

25 July 2014

Forest and Bird Protection Society, Nelson Branch
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Paremata Flats Restoration Project Visit and Endorsement

Thank you for inviting me to visit your Paremata restoration project at the mouth of the Wakapuaka River last week. The trip was well-worthwhile: updating me with the progress that has been made since I visited a year ago, and also allowing me to respond to your request to critique the restoration work done so far and to provide advice for this coming season's programme.

I would like to take the opportunity in this letter to congratulate you on the fantastic restoration work that has been achieved to date. As I have said before, I fully endorse this project and consider it one of the most high priority habitat restoration initiatives in the Region.

As you know, Paremata is one of the few remaining areas of coastal alluvium still supporting native forest in the Nelson Region. Its acquisition by Nelson City Council as a reserve was pursued in recognition of this. When it was originally purchased, it was in ecological tatters: many of its natural processes were compromised due to its small size; the loss of cover had resulted in an induced, non-functional treeland with a high edge to size ratio, dominated by weeds and a chronic lack of native species recruitment resulting in local extinction of species.

Over the past two years this situation has had a spectacular turn-around with the adoption of Paremata for restoration by your Society. Your restoration efforts have been incredibly valuable as they have been based on sound ecological principles: actively minimising threats, mimicking natural succession as the pathway back to old-growth forest, using only eco-sourced plants and using an adaptive management approach. Also, your project is at a large enough scale that, if the restoration plan is fully implemented, it will secure the viability of this coastal remnant in the long-term. With nearly 36,000 plants in the ground over the last 3 seasons, this is one of the largest community restoration projects in the Nelson Region.

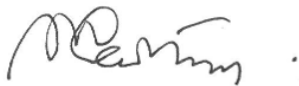
Its success is based on a committed and dedicated team of volunteers, using best practice restoration techniques, having good planning and management skills, with a proven ability to work with local authorities and landowners and to successfully seek funding for the project's continuation. It is also exciting to see the project at a stage, with pioneer species canopy closure, where consideration is now being given to planting old-growth forest species that would have been the original forest cover.

The restoration area includes habitats that transition from estuary and the river mouth delta system to riparian and alluvial habitats. This provides fantastic potential for multiple habitat restoration that is continuous along landform and hydrological gradients so as to recreate a full sequence of vegetation types from estuary to floodplain. The project also provides the opportunity to supplement existing plant species that are now regionally rare, as well as providing the ability to translocate back into the area species that are now locally extinct and/or nationally threatened. The well-supported trapping system you have set up for introduced mammalian predators, targeting ship rat, Australian possum, cats, stoats, ferrets and weasels, is also proving to be a vital tool for the maintenance and successful recruitment of nationally rare wildlife such as fernbird and banded rail and improving breeding success of the more common native bird species.

This project is the result of a fortuitous combination of a regionally important natural area desperately requiring active management and a willing, informed community-based conservation group providing substantial resources to undertake that management.

As you may be aware, your project is fully aligned with various national conservation policies. Enhancing and increasing the extent of this natural area is entirely consistent with the NZ Coastal Policy Statement regarding restoration and enhancement of the natural character of the coast. It also strongly aligns with the Council's biodiversity strategy which identifies Paremata Flats as an example of an ecosystem that is almost lost from the Nelson Region and is therefore accorded high priority for restoration. Furthermore, the national importance of Paremata Flats restoration project is underpinned by two of the four national priorities for biodiversity protection as defined by the Ministry for the Environment and Department of Conservation. These are: National Priority 1: To protect indigenous vegetation associated with land environments that have 20 percent or less remaining in indigenous cover, and National Priority 4: To protect habitats of acutely and chronically threatened indigenous species.

I am very happy to provide ongoing advice and reviews of your project and wish you well for the next restoration stage and to garner further funding for it.



Yours sincerely
Shannel Courtney
(Senior Ranger - Biodiversity Services -Department of Conservation)