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Committee Rural Services and Wairarapa
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Key Native Ecosystems - Pest Plant Management Update

1. Purpose

To provide the Committee with an update on pest plant management work in Key Native Ecosystems and Territorial Authority Reserves in the 2006/07 year.

2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report do not trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger Section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

3. Background

At the beginning of the current financial year a contractor budget of approximately \$65,000 was designated for pest plant control in some of the Region's best Key Native Ecosystems (KNE). This enabled the department to tackle more holistically the pressures and threats exerted in these critical environments – particularly the impact of pest plants. It is these pest plants that undermine the integrity of our native ecosystems; by vines smothering and collapsing canopy species, by woody weed species shouldering their way in and displacing native plants, and by ground cover weeds preventing the processes of seedling recruitment and subsequent forest regeneration.

The key point about this pest plant control work is that we are not just controlling weeds but instead seeking to repair the natural processes in the KNEs' by removing the worst pest plants, and where needed, co-ordinating restoration plantings.

The site selection process depends on a combination of factors: the ranking of the KNE, whether it adds to the range of high value ecosystems, the type of threats impacting on the site. Ideally, the sites should be located across a range of Territorial Authorities (TA). Supporting a variety of ecosystem types supports greater biodiversity in the long term. Staff have worked this year in

wetlands, dunelands, coastal forest, estuaries, lowland forest, coastal escarpments and riparian zones.

4. Partnerships

A key feature of the KNE programme is the inter and intra-agency partnerships that have been developed and strengthened in recent years. Between the TAs' and DOC, the Department has secured over \$30,000 this financial year for pest plant control, mostly through memoranda of understanding, with a commitment to continue funding in the future. The Department has also worked with our colleagues in the Environment Division and Parks and Forests Department in various dune projects.

The Department will spend around \$65,000 on contract work in 20 of our region's best KNEs'. At present, work has been completed in over 50 large scale pest plant contracts covering over 1000 hectares. Assistance has also been provided to other GW staff and community groups for 9 environmental reserves outside the KNE programme, either through small scale weed control efforts, contract management, or advice and information.

Ecosystems with pest plant/ restoration work in 2006/7

(* reserves not in KNE programme)

	Districts/ Cities->				
Ecosystem types	Kapiti	Hutt Valley	Porirua	Wairarapa	Wgtn City
Lowland/ Coastal Forest	Waikanae Reserves (3 Reserves)	Flux covenant	Raroa reserve	Greytown Memorial Park	Trellisick Park*
		Galbraiths gully	Porirua park	Rewanui	
		Keith George	Porirua Scenic	Tauherenikau	
Wetlands/ Riparian	O-Te-Pua swamp	Hulls Creek*			Glenside stream*
	Te Hapua	Moehau stream*			
	Te Harekeke				
Escarpments	Raumati		Pukerua Bay		
	Paekakariki				
Dunelands	Waitohu dunes	Petone foreshore*			Island Bay*
	Waikanae*	Eastbourne*			Princess/Houghton*
	Paraparaumu*	Pencarrow			
Estuaries	Waikanae				Makara

As the table shows there are several gaps in representation across the TAs'. However biodiversity work from the GW wetlands and riparian groups occurs in the areas under-represented in the KNE system. The aim is to move the sites back to a healthy functioning state resulting in a reduction of expenditure in each site, allowing a gradual expansion into new sites.

Given the high degree of weed infestations and length of time they have been established, a 'healing' of the ecosystems may take 5-10 years. Although it takes time for the native regeneration to respond, there are already clear responses where GW have been controlling pest plants for more than two years. For example, at Tauherenikau where there were thick mats of Tradescantia there are now high numbers of native seedlings returning on the forest floor. In areas where there was complete weed coverage, GW and the community are planting natives to facilitate the process of regeneration. At the Waitohu dunes, the spinifex is racing to reclaim sand from dead and dying marram grass clumps, with the result being changing dune profiles and a progression to a more native ecosystem.

In summary, the KNE/ Reserves pest plant control programme to date has seen some huge gains made in terms of wrenching back the weeds in many of the KNEs'. With a sustained long term effort and the commitment of other agencies in this programme, we will make real gains in biodiversity by protecting and restoring a variety of ecosystems across the region.

5. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. ***Receives the report.***
2. ***Notes the content of the report.***

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