

RANGITIKEI ENVIRONMENT

Rangitikei Environment Group (REG)

By Hugh Stewart

The Rangitikei Environment Group (REG) was formed in 2001 primarily to address the problem of Clematis vitalba (Old Man's Beard) in Rangitikei District Council reserve areas in and around Taihape.

The WINZ workers for both the Taihape Work Team, working under Noel Dockery (the Taihape Team Leader for 3 of the last 4 years) and Southern Work Team, working under John Wing have been made. The two Work Teams operate from 19 October to April each year.

The two trucks and spray units (held over from last year) are again operating throughout the Rangitikei targeting Old Mans' Beard, Blackberry and Sycamores on Council Reserves in Taihape; roadsides; and as part of the Weedbusters project.

"REG meets with home owners and farmers to show them how to deal with weed problems"

Rangitikei District Council confirmed that REG will receive additional funding from District Council of \$10,000 for roadside spraying in addition to what Council's contractors will receive, and another \$10,000 for replacement of equipment, chemical and general work in Council Reserves.

REG also meets with home owners and farmers to show them how to deal with weed problems and provides a follow up service in succeeding years.

We applied to the DOC Community Partnership Fund for funding for Old Man's Beard control in gorges on

Treasured Natural Environment Group

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farmland closest to the Rangitikei River and Ruahine Ranges.

This application was partially successful, with DOC providing \$30,000 of funding spread over 3 years. The area targeted is between Moawhango River and Rangitikei River on the Otuaireiawa Stream catchment. We will be meeting farmers and helicopter operator Simon Werthmuller shortly to plan the operation.



Dead Old Man's Beard vines in the Papakai Reserve, Taihape

Weed Eradication in our Parks

*By Athol Sanson
Parks and Reserves Team Leader
Rangitikei District Council*

Local residents may have noticed Council's Parks Team taking out the understory plantings in Marton Park and several other areas. The team will, over the next year, be removing a number of invasive weed species that have established in our parks beneath trees and in other damp areas.



Ivy (Hedera helix and Hedera canarensis)

The first on the hit list will be Ivy (*Hedera helix* and *Hedera canarensis*). Both were once acceptable garden plants but are now seen as invasive plant pests because they will ultimately cause long term damage to our feature trees in our parks. This species is easily spread by seed, which makes it a difficult plant to fully eradicate.

The second plant we will be removing is *Iris foetidissima* (Stinking Iris). Again this plant is continually naturalising in our parks and if left



Iris foetidissima (Stinking Iris)

unchecked will become a major plant pest. This is a small clumping Iris that reaches a height of 0.4m when mature. It will establish well in both wet boggy ground and under mature trees. Its small purple flower is followed by orange berries in late summer early autumn.

Both of these species are being removed manually as it is the best form of eradication and will do less damage to surrounding ornamental trees and shrubs than any other control method.

Once an area is cleared it will be maintained in a weed free state and when completely eradicated the area will be replanted with more ornamental and colourful species.



Ivy (Hedera helix and Hedera canarensis)

Let's Talk About Hill Country Cropping

By Brian Megaw

A fairly recent development on the hill country farming scene is the practice known as hill country cropping.

For those who don't know what that is, it is the application of glyphosate (Round Up) by helicopter on to generally steep hill country, followed by seeding and fertilising, also by helicopter.



Sprayed hill country

I undertook some online research about the practice, but unfortunately while there are quite a few articles about the economics of hill country cropping, there is very little regarding the long term environmental consequences of removing the pasture cover, destroying the existing root mat, and the consequences of leaving these steep slopes as bare dirt for months of each year.

I think there are several issues with this practice, which I will outline below.

1. Is this practice sustainable bearing in mind it is often carried out on slopes way over 20%? By sustainable I mean that there is unavoidable loss of the thin top soil that

presently exists. This practice does not appear to grow the topsoil in any way so at what point is serious long term damage done?

