



Chilean needle grass on increase

Council's Biosecurity team is working hard to combat the long-term threat from Chilean needle grass with 2,615 hectares now affected in Marlborough.

Intensive on ground search and destroy operations over the key seeding season supported landowners' year-round efforts, Council's Senior Biosecurity Officer Liam Falconer told Council's March Environment and Planning committee meeting.

A priority programme targeted containment of the high threat pest with the aim of early intervention and put pressure on lightly infested properties.

"There is a huge amount to lose if we button off – we need to keep going hard on this," Mr Falconer said.

Ten new Chilean needle grass infestations were discovered this past season including a first detection in an urban setting within Blenheim. The invasive pest was also found on new properties near existing known areas in Ben Morven Road, Taylor Pass and Marfells Beach Road.

The land area affected has increased 21.9 hectares from last season.

"Even with an enhanced level of input and investment by

Council there continues to be new infestations discovered and ongoing difficulties preventing low to moderate infestations escalating to becoming more troublesome," Mr Falconer said.

Chilean needle grass was first recorded in Marlborough in the 1940s in the Blind River area.

While its distribution is somewhat confined, the long-term impacts should it build to high densities across Marlborough would be severe, Mr Falconer said.

Ongoing changes in management staff on corporate owned properties was a challenge to understanding spread risk with mowers and other machinery.

"Intensity of land use has changed over time with a lot more people interacting with these properties and a lot of machinery moving between blocks," he said.

Anyone seeing suspected Chilean needle grass is urged to contact Council's Biosecurity team as soon as possible.



📷 A new Chilean needle grass infestation in urban Blenheim

Ronga Road works finished

A roading milestone has been reached at Ronga Road near Rai Valley.



📷 Recovery repair works at the Ronga Road slip site are now complete

Roading recovery repair works were completed at the site of a slip 5.5 km from the SH6 turn off. "During the August 2022 weather event a slip came down across the road, unfortunately bringing a house with it, which closed the road for approximately six weeks," Marlborough Roads Recovery Manager Steve Murrin said.

"This has been one of many large roading recovery projects around the region with approximately 15,000 cubic metres removed from the site in April and May 2023," he said. "During this time slip material and debris was removed from the western side of the road, new water channels created, and existing ones cleared and deepened."

In November 2023, the eastern side of the slip was cleared from the property and drainage lines installed. In February and March 2024 new culverts were installed at three sites to complete the drainage works. This was followed by sealing.

"The property owner also tilled the paddock on the western side of the road to return it to useable land. It's fantastic to see these repair works completed," Mr Murrin said.



📷 A house in the middle of Ronga Road after the August 2022 storm

Cooler conditions sees Wither Hills reopen



Walkers and cyclists have returned to the Wither Hills Farm Park.

Council reopened the park to users last Wednesday given the run of cooler temperatures.

Council's Parks and Open Spaces Planner Linda Craighead said staff were very appreciative of the public's response in staying away from the farm park during the last couple of months.

"It is great to see other areas being used," she said. "While the park is open it is still dry and we ask that the public remain vigilant and if temperatures do increase or it is windy then walkers and bikers

should stay on the lower tracks."

Council closed the Wither Hills Farm Park in January following discussions with Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ). The decision was made in the interest of public safety due to the dry conditions, steep slopes and warm and windy conditions.

Cooler overnight temperatures have lowered the fire risk but the grass is still dry and users are urged to stay on lower tracks especially in the middle of the day or if temperatures rise again.



Butterflies the focus of Pollard Park centre bed

As we enter a new season our gardeners have been working hard across the district to maintain our beautiful gardens.

Weeding, pruning and deadheading has been underway at Pollard Park, while this flower bed, known as 'centre bed', has been replanted with butterflies in mind.

The four plant types in the garden attract butterflies for feeding and pollination.