



RURAL FOCUS



Many landowners have noticed an increase in native birds on their properties as a side effect of possum control.

Maintaining the economic and conservation gains

SUCCESS WITH BOVINE TB AND NEW CHALLENGES

Success often creates new challenges. This is definitely the case in the Wellington region with the possum control programme to eradicate bovine tuberculosis from cattle and deer herds, says Councillor Ian Buchanan, chair of Greater Wellington's Catchment Management Committee.

"The programme has been so successful that the Animal Health Board (AHB), the agency responsible for implementing the Tb strategy, will be stopping this work for 80,000 hectares in the north of region over the next few years."

"This sets Greater Wellington and its ratepayers the challenge of how we maintain the gains created by this possum and predator control, without the assistance of the Government and industry-funded AHB."

"Councillors are currently considering whether Greater Wellington should fund a possum control programme to continue where the AHB are pulling back. It's a delicate issue. Do we sit back and watch possum numbers and possum damage build up again, or do we spend ratepayers money to stay on top of the problem."

"As with any issue concerning a future burden on ratepayers, it has to be considered very carefully."

THE BURDEN OF BOVINE TB AND POSSUM DAMAGE

Cr Buchanan says there have been obvious gains made across the region since the early 1990s.

"More of the region is becoming free of bovine Tb, which removes a significant economic burden to farmers. Fewer possums means healthier native bush, more native birds and better water quality."

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The wet winter
Lots of rain but little flooding

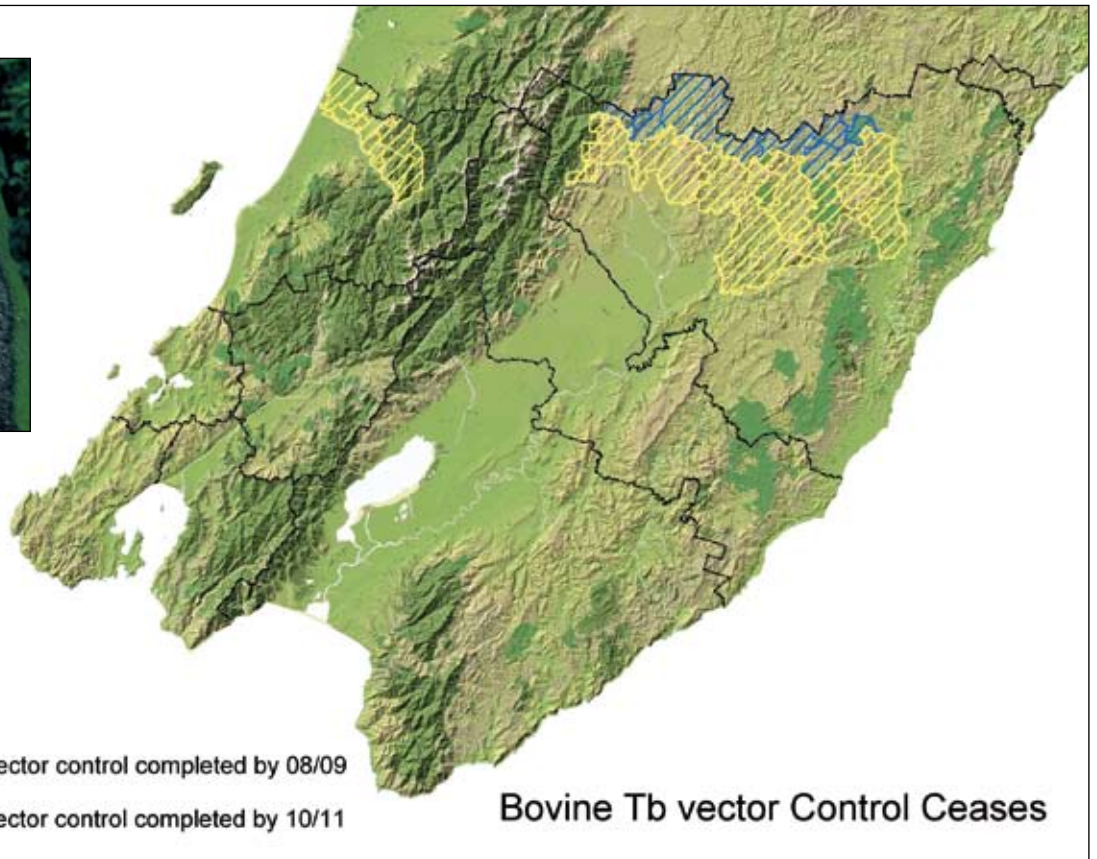
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Planning a wetland park
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Above shows the 80,000 hectares where AHB possum control will stop in the next few years

"Farmers are telling me they don't want to go back to the bad old days when bovine Tb, spread mainly by possums, was rife, particularly in Wairarapa. Fifteen years ago 330 herds were infected. Many farmers were tied down with regular and expensive regimes of herd testing, and were heavily restricted in moving stock around the region or further a field."

