ROTORUA DISTRICT PLAN

HE WHAKARAPOPOTNGA O TE PANONITANGA MAHERE TUAWARU E TŪTOHUTIA ANA - SUMMARY OF PROPOSED PLAN CHANGE 8 (NGĀ WHAKARITENGA MŌ NGĀ TŪRARU Ā-TAIAO - NATURAL HAZARDS)

June 2025

ROTORUA LAKES COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera o ngā Roto o Rotorua

Contents

1. Introduction

This summary of Proposed Plan Change 8 (Natural Hazards) is intended to assist those potentially affected by Plan Change 8, and/or those interested in making a submission on the plan change, to understand what changes are being proposed to the District Plan and the context for the changes.

This document focuses on the key proposals and does not contain a complete list of all the changes proposed. It should not replace reading the full plan change assessment document (referred to as the 'Section 32 Report'), which contains additional detail.

2. Purpose

In progressing this plan change, Rotorua Lakes Council (RLC) seeks to fine-tune the management of natural hazards through the District Plan and respond to changing natural hazard information, including new hazard mapping.

RLC is seeking to ensure that the District Plan is both effective at managing hazards but also efficient.

The plan change supports and builds upon other recent changes to natural hazard provisions in the District Plan advanced through Plan Change 9 (Housing for Everyone).

3. Scope of Plan Change

Plan Change 8 considers the management of natural hazards across the whole Rotorua District. For the avoidance of doubt, this includes in the Lakes A Zone. Parts of the district inside the Lakes A zone are shown in the figure 1.

Plan change 8 proposes amendments to the strategic policies and objectives for all natural hazards.

It also reviews the detailed policies and rules that seek to manage specific natural hazards: flooding, wildfire, fault rupture, ground condition hazards (including liquefaction and soft, compressible soils), slope stability and geothermal hazards. The policies and rules for other hazards, such as volcanic hazards are not in scope.

Some matters, while related to the identified natural hazards, are also identified as out of scope. This includes stormwater management requirements for subdivision and development and vegetation disturbance provisions.

4. Process

The plan change follows a formal process set out in the Resource Management Act 1991. Key steps include:

- Notification – The proposed plan change is publicly notified, and submissions are invited from the community.
- Submissions – Anyone can make a submission supporting or opposing the proposal. **Submissions close 8 September, 2025**.
- Further Submissions – A second round of submissions allows people to support or oppose earlier submissions.
- Hearing – A hearing may be held where submitters can speak to their submission.
- Decisions – Council makes a decision based on recommendations of the hearings panel.
- Appeals – Submitters can appeal the decision to the Environment Court if they are not satisfied.

