

## Restoring our wetland treasure – Whakaora te repo, ka ora te taonga Wai

### What's been happening to achieve the vision

Our vision is restoring our wetland treasure, and staff and volunteers have been busy this year working towards this.

### Developing a logo

Part of our work is to increase the profile of Wairarapa Moana. It's the feature that gave our valley its name and the Wairarapa Moana Wetlands Group wants to make it easy for people to connect with it. A strong image that can be used on letters, pamphlets, signs and web material helps build identity.

The group ran a competition among Wairarapa secondary schools to design a logo with a first prize of \$1000 for the student and another \$1000 for the school. Students were encouraged to go to the Wairarapa Moana Exhibition at Aratoi for inspiration. Dozens of quality entries made judging difficult but the eventual winner was Carterton's Claudia Hickey of St Matthews Collegiate School. Her design depicts eels, water and the Rimutaka Range that the group felt were both simple and effective.

The school donated its \$1000 back to the project and 20 students used the money to plant 300 native trees at Lake Domain this winter.



The project logo designed by Claudia Hickey of Carterton, pictured here with Wairarapa Moana Wetlands chair Fran Wilde.

### Plenty of planting

It's been another great winter for planting with substantial events at Wairio Wetlands, the Ruamahanga River Cut-off, Lake Domain and Lake Onoke.

Ducks Unlimited continued leading its impressive wetland development at Wairio Wetlands, with the construction of new ponds and islands. Planting the islands was challenging, but Jim Campbell and Ross Cottle did a great job of ferrying the plants and volunteer labour across the ponds in dinghies.

More than 40 volunteers planted a further 2.3km of the Ruamahanga River Cut-off this winter.

Farmer Mike McCreary fenced a generous strip of land adjacent to the cut-off and this was filled in with 4000 native wetland plants. These plants will provide shade and habitat for native animals and help stop nutrients getting into the waterway. Mike and neighbour Ed Handysides are endeavouring to plant all their land that borders the cut-off. The project is being funded in equal shares by the landowners, the Department of Conservation and Greater Wellington Regional Council.



Volunteers make the most of ideal planting conditions at the Ruamahanga River Cut-off

Locals and school children got stuck into planting a strip alongside Lake Onoke from the camping ground to the hotel. This planting was organised by DOC and supported the South Wairarapa Biodiversity Group and the Lake Ferry Ratepayers Association, among other groups.

There were several plantings at Lake Domain with the intent of providing shelter for picnickers and campers. The areas for planting are set out in a development plan that was finalised by South Wairarapa District Council this year.

### Controlling pest plants

Much of this has been focused on the high value wetland areas on the eastern shore of Lake Wairarapa. Staff controlled another 81ha of alders and willows and 25ha of blackberry that were crowding out the native plants and animals. Spraying willows this year was part of a concerted effort to restore Boggy Pond to as near natural as possible, as this is the best remaining example of a wetland near Lake Wairarapa.



Willows at Boggy Pond at the bottom right of the picture are dying after spraying.



## Natives plants and animals

The past summer saw bird monitoring resume after a break of almost two decades. Overall bird numbers are on par with 20 years ago. A couple of species had declined, but this was part of a nationwide trend for those species. Several new species were sited and there were larger numbers of bittern and royal spoonbill.

There was concern about the future of kakahi (native freshwater mussel) after a survey this year found plenty of mature kakahi, but no juveniles. Not a good prospect for any species and something that needs further attention.



Kakahi - freshwater mussel

Two rare plants are bouncing back at Lake Domain since grazing was limited to west of the yacht club. *Carex buchananii* and *C. cirrhosa* are popping up at the lake edge and growing strongly. It's a reminder that wetlands can heal themselves if we remove the negative pressures.

## Wairarapa Moana Co-ordinating Committee

The co-ordinating committee began meeting formally again this year, providing comments on management issues that go to the governance group. The committee is made up of farmers, iwi and hapu, South Wairarapa District councillors and representatives from Fish and Game, Forest and Bird, Ducks Unlimited, the Wellington Conservation Board and the Lower Wairarapa Valley Development Scheme. The focus is on using the committee's mix of expertise to find lasting solutions to problems that are affecting the environment at Wairarapa Moana.

The committee has been discussing the big issues, like the future of managing effluent and nutrients from the wider valley and controlling aquatic pest plants. A big focus has been a new project that received \$1million of Government funding to improve the water quality and the future for native plants and animals on the wetlands at the edge of Lake Wairarapa.

## Fresh Start for Freshwater project

And speaking of funding, it was a real coup when Fran Wilde accepted \$1million on behalf of Wairarapa Moana Wetlands from Prime Minister John Key earlier in the year. This was part of the Government's Fresh Start for Freshwater Project.

The \$1million from Government is being matched by the regional council, DOC, Dairy NZ and Ducks Unlimited and is to be spent over three years. Everyone agreed that three years was too little to improve the water quality of the 7800ha Lake Wairarapa, so we decided to focus on the high value edge wetlands – Wairio, Boggy Pond, Matthew's Lagoon, JK Donald Reserve and Barton's Lagoon.

We intend to work with farmers around these wetlands to try and mitigate the effects of fertiliser and effluent on water quality. More than a dozen farmers are already involved. Staff will work with them and others on techniques to stop pollutants getting into drains, streams or groundwater and other ways on how water quality might be improved before it leaves the farm. One technique is enhancing existing wetlands on the farm to increase their ability to strip nutrients from the water. Another is to construct wetlands to achieve this. The National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research have several designs that are working in other parts of the country.

The better water quality coming from the farms, will then be further improved as it flows through the edge wetlands and more nutrients are stripped. We will monitor the improvement by measuring nutrient levels in water leaving farms, entering wetlands and leaving wetlands. We intend to develop a working model to improve water quality that could be applied across the wider valley in the future. It is very early days, but all involved are very keen to see it succeed.



Edge wetlands – From left, Matthew's Lagoon, Boggy Pond and Wairio in the distance.

## Wairarapa Moana book launch – 25 November

Various Wairarapa people have contributed 20 chapters on different subjects about Wairarapa Moana. They have in turn been edited by Masterton's Ian Grant and the book will be launched at Featherston's Anzac Hall on 25 November at 4.30pm. The idea of the book was to build on the information in the Wairarapa Moana Exhibition at Aratoi and make it widely available.

## For more information

Please call Jim Flack at Greater Wellington's Masterton office 06 8261542, or the Department of Conservation's Masterton office 06 3770700.