"These days nine herds are infected across the Wellington region (as at September 2008), but the benefits of possum control are far wider than controlling bovine Tb."

"Possums can also spread water borne diseases such as cryptosporidium, leptospirosis, and giardia. They can speed soil erosion by damaging soil conservation plantings or native bush in hill country. Possums graze pasture and can make a mess of fodder crops. They eat the eggs and chicks of our native birds and compete with the birds for food." "The fewer possums, the less these problems affect our region."

KEY NATIVE ECOSYSTEMS

While the AHB has focused on possum control in the region to curb bovine Tb, Greater Wellington has been doing comprehensive predator control in areas of high native biodiversity for the past decade. This work targets areas with significant remnants of native vegetation, including forest, wetland and coastal

areas, where predators are degrading or threatening the native plants and animals.

This has been part of the Key Native Ecosystem (KNE) programme where sites in Wellington region (outside of the Department of Conservation estate) with significant native plant and animal species were ranked. The sites with the best "biodiversity values" have the pest animals and plants that threaten them,

controlled. These pest animals include possums, ferrets, stoats, weasels, rats, feral cats and feral goats. A large range of pest plants are also managed where funds allow.

The KNE programme protects the significant native areas in our region that are outside the DOC estate. Many of these areas are valuable lowland forest that give a lot of character to the region.

QUICK FACTS

- \$60 million has been spent on controlling bovine Tb in the Wellington region in the past 15 years. Around \$20 million of this has been provided by regional ratepayers. The rest has come from affected industries and central government.
- The \$60 million investment means possum numbers are now far lower which has brought many gains to the region.
- Greater Wellington is contracted until 30 June 2009, to manage possum control work for bovine Tb in the Wellington region for the Animal Health Board.
- The AHB will be stopping possum control for bovine Tb on 80,000 hectares in the north of the region in the next few years.
- Some feral animals are capable of carrying and spreading bovine Tb to uninfected cattle and deer herds. These are predominantly possums and ferrets, but feral deer, and feral pigs are also known to carry bovine Tb.

Debris deflectors in floodways minimise the nuisance damage of branches strewn across productive land and collapsing stock fences.



A wet winter brought few floods

The region is fortunate that a wetter than normal winter did not translate to serious winter floods, says Flood Protection manager Graeme Campbell.

"We got a lot of rain over winter, but no major floods. Luckily the rain was well spread and not concentrated in intense events."

Mr Campbell says most of the rivers in the region stayed within their banks for the winter period and were spared any damaging erosion. "However, there were a couple of exceptions."

"The lower Ruamahanga River tested two recently redeveloped over flow 'sills' in the Pukio area near Martinborough.

Sills are low sections in the stopbank system that are designed to allow water out of a river during a flood event and into a managed floodway. In the lower Ruamahanga, the sills are designed to channel water into floodways that take the excess water into Lake Wairapa,

where it can be released once the flooding event has passed.

The productive land in the floodways is underwater for a time, but this has a far lesser effect than if the entire flow was allowed to rampage unchecked down the lower Ruamahanga and spill out onto farmland in an unmanaged way.

The sills operated on July 31 and August 27 when the lower Ruamahanga River was flowing ten times its average volume - 900 cubic metres per second, compared with a year to date average of 89 cubic metres per second. The lowest flow in February 2008 was four cubic metres per second.

Most of the flood debris flowing down the floodways was kept out of stock fences by new debris deflectors, which minimised nuisance damage to productive land.

Both these events caused minor erosion in the lower Ruamahanga and its tributary rivers, the Tauanui and Huangarua.

There was also some erosion in the Waingawa River where staff had to get machinery in and make repairs on three occasions. This work happened during the trout spawning season, which is of concern to freshwater anglers.

The Fish and Game Council is concerned about the amount of work happening in the rivers and how this affects fish habitat. Staff are working with Fish and Game to minimise the effect on fish habitat.

WINTER 2008 TWICE AS WET AS 2007

The region got roughly double the rainfall from June 1 to August 31 2008, than it did for the same period in 2007.