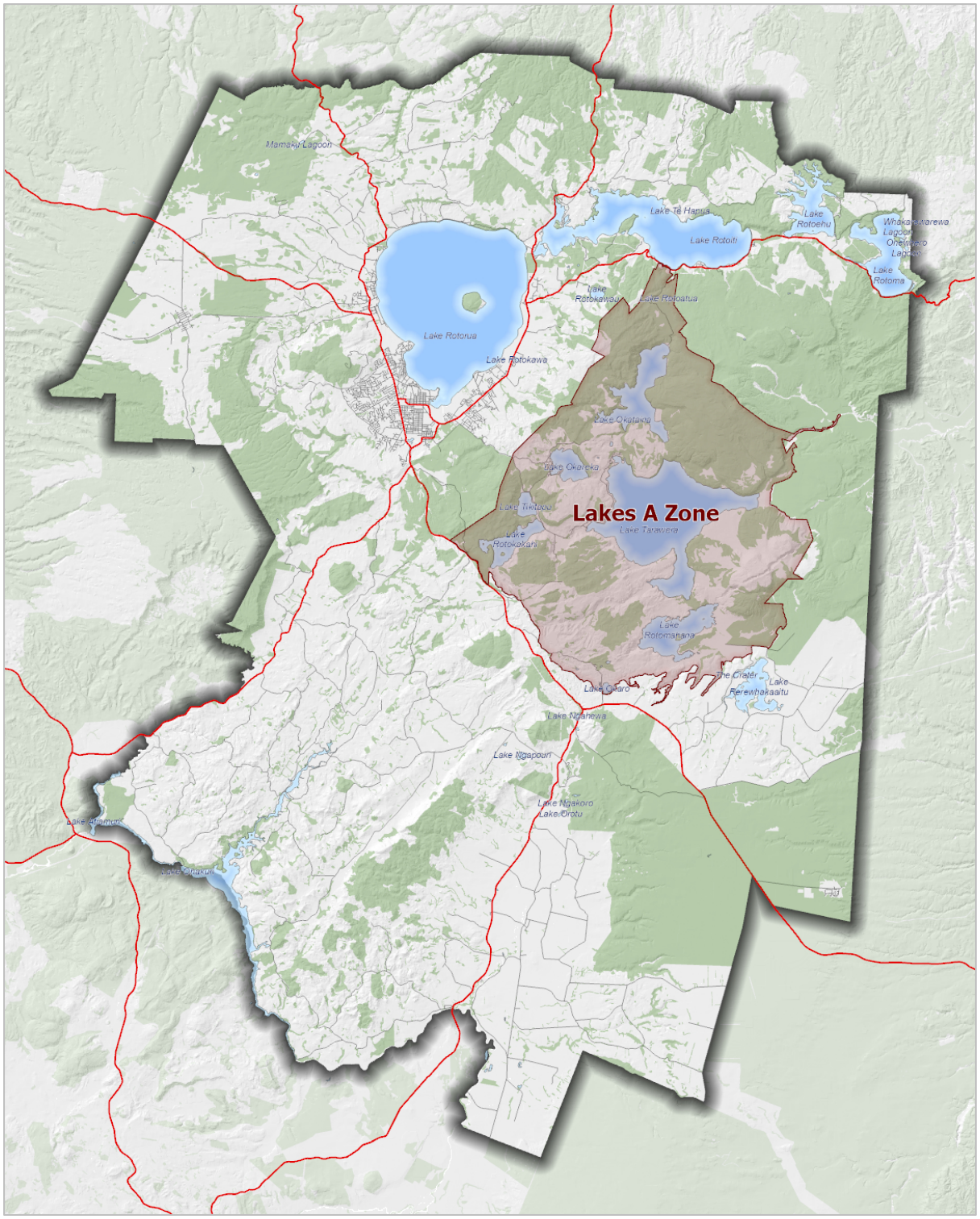

Figure 1 Boundaries of the Rotorua District and the Lakes A Zone

5. Strategic Objectives and Policies:

The plan change proposes to replace existing strategic objectives and policies to focus on acceptable risk, resilience to climate change and best practice principles for decision-making through the assessment and consideration of risk.

The proposed policy for assessing and considering risk includes and acknowledges that for developments undertaken by tangata whenua, the cultural significance of the site or activity, may justify acceptance of a higher level of natural hazard risk.

The full text of these proposed objectives and policies can be found in Appendix 1 to the Section 32 report (Objective SDNH-O1, SDNH-O2, SDNH-P1 and SDNH-P2).

6. Flooding

6.1 Flood Hazards and Risk

Flooding in the Rotorua District is caused by three main hazard types: high lake levels, overtopping of rivers or streams (fluvial) flooding, and surface (pluvial) flooding. High lake levels occur after extended wet periods, as experienced in 2023 around Lakes Rotomā and Rotoehu. River and stream flooding happens when rainfall exceeds channel capacity, leading to overflow onto adjacent land, such as the 2018 Ngongotahā Stream flood. Surface flooding results from intense rain overwhelming drainage systems and can affect areas away from rivers and lakes. Climate change is expected to worsen fluvial and pluvial flooding due to more extreme rainfall, while impacts on lake flooding may be more limited due to the slower response of lake systems.

Flooding poses significant risks to people, property, infrastructure, and community wellbeing. Land use can amplify flood risk by increasing exposure (developing in areas susceptible to flooding) but also through increased impervious surfaces (like concrete, which stop water soaking in), changes to natural water flow, and loss of flood storage.

Flood hazard mapping and modelling have been carried out across much of the urban area and near the major lakes. Recent modelling shows that parts of Rotorua's urban area are already highly exposed to flooding. Floodwaters in some areas may reach depths capable of severely affecting buildings and infrastructure. This highlights the need to manage new development carefully.

Broader regional and national models are also being developed to provide wider context.

6.2 How the District Plan Currently Manages Flooding

Flood risk in Rotorua is currently managed through a layered approach: subdivision and land use rules in the District Plan, engineering works, building code requirements, and emergency management systems all work together to reduce harm from flooding.

Within this broader context, the District Plan currently applies different rules based on how serious the flood hazard is:

- In areas where flood depths are anticipated to be lower, new buildings must be built high enough off the ground to stay above expected floodwaters (with climate change taken into account) (Rule NH-R4(2)).
- In areas where flood depths are anticipated to be higher, before any major building work is allowed, a flood risk assessment is required as part of a resource consent application to consider whether the risk is acceptable (Rule NH-R4(4)). This looks at things like:
    - Risks to the proposed building work
    - Impacts on neighbouring land

- Opportunities for safe evacuation
- Effects on existing overland flowpaths

Flood risks are also considered at subdivision for land susceptible to flooding (Rule SUB-R43).

The plan also limits the amount of impervious surfaces in some areas, as impervious surfaces can worsen flooding by stopping rain from soaking into the ground. Rules around building coverage and earthworks also help avoid making flooding worse by displacing water.

In the Lakes A Zone area of the district, older rules apply. These focus on locating building platforms and accesses to properties clear of high lake levels and ephemeral (temporary) watercourses (Rules 6 and 40).

6.3 Key Proposals for Flooding

Plan Change 8 is seeking to build on recent improvements to the flooding provisions with further changes intended to make flood rules clearer, more consistent, and more effective across the district.

Key proposals include:

1. **Use the Best Flood Information (Not Static Maps)**

   Continue to keep flood maps outside the District Plan. This means the Council can use the latest flood modelling when making decisions—rather than relying on maps locked into the District Plan that may become outdated.

2. **Better Protection for Overland Flowpaths**

   Overland flowpaths are natural paths where stormwater flows during heavy rain. If they're blocked by buildings or landscaping, it can make flooding worse—especially for neighbours. New performance standards for earthworks, building and structures are proposed to protect neighbouring property in urban areas from changes to overland flowpaths (Rules EW-S1, NH-R5).

3. **Make Flooding Policies and Rules Consistent Across the District**

   Currently, the Lakes A Zone uses a weaker flood standard (based on a 1-in-50-year event), which could confuse people and creates a risk of redesign since building regulations may encourage design for a higher standard to avoid hazard notices. It is proposed to make the same rules for flooding apply across the district (Rules NH-R4, NH-R5).

