500 black swan. A highly scenic area, though access is not easy. 	www.nzbirds.com/birding/parengarenga.html www.doc.govt.nz/upload/documents/science-and-technical/nzwetlands01.pdf <i>Turn left off SH 1 into Paua Rd about 85 km north of Kaitaia. The area is best visited by boat. Kayak tours and boat services are available. Access fees may be charged to cross private land.</i>
Lake Rotokawau & Waiporohita ★★	Three accessible dune lakes with high value for threatened bird and plant species. Reed beds and native submerged vegetation. Snorkelling and swimming in Lake Waiporohita when water is clear. Walks around Lake Rotokawau and wetlands can be accessed from Puheke Road 	<i>Turn off onto Inland Rd (Karikari) on SH10 north of Taipa. Lake Waiporohita is approx 10km on left. Turn left onto Puheke Rd a further 2.5 kms along the road.</i>

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Rotopotaka (Coca Cola Lake) ★ ★	<p>The peat and tannins in the water of this 11 ha dune lake gives it a distinct 'cola' colour. Large areas of emergent vegetation around much of the lake, mainly raupo, spike sedge, and flax, providing good habitat for many aquatic birds including Australasian bittern, spotless crake, and NI fernbird. Common bullies, inanga, longfin eels and black mudfish. Well formed tracks to the western and northern shore.</p> 	<p><i>There is an easy walk around the shoreline of the lake from the end of Ramp Road, off Inland Road, at Tokerau Beach</i></p>
Lake Rototuna, Pouto Peninsula ★ ★	<p>The Peninsula has a complex of 22 freshwater dune lakes and swamps that support a wide range of species. Bittern stronghold, crakes and banded rail present. Dwarf galaxiid fish present in some of the lakes. Lake Rototuna is a good example of a dune lake, visible from the road (but no access to or around the lake). The rest of the Pouto lakes tend to be accessible only via privately owned land. Large flocks of scaup and other waterfowl.</p> 	<p>www.doc.govt.nz/upload/documents/science-and-technical/nzwetlands01.pdf</p> <p><i>Lake Rototuna is located within an area of conservation estate off Pouto Road. Locked gate.</i></p>
Rawene Mangrove Walkway ★ ★	<p>Walkway built as a community project to allow people to get close to the mangroves and historic sites. Built on the site of a century old timber mill and box factory and provides visitors with a fascinating view of a unique and valuable wetland habitat. Has wheelchair access.</p>  	<p><i>Access off Clendon Esplanade, Rawene</i></p>