

Ancient forest recreated at Koromiko

The memory of the magnificent forests that once filled river-flats and terraces north of the Wairau River, is being revived on the four hectare Koromiko Forest Reserve.

The Marlborough District Council (MDC) took on management of the Reserve – on State Highway One between Tuamarina and Picton – in March 2002. Since then, close to 12,000 native seedlings have been planted by pupils of Koromiko School, the local community, Marlborough Forest & Bird and contractors. In July last year, a QEII Open Space Covenant was registered on the title, ensuring its long-term protection.

The revegetation project is aimed at creating an understorey beneath remnant beech and totara trees, some a century or more old, says MDC reserves and amenities officer, Robin Dunn.

For 30 years, the Marlborough branch of the New Zealand Deer Stalkers Association ran the four hectare reserve as a deer park. On display were red and fallow deer, a thar, a couple of wallabies and some goats which along with sheep and cattle grazed for neighbours, kept the pasture beneath the trees clear of native plant seedlings as well as weeds.

The MDC's initial focus at the Reserve was on upgrading the popular picnic area and toilets.

The suggestion that a historic forest be re-created there came from former Deer Stalkers Association member and

revegetation enthusiast, John Walsh of Fairhall. After a site visit by MDC and Department of Conservation (DOC) staff and environmental specialists, the idea's merit was confirmed in an ecological report written by respected Canterbury ecologist, Geoff Walls. "Almost unique", was Walls' impression of the Koromiko site. The trees that remained provided the best example of valley-flat treelands in the North Marlborough ecological district, if not the wider region.

An exciting discovery was the nationally endangered yellow mistletoe (*Alepis flavida*). Totara and black beech were the most common trees followed by silver beech. Also present were several matai, a broadleaf and two white maire (just outside the boundary). The very largest silver and black beech trees were thought to have pre-dated logging.

"The decision by MDC to nurture the treeland and use it as the basis for restoration of native forest on the site is laudable," said Walls.

Authenticity assured

Only seedlings or plants raised from seeds sourced from the site and neighbouring land have been used in this restoration project. This is important for the ecological integrity of the site, Dunn explains. Species planted include, beech, totara, tawa, titoki, pukatea, miro, rimu, pokaka, hinau, narrow-leaved lacebark, ribbonwood, kowhai, kanuka, manuka, karamu, mapou, small-leaved

coprosmas, turepo (small-leaved milk tree), kohuhu, tarata (lemonwood), putaputaweta, kaikomako, lancewood and cabbage trees.

Most plants have been propagated at Morgans Road Nursery.

Possums are a threat to the yellow mistletoe and also totara trees and seedlings so there is ongoing control using traps. Wasp and rabbit control also takes place as required. Ongoing weed control is necessary to ensure invasive species do not take hold, now that they're no longer grazed back. Other work on the site has included removing internal fences and strengthening perimeter fences, creating sloping pseudo river swales for planting, and forming gravel tracks for access. Soil from the river swales was used to partially infill the former gravel pit located beside the picnic area and ensure it's safe for visitors. New helpers are always welcome.

Honda provides funds

Honda New Zealand's TreeFund has been strongly supportive of the Koromiko Forest Reserve restoration project.

The TreeFund finances the planting of 10 native trees by New Zealand Regional Councils for every new Honda sold, to offset vehicle greenhouse gas emissions. In the three years since the fund was established, it has paid for 277,620 trees.

"Last year's payment towards the Koromiko project was a very useful \$4550," says Robin.



Contractor Steve Dower demonstrates tree-planting techniques to Koromiko schoolchildren, who help out with the forest restoration project.



At Koromiko, these beech and totara trees are all that remain of magnificent forests which once filled Marlborough riverflats and terraces, north of the Wairau River.

Reserve will showcase kahikatea

Four remnant kahikatea trees in a Spring Creek reserve have inspired the Marlborough District Council (MDC) to potentially recreate a 10 hectare floodplain forest alongside State Highway One.

The kahikatea trees are a lonely reminder of the 60 hectare Big Bush forest that stretched from Grovetown to Spring Creek, when European settlers arrived in the Wairau in the mid 1800s, says MDC reserves and amenities officer, Robin Dunn.

The River Reserve's primary role has been to store and pond Spring Creek floodwaters when the Wairau is in significant flood, which occurs once every five years or so. The proposed creation of a forest is complementary with this flood protection role, says Robin.

Being low-lying, moist and fertile and situated alongside Spring Creek with the Wairau River close by, the site is fairly unique. Over recent years it's been leased for dairy grazing which will continue in areas not immediately identified for restoration planting in early stages of the project. Two small areas have already been removed from

the lease and planted with kahikatea and other locally sourced native seedlings.

"Council is keen to recreate a portion of this historic forest, as part of its commitment to protecting and enhancing the Wairau Plain landscape through good environmental stewardship," says Robin. "Our vision is to restore the Reserve in a way that reflects its origins as a lowland kahikatea swamp forest and provides valuable habitat."

Being visible from the main highway and accessible from Peninsula Rd, over time the forest is expected to become a showpiece of ecological restoration. Long-standing local ecologist, Margaret Peace, has provided inspiration with a similar transformation from paddock to native forest, on her Tuamarina property. Ecologist Geoff Walls – contracted by the MDC to identify and evaluate significant natural areas in Marlborough – says the reserve is well suited to restoration of swamp forest and other wetland habitat because it is low-lying and damp, kahikatea is already there, restoration planting has already begun beside Spring Creek and it is highly visible from State Highway One.

There has already been some planting of

native trees, shrubs, toetoe and harakeke (flax), alongside Spring Creek where it runs through the Reserve. Establishment success has been unusually high and growth rates extraordinary due to the favourable site, the selection of suitable plants and excellent planting and after-care techniques, Walls observes. Christchurch-based Lucas Associates Landscape Planners has prepared a Spring Creek Kahikatea Park Landscape Concept Plan, including a 10 year restoration programme. This begins with selective removal of willows, earthworks including excavation of low points to accentuate wetter areas and naturalisation of drains including Hall's Stream.

Plans include opening up creek margins in some places to increase water carrying capacity and creating areas of deep, still calmed waters as safe habitat for juvenile eel and inanaga away from predation by trout and adult eels. Walking tracks, boardwalks, jetties, viewing platforms, bird hides and interpretation facilities would encourage public enjoyment of the Reserve, which ultimately could be extended on the other side of State Highway One.

Plenty of planting projects

The Marlborough District Council also has native planting projects underway at a number of reserves including;

- The Wither Hills Farm Park including the 45 ha Sutherland Stream QE II open space covenant
- The Aerodrome Road - New Renwick Road intersection – berm amenity planting
- State Highway 63 - Anglesea St intersection – amenity roadside planting
- The Dillons Point Road - State Highway One corner - riparian and amenity planting
- Blind Creek River Reserve – riparian planting in association with the local Landcare Group and the Rivers and Drainage section
- Grovetown Lagoon enhancement project – ecological planting in partnership with iwi and the community
- Grovetown State Highway One - roadside amenity planting
- Endeavour Park in Picton - restoration and amenity planting after recent sports-field development
- Endeavour Heights Reserve, Picton - riparian planting
- Indigenous planting within various Picton reserves and roadside plantings
- Awatere Bridge – amenity roadside planting

To find out more about Marlborough District Council planting projects or to offer help, contact;

Reserves and Amenities Officer
Robin Dunn

Ph 520 7400

robin.dunn@marlborough.govt.nz



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