4. **Include Flood Risk in Other Consent Decisions**

   Where buildings are already required to get consent near lakes, rivers, or streams, changes to rules are proposed to make sure natural hazard risks (like flooding) are also taken into account when making consent decisions (Rule NATC-R3).

7. Wildfire

7.1 Wildfire Hazards and Risks

Wildfires can be described as uncontrolled fires in natural areas, with most caused by human activity—common ignition sources include pile burns, cigarettes, and open flames.

Wildfires can damage property, ecosystems, and infrastructure, and release greenhouse gases. Land use contributes to risk through development patterns, vegetation management, emergency access, and water availability.

Assessing the significance of wildfire risk in Rotorua is challenging. A comparison of sample sites across New Zealand found the site sampled in our district to have a relatively low number of average very high or extreme fire danger days over recent years compared to other sites across the country. However, this is site-specific and does not reflect characteristics that influence risk across the district, such as proximity to geothermal areas. Research also indicates an increasing trend in wildfire-conducive conditions; and wildfire risks are anticipated to increase with climate change.

Factors that influence wildfire susceptibility include:

- Vegetation type (grass, scrub, or forest), affecting fire intensity and ease of control.
- A high level of human activity, which provides a source of ignition.
- Topography, soil, and wind exposure, which affect drying and fire spread.
- Proximity to ignition sources such as geothermal areas, powerlines, and rail corridors.

7.2 How the District Plan Currently Manages Wildfire

The District Plan includes some measures to help manage wildfire risk, although they are not targeted specifically at wildfire. Approaches also vary across the district and between subdivision and land use:

- Water supply for firefighting must be provided at subdivision in all zones (Performance Standard SUB-S9(3)). Where public reticulated supply is not available (like in rural areas), applicants must demonstrate that an alternative supply meets firefighting standards. This often results in water storage tanks being provided for buildings constructed following subdivision, in order to meet consent notices imposed on titles at subdivision.
- Accessway standards apply at subdivision for residential units and papakāinga – in order to facilitate emergency service vehicles, including firefighting appliances (Performance Standard SUB-S9(2)) .
- Setbacks from plantation forestry apply to new residential units in Rural Zones (30 metres), which may help reduce the risks (Performance Standard RURZ-S6); and setbacks from residential units also apply to commercial forestry under national environmental standards. These setbacks are not specifically designed for wildfire protection but could help to reduce risk if the vegetation within the setback is managed.

In the Lakes A Zone, there is inconsistency between policies (which seek firefighting-capable water supply across the whole fire district) and rules (which only require firefighting water supply for community water supplies) (Policy 12.2 and Rule 34). Policies also prioritise landscape protection over fire reduction, with reliance placed on evacuation and fire response instead of restrictions on vegetation (Policy 13.4).

7.3 Key Proposals for Wildfire

Plan Change 8 includes proposals to make the approach to managing wildfire clearer, more consistent, and to focus on more intensely developed areas, which are considered to have higher risk.

Key proposals include:

1. **Focus and Strengthen Firefighting Water Supply Requirements**

   Firefighting water supply requirements for Rural Zones and the Lakes A Zone are proposed to be focused on more developed areas – that is, papakāinga, the Rural 2 Zone, Rural 3 Zone, and the Settlement Management Area and Bush Settlement Management Areas in the Lakes A Zone. Figure 2 illustrates the location of these rural zones and management areas. Proposed amendments will require firefighting water supply for land use and not just subdivision, to ensure that there is greater consistency in the provision of firefighting water supply between developments that include subdivision and those that do not (Policies SUB-P16, and NH-P5, and Performance Standards SUB-S9(3), RURZ-S5A and 34.1.1(2) in the Lakes A Zone).

   Firefighting water supply requirements would not apply to the Rural 1 Zone and Reserve 1 Zone or other management areas in the Lakes A Zone.

   When building residential buildings in rural areas, outside the firefighting-capable reticulated water supply zones for Mamaku, Ngongotahā and Rotorua city, firefighting water supply needs are usually met by on-site water storage tanks.

2. **Encourage Safer Subdivision Design**

   A new policy also seeks to encourage people to think about wildfire and how to reduce the risks when subdividing in rural areas and at the rural-urban fringe (Policy NH-P5). For example, through consideration of access for emergency services, building placement, and planting choice.