2. The One Plan did not envisage hill country cropping so are the rules pertaining to cultivating areas over 20% applicable? It would appear they are not, and because a machine does not physically cultivate the soil this practice is not viewed as cultivation. I find this somewhat bizarre when these steep paddocks are highly erodible bare dirt for months at a time.
3. The One Plan prohibits cultivation within 5m of a stream that flows all year round, or does not flow all year round but has a width of at least 1 metre. Helicopter spraying is just not that accurate. There are areas of spray drift all over the place, with some up to 20 metres beyond fence lines. Any streams within the target areas from my observations have been sprayed and the vegetation on their banks killed off. The result of this is huge sediment loads in these streams.
4. Is such widespread use of glyphosate safe? Monsanto – the maker of Round Up – in the past have assured everyone that it is safe. If that is the case, why are an increasing number of countries banning its widespread use, and why is Germany pushing for it to be banned in the EU? The concerns are based on studies linking it to carcinogenic issues. (It now appears that the carcinogenic issue is more related to the total chemical soup that makes up Round Up, not specifically glyphosate itself).



Small stream nearby a hill country cropping site

5. Climate change. While the rest of the world is talking about how to drop carbon emissions, and setting some big targets, we seem to be on an intensification mission that somehow pretends that what we do does not count.

Finally back to the Rangitikei River.

All our seasonal guides at River Valley have returned from mid-November. Without exception they have commented on the deterioration in the river since last season. Primarily the amount of silt on rocks, and building up in eddies.

Let's be honest here. This silt comes from farming practices that are not sustainable and are damaging to the environment and the river. Mike Joy, the controversial water scientist at Massey University, has demonstrated how this build-up

of nutrient loaded silt is not only bad for water quality, but also for threatened native fish species that use the space between rocks and in the gravel to live. Silt fills up these spaces.

“Without exception they have commented about the deterioration in the river since last season”

In Summary

Too often land use practices are adopted on a major scale without sufficient rules being in place that look at the whole picture. A picture that needs to include more than just the dollars and cents of growing more grass, but should include what are the effects on the overall environment, and how does a new practice effect rivers, streams and communities literally downstream.

I believe the lack of controls around hill country cropping is a case in point.



Sprayed hill country

*If anybody has questions, they can contact me –
Brian Megaw, brian@rivervalley.co.nz*

Bulls River Users Group

By Jo Rangooni

Jan Harris, Bulls Community Development Manager recently facilitated a meeting with people and groups interested in the area along the Rangitikei River by Bulls. Key issues discussed are outlined below.

Old Man's Beard and Ivy are issues in this area. Ivy is well established on some of the tall trees by the Bulls Bridge. Ways of dealing with this issue were discussed and the problem will be addressed.

Horizons has plans to remove pine trees north of the Bulls Bridge to prevent them falling in the river. In addition, a planting programme involving Horizons and the Schools is being developed for 2016.

Brian Scadden continues to grow and plant young native trees in the Native Area, established by him and Bill Genefaas in 1993. This is a wonderful grove of trees which has brought bird life back to the area, and is an important community asset.



Seating at the Rangitikei River access in Bulls

Higgins and Bullocks will be approached by Jan to improve the access road under Bulls Bridge when they next have machinery in the Area.

Anyone interested in being involved should contact Jan Harris bulls.community@xtra.co.nz

Upcoming Events

Treasured Natural Environment Group Meeting

February 2016

Contact Katrina Gray

katrina.gray@rangitikei.govt.nz

06 327 0099

Hautapu Catchment Care Group Committee Meeting

Contact Angus Gordon

angusg@xtra.co.nz

Bulls River Users Group Meeting

Contact Jan Harris

bulls.community@xtra.co.nz

Tutaenui Stream Restoration Group

Contact Greg Carlyon

021327774

If you have any contributions to the newsletter, any questions, or wish to subscribe please contact Katrina Gray katrina.gray@rangitikei.govt.nz
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