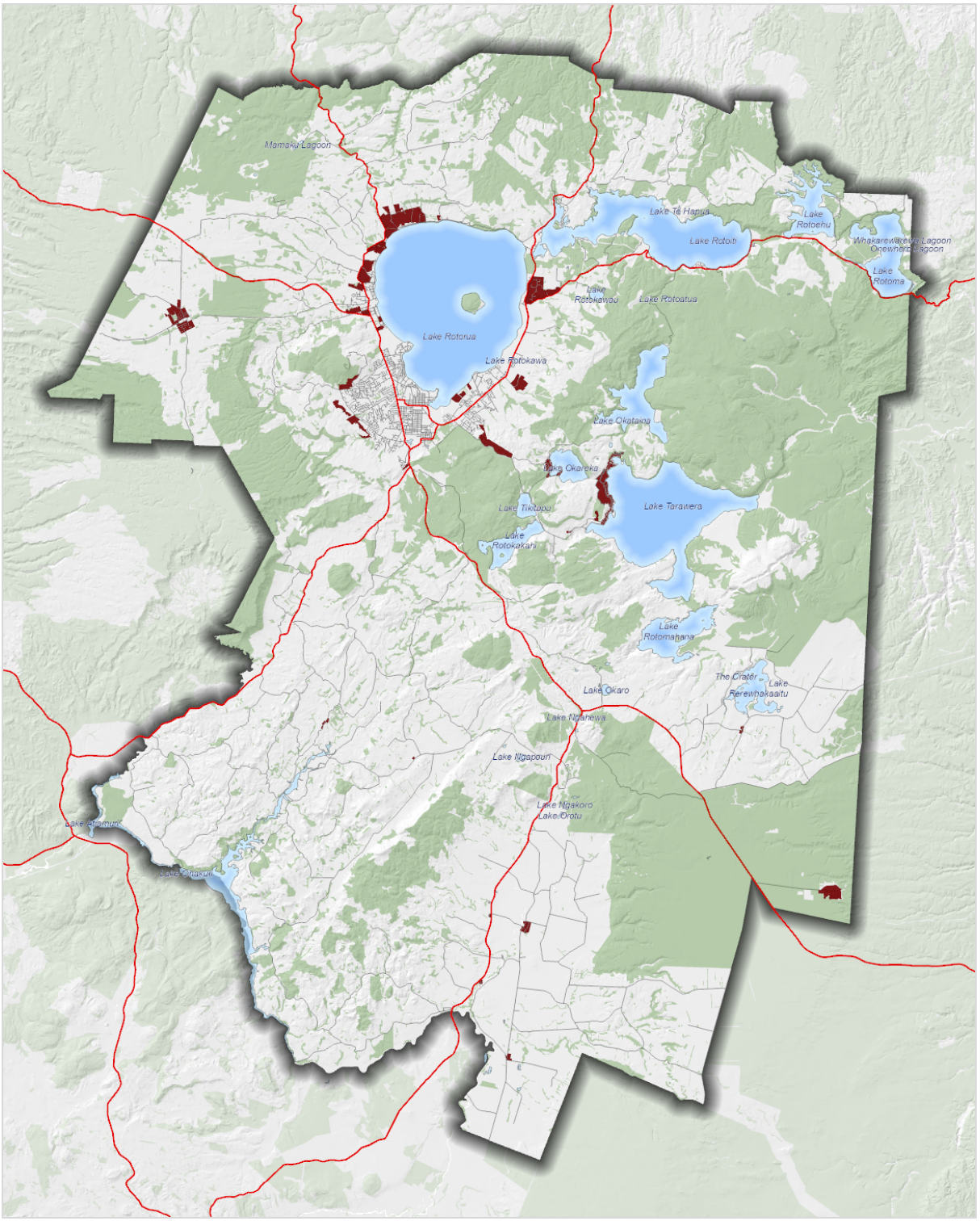

Figure 2 Rural Zones and Lakes A Management Areas proposed to be subject to firefighting water supply requirements (Brown)

8. Fault Rupture

8.1 Fault Rupture Hazards and Risks

The Rotorua District has a large number of locations where the ground has ruptured in the past in association with tectonic processes. As ruptures tend to occur repeatedly at the same location, these faults also mark where a rupture is more likely to occur again in the future causing potential damage to buildings, infrastructure and other structures, and potentially causing injuries or deaths due to structural damage or failure.

Faults are especially 'dense' in rural areas south of Rotorua city, as shown in figure 3 below. In fact, parts of the Rotorua District have the highest density of faults in New Zealand. However, the degree of activity along each fault in the Rotorua District varies and tends to be low to moderate when compared with New Zealand's fastest moving faults.

The mapping of faults was recently reviewed by GNS Science and updated mapping is now included in the New Zealand Active Faults database. This mapping identifies the location of fault traces as well as buffers around them (known as Fault Avoidance Zones or FAZs) to account for the potential zone of intense deformation and secondary ruptures. The location of these buffers / FAZs in the Rotorua District is illustrated in the figure below.

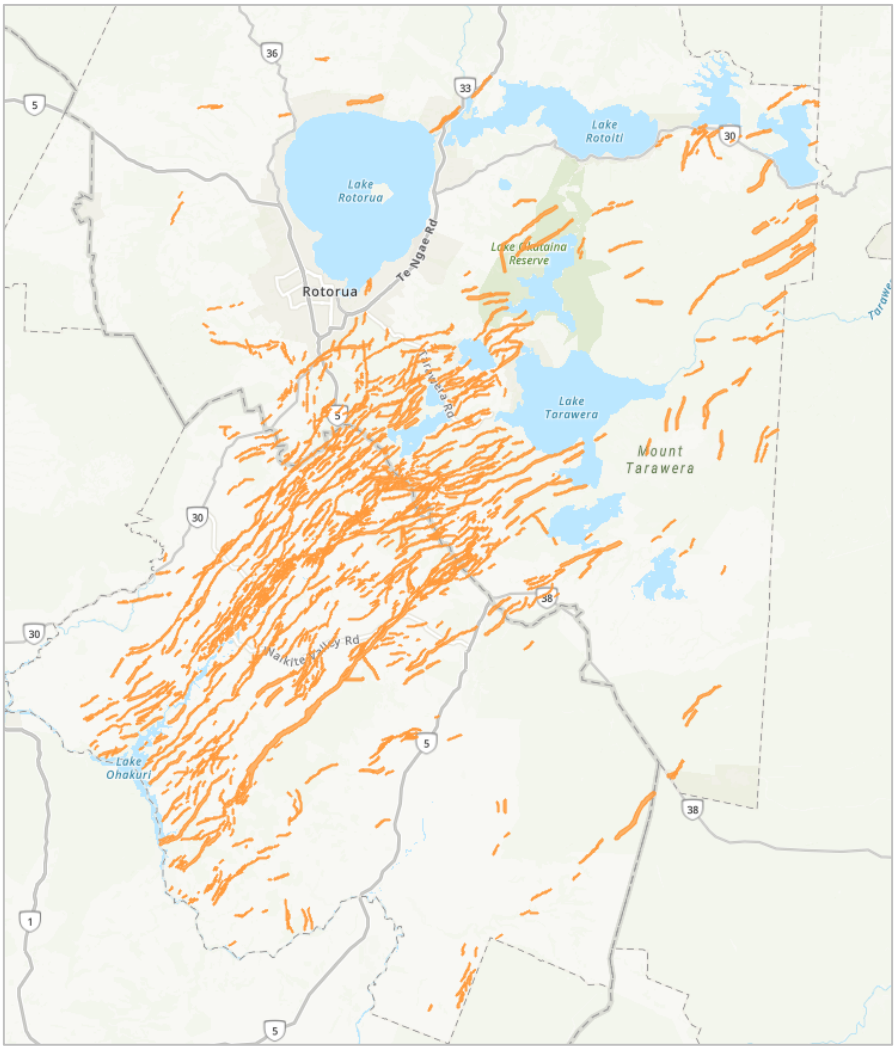

Figure 3 Fault Avoidance Zones (FAZs) in the Rotorua District (Source: New Zealand Active Faults Database, June 2025)

8.2 How the District Plan Currently Manages Fault Rupture

The District Plan currently manages fault rupture hazards through subdivision and land use rules, with more detailed provisions applying to areas outside the Lakes A Zone. This management sits alongside Building Code requirements for structural stability.

For areas outside the Lakes A Zone, the following District Plan approaches apply:

- **Assessment at subdivision** – All subdivisions must meet a general performance standard requiring each lot to have a building platform suitable for the intended use and free from erosion, subsidence, or slippage (Performance Standard SUB-S9(1)). While this standard applies district-wide, the presence of a mapped fault typically triggers consideration of fault rupture risk. Subdivision provides an opportunity to identify hazard issues early and guide appropriate site layout and development expectations.
- **Rules for Building within a Mapped Fault Avoidance Overlay** – The District Plan includes a Fault Avoidance Overlay based on the buffer areas (or FAZs) identified in a now-outdated study. The following rules for building within the overlay (Rules NH-R1 to NH-R3):
    - Additions to existing buildings are permitted.
    - New 'low importance' buildings (e.g. small, non-habitable structures under 30m²) are also permitted.
    - Replacement of existing buildings is permitted if the footprint is not extended.
    - New buildings or footprint extensions within the overlay require a restricted discretionary consent, including a geotechnical assessment of fault location, recurrence interval, and mitigation measures. These assessments tend to follow the Ministry for the Environment's 2003 guidance on Planning for Development of Land on or Close to Active Faults, which involves a risk-based approach, involving consideration of how often the fault is likely to rupture and the type of development.

Within the Lakes A Zone, fault hazards are acknowledged in general terms in the policies and objectives, but supported only through general rules:

- **Building platform standards** – Require that platforms be located clear of areas of instability or known hazards, which can include active faults (Rule 6).
- **Subdivision assessment** –refers to the performance standards for building platforms and, where this standard is not met, subdivision is a discretionary or non-complying activity (Rule 38).

8.3 Key Proposals for Fault Rupture

Plan Change 8 is seeking to clarify how fault rupture hazards are managed, improve consistency across the district and allow for the use of best available information on the location of faults.

Key proposals include:

1. **Remove fault mapping from the District Plan to allow for use of best available information on fault locations**
   The current active fault maps in the District Plan are based on an older study. They include faults now identified as inactive and do not include faults recently identified. The proposal is to remove the mapping from the District Plan altogether and instead use a new term – Fault Rupture Hazard Area –

to describe where the rules apply. This is defined as the likely area of rupture plus a 20-metre buffer on each side. The New Zealand Active Fault Database is anticipated to provide information about where this area is located but can be supplemented with site-specific studies.

2. **Keep existing rules for building near faults**
   Rules that manage buildings near fault lines (Rules NH-R1 to NH-R3) are proposed to be retained but updated to refer to the new Fault Rupture Hazard Area. While overlaps with the Building Act are recognised, these rules keep the focus on early risk identification and manage development that may not be required to obtain building consent.

3. **Add a Clear Policy to Support Rule Application**
   A new policy is proposed to require assessment of fault rupture risk and appropriate mitigation for subdivision and new buildings in areas susceptible to fault rupture (Policy NH-PAA). This helps link the rules to clear policy direction and improve transparency for plan users.

4. **Apply the Same Approach in the Lakes A Zone**
   Currently, fault rupture is handled differently in the Lakes A Zone. The proposal is to apply the same policy and rule framework across the district (including in the Lakes A Zone), improving clarity and ensuring consistent management of risk—regardless of location (Policy NH-PAA and Rules NH-R1 to NH-R3).

9. Land Stability Hazards – Slope Stability, Liquefaction, Soft Soils

9.1 Land Stability Hazards and Risks

Ground Condition Hazards and Risks (Liquefaction and Soft, Compressible Soils)

Ground condition hazards in the Rotorua District include soft or compressible soils and the potential for liquefaction. Soft soils—such as peat, silts, and clays—are often found in swamps, lake margins, floodplains, and areas of fine sediment accumulation. These soils can compress under load, leading to damage of buildings and infrastructure. Liquefaction is a separate hazard that occurs in loose, saturated soils—typically sands—when strong earthquake shaking causes the ground to temporarily lose strength and flow, potentially resulting in lateral spreading, ground deformation, and significant damage.

These hazards pose risks to buildings and infrastructure, including roads and underground services. Soft soils can lead to uneven settlement and slope instability, while liquefaction can cause widespread damage across multiple properties and infrastructure systems, as experienced in the Christchurch earthquakes. Risks are influenced by both exposure (where development is located) and vulnerability (how it is designed). Areas near lakes, streams, floodplains, and reclaimed or poorly compacted land are especially susceptible.

Hazard mapping has been carried out to identify areas with soft ground and potential liquefaction risk. GNS Science mapped soft soil zones in 2010 based on geological conditions. More recently, liquefaction susceptibility has been assessed at a regional level by Tonkin & Taylor (2021), identifying much of Rotorua as “undetermined” or “possible” for liquefaction. While these maps are not included in the District Plan, they are publicly available and used in development assessments.

Slope Stability Hazards and Risks

Landslides in the Rotorua District are caused by a range of natural and human-induced factors. They occur when the stress on a slope exceeds its strength, and may be triggered by earthquakes, intense rainfall,

changes in groundwater, or long-term processes like weathering. Additional contributing factors include human activities such as earthworks, drainage changes, and vegetation removal. Instability also occurs along riverbanks where high flows undercut the base of slopes. The impacts of landslides can extend beyond the source area to include downslope 'runout' areas, regression at the top of slopes, and debris flow paths, particularly in steep terrain.

Rotorua is not among the most landslide-prone parts of New Zealand, but the district has experienced damaging landslide events in the past. Heavy rainfall in 1999 caused widespread landslides north of Lake Rotorua, while earthquakes in 2004 triggered over 100 landslides around Lakes Rotoehu and Rotomā. Natural Hazard Commission (formerly the Earthquake Commission or EQC) data on settled insurance claims further illustrates that landslides have been an issue for property, resulting in claims. Climate change is also expected to increase the frequency and intensity of rainfall-triggered landslides due to more extreme storm events.

Landslide susceptibility mapping has been carried out for the district by GNS Science (2010) and more recently by WSP for the Bay of Plenty Regional Council (2024). These maps classify areas from 'very low' to 'very high' susceptibility based on terrain, geology, and slope angle. However, they focus only on potential source areas and do not assess runout or regression. Landslide susceptibility maps also do not provide estimates of the likelihood of landslides and are best used as a screening tool to identify areas where site-specific geotechnical assessments are needed. This reflects the highly localised nature of slope stability risk.

9.2 How the District Plan Currently Manages Land Stability Hazards

Risk from land stability hazards is managed through the combined use of District Plan rules, national building regulations under the Building Act 2004 (the Building Code), national geotechnical guidance, and case-by-case technical assessments at development stage.

For areas outside the Lakes A Zone, the District Plan addresses land stability hazards primarily through rules applied at the time of subdivision. Subdivision performance standards require developers to provide information to demonstrate whether land is likely to be subject to slippage or subsidence and confirm that proposed lots are safe for their intended future use (Performance Standard SUB-S8). Sites must also include a suitable foundation area that is free from instability and foundations and bulk earthworks must also be certified by a qualified geotechnical engineer (Performance Standard SUB-S9)

The District Plan also controls earthworks, placing limits on the volume and steepness of cuts, and restricting works near water bodies, which can destabilise slopes (Rule EW-R1 and Performance Standard EW-S1). If these thresholds are exceeded, the effects on natural hazards, including slope stability, must be assessed as part of a resource consent.

The District Plan also includes a policy for Rural Zones that seeks to manage land instability (Policy NH-P2), but this is not strongly reflected in land use rules. Instead, risks from building placement on unstable land are addressed through the Building Act.

In the Lakes A Zone, rules require that building platforms avoid unstable areas, and some areas have additional restrictions for building on steep slopes (Rule 6). Similar to the rest of the District Plan, the Lakes A Zone also has performance standards for earthworks (Rule 5). These also take slope angle into account.

Vegetation disturbance rules may also help reduce instability in steep areas, but these were developed for other purposes and are outside the scope of this plan change.

9.3 Key Proposals for Land Stability Hazards

Plan Change 8 is seeking to clarify and strengthen how land stability hazards are managed through the District Plan.

Key proposals include:

1. **Remove static hazard maps from the District Plan**
   Soft soil maps and landslide susceptibility maps are proposed to be removed from the District Plan. This is intended to allow for use of the most up-to-date geotechnical information in understanding the constraints affecting development, rather than maps that may become outdated or misleading over time. However, it is recognised that these maps may change less than other maps, such as flood hazard mapping.

2. **Clarify expectations for subdivision**
   The plan change proposes to replace the existing Policy NH-P1, which is not well-connected with methods, with a new policy to acknowledge assessment of land stability at subdivision, and applying this policy to the whole district, including the Lakes A Zone.

   Terminology is also proposed to be amended in the subdivision performance standards to improve clarity and reflect actual practice – such as replacing the need for a 'foundation area' to a 'building platform' (SUB-S8(3) and SUB-S9(1)).

3. **Refine Performance Standards for Earthworks**
   The plan change also proposes to reduce the permitted volume, cut face and fill depth thresholds in the performance standards for permitted earthworks in Industrial Zones, Business and Innovation Zones, and the Rural 1 Zone to improve the management of slope stability risks (Performance Standards EW-S1(1)).

   It also proposes to reduce and clarify the scope of the exceptions from the need to comply with earthworks performance standards for earthworks associated with subdivision and building platforms (EW-S1(4)).

10. Geothermal Hazards

10.1 Geothermal Hazards and Risks

Geothermal activity in the Rotorua District creates a range of hazards, including geothermal surface features (such as mudpools, steam vents, and geysers), heated ground, noxious gases (e.g. hydrogen sulphide and carbon dioxide) and damaging geothermal fluids, ground instability, and hydrothermal eruptions. These hazards can cause injury, damage to buildings and infrastructure, corrosion of materials, and in rare cases, fatalities. Heated ground and gases can also create uncomfortable or unhealthy living environments. In addition, human-made infrastructure such as bores may create hazards. These hazards and risks are very site-specific.

Land use and development can increase geothermal risk by placing people or structures close to hazardous features, interfering with geothermal processes (e.g. through stormwater discharge or high site coverage), or concentrating gas emissions.

10.2 How the District Plan Currently Manages Geothermal Hazards

Geothermal hazards are managed in the District Plan through a combination of subdivision and land use rules. This sits within a broader framework that also includes building design controls under the Building Code, particularly provisions related to structural stability, durability and protection from hazardous agents.

For areas outside the Lakes A Zone, the following District Plan management approaches apply:

- **Assessment at subdivision -** if land is within the Rotorua Geothermal Systems Overlay or affected by geothermal features, activity, or bores, a geothermal hazard assessment is required as part of the subdivision application (Rule SUB-R42). This must identify geothermal risks and propose measures to avoid, remedy or mitigate them (Performance Standard SUB-S8(2)). Subdivision must also provide a suitable building area free from subsidence, based on advice from a qualified geo-professional (Performance Standard SUB-S9).
- **Setbacks from geothermal surface features and bores -** resource consent is required if a building or structure is proposed within 5 metres of a geothermal surface feature or bore (Rule NH-R6). In these cases, Council assesses the potential for natural hazard impacts or for the development to worsen existing hazards.
- **Impervious surface standards -** hard surfaces can contribute to increased ground heating and prevent the release of geothermal gases, so that the gases are forced into other areas such as neighbouring properties. Maximum impervious surface standards do not apply in all zones and are not specifically targeted at management of geothermal hazards, but if a standard is exceeded, and consent is needed, geothermal hazards are considered alongside other effects.
- **Assessment of hazards and mitigation at the time of building –** Within the Rotorua Geothermal System, an additional performance standard applies to require an assessment of geothermal hazards and mitigation to be submitted at the same time as most building consent applications (Rule NH-R8). This rule aims to leverage off assessments already undertaken to support building consent applications while addressing risks not fully covered by the Building Code—such as site layout and effects on neighbouring land. The rule was introduced by the recent plan change to facilitate intensification of residential development (Plan Change 9) and was limited to the Rotorua Geothermal System because of the scope of that plan change. Rotorua Lakes Council has published guidelines to help with the preparation of geothermal hazard assessments.

Within the Lakes A Zone, the policy direction acknowledges and seeks to manage geothermal hazards, but there are few specific rules to directly manage them, and management relies on general hazard provisions:

- **Building platform standards** - require that building sites be located clear of known hazards, which may indirectly address geothermal risks (Rule 6).
- **Subdivision discretions –** usually allow for consideration of natural hazards, but notably not in the Less Sensitive Rural Management Area despite the fact that some parts of this management area are located within identified geothermal systems (Rule 38).

10.3 Key Proposals for Geothermal Hazards

Plan Change 8 is proposing changes to make geothermal hazard provisions in the District Plan clearer and more consistent across the district. Proposals also respond to feedback from iwi about the importance of

geothermal areas and gaps in the management of geothermal hazards presented by law changes to enable 'granny flats'.

Key proposals include:

1. **Retain the Geothermal System Maps in the District Plan**

   The District Plan will continue using geothermal system maps to show where geothermal rules apply. These maps give a broad indication of where geothermal hazards might be present. No better alternative has been identified.

2. **Clarify where assessment of geothermal hazards is required at subdivision**

   Subdivision rules are proposed to be updated to clearly apply to sites within the geothermal systems overlay or those affected by geothermal features or bores (Rule SUB-42 and Performance Standard SUB-8(2)). This replaces wording that may create confusion about when geothermal hazard assessments are needed at the time of subdivision.

3. **Apply the requirement to assess geothermal hazards and mitigation at the time of building consent more consistently**

   The plan change also proposes to extend the requirement for an assessment of geothermal hazards and mitigation to be provided at the same time as a building consent application (which currently applies only in the Rotorua Geothermal System) to all geothermal systems (Rule NH-R8). Figure 4 shows the location of the geothermal systems as they are mapped in the District Plan.

4. **Better Recognise Māori Values and Papakāinga**

   New policy wording is proposed to reflect iwi aspirations and cultural connections to geothermal areas throughout the district—not just in the historic villages of Ōhinemutu and Whakarewarewa (Policy NH-P3). This will help guide decisions where geothermal risks need to be considered, for example subdivision in geothermal areas and where setbacks from geothermal surface features are not met.

5. **Introduce New Rules for 'Granny Flats'**

   With national changes making it easier to build small homes (like 'granny flats') without building consent, the plan will introduce a new rule to require resource consent and ensure geothermal risks are still considered when building consent is not sought for building in a geothermal system (NH-R8).

6. **Align the Lakes A Zone with the Rest of the District**

   Geothermal hazard rules in the Lakes A Zone will be updated to match the rest of the district. Outdated policies will be removed, and the same hazard assessment and setback rules will apply. This will create a more consistent approach across the district.

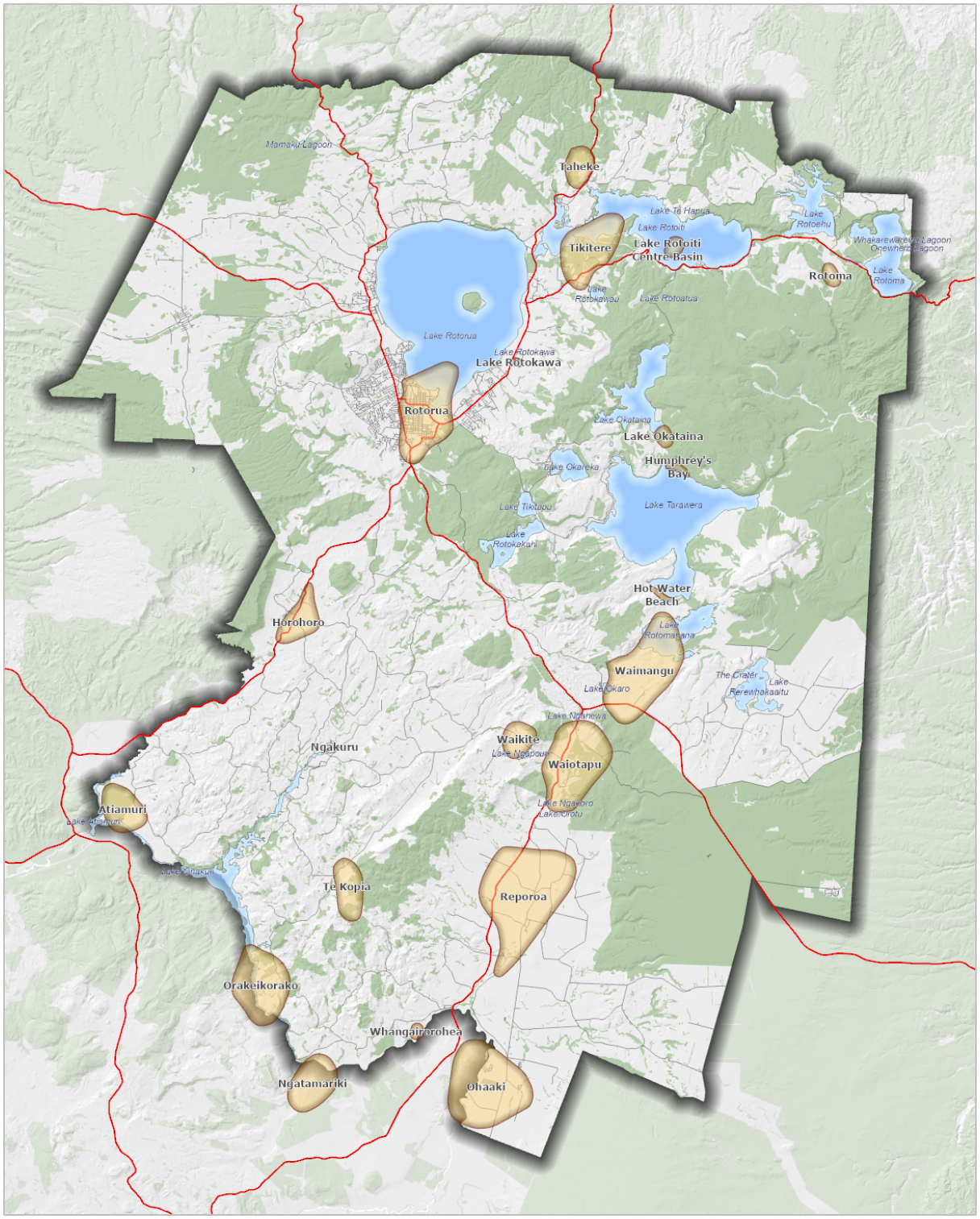

Figure 4 Geothermal Systems mapped in the Rotorua District Plan

11. Next Steps – The Plan Change Process

Submissions are being received on Proposed Plan Change 8 (Natural Hazards) until **8 September 2025.**

To find out more about how to make a submission go to rlc.net.nz/PlanChange8.

After the initial submission period closes, a further submission period will be provided to allow people to support or oppose original submissions. A hearing will then be held to consider all submissions and evidence, after which the council makes its decision. Submitters then have the right to appeal the decision to the Environment Court.