Rainfall comparisons for winter 2008 and winter 2007

Site	Winter 07 Rain in mm	Winter 08 Rain in mm
Masterton	213	417
Tauherenikau	227	500
Eringa Longbush	223	467
Reikiorangi	276	522
Otaki	205	414

The following major works are scheduled in the Lower Wairarapa Valley Diversion Scheme for 2008/09:

- Boulder groynes, rip rap protection and extension of the rock berm in the lower Ruamahanga River
- Upgrade the stopbank on the Tauherenikau River
- Major repairs to Mahaki Floodgate
- Clearing of willows and scrub in the upper part of Tawaha Spillway
- Removal of build up and improvement to channel downstream of the barrage gates.



The sill at Hikinui diverts water from the flooded lower Ruamahanga River into a floodway and on to Lake Wairarapa.

Planning for a wetland park

Steady progress is being made in a joint initiative to create a wetland park around Lake Wairarapa, Lake Onoke and their wetlands.

There was a substantial wetland planting at Lake Domain in September, controlling an invasive alder species has started and a cultural heritage study for the lake is underway says Greater Wellington chair Fran Wilde.

Several Wairarapa organisations have formed an establishment board and are working on this initiative. These organisations are South Wairarapa District Council, Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, Rangitane o Wairarapa, local hapu, the Department of Conservation and Greater Wellington.

"Lake Wairarapa is the third largest lake in the North Island, with many adjoining wetlands, which makes it a significant part of the region," says Cr Wilde.

"Wetlands typically support a lot of wildlife, which attracts people for different reasons. Lake Wairarapa has been an important food gathering area for centuries and remains popular with duck-shooters, fishers, birdwatchers and campers alike."



South Wairarapa Mayor Adrienne Staples and GW staffer Ross Jackson get stuck into planting at Lake Wairarapa

"Many of the people who use the lake have wanted its special characteristics recognised and enhanced for some time. A park would be a great way to improve recreation opportunities and the delicate ecology of the area."

"Tangata whenua, local and central government organisations are working together to make this happen. Greater Wellington is delighted to be part of that. We will be building on the work other organisations have been

doing over the years."

"Creating a wetland park would entail vesting the management of the public land at the lake under a park management board. "We will be taking the views and aspirations of users into account when planning a park."

South Wairarapa District Council mayor Adrienne Staples says Lake Wairarapa is the jewel in the crown for the district and she is very pleased to be part of a group of organisations working to improve it.

Planting continues on Wairarapa farms despite tough economic times

Dry stock farmers might have tightened belts in 2008 but they didn't skimp on soil conservation planting in hill country areas this winter says Wairarapa Hill Country Advisory Committee chairman Peter Gawith.

"Farm returns are well down after two dry years and farmers are looking hard at their budgets for potential savings, but it's good to see hill country farmers did not sacrifice their soil conservation plantings," Mr Gawith says.

"Winter planting has just finished and we have seen pole plantings of poplar and willow continue in the Wairarapa hills at the planned rate.

"It is very pleasing that farmers see on-going soil conservation as a priority and keep spending money on it in difficult years."

"About 30 percent of Wairarapa hill country is erosion-prone and soil conservation plantings are essential to farm these areas sustainably and to lessen the amount of sediment getting into waterways."

"Farmers benefit from stable land and everyone in Wairarapa benefits through cleaner rivers and streams."

Mr Gawith says many erosion-prone properties have soil conservation plans that are prepared by Greater

Wellington. Plantings are recommended and the costs are shared between the farmer and Greater Wellington.

Poplar and willow poles are purpose grown at the Greater Wellington's Akura Conservation Centre just north of Masterton and a riverside nursery on the Castlepoint Road. The trees are grown for their suitability to Wairarapa conditions.

The Wairarapa Hill Country Advisory Committee provides advice to Greater Wellington Regional Council. Six hill country representatives are on the committee – Peter Gawith (chair), Jenny Boyne, Jamie Falloon, Andrew Pottinger, Michael Blundell and Emily Crofoot. Masterton District Councillor David Holmes and Greater Wellington's Wairarapa Councillor Ian Buchanan are also on the committee.

Regional Pest Management Strategy review nears completion

More emphasis on pests that threaten human health and biodiversity, and a more user friendly style are three of the changes under the *Proposed Regional Pest Management Strategy 2002-2022*.

Every five years Greater Wellington must review the way it decides to manage pest plants and pest animals in the Wellington region. This started in March when submissions were sought on the *Proposed Regional Pest Management Strategy* (RPMS). The RPMS lists all pest plants and animals in the region, spells out the legal requirements for managing some pests and outlines the strategy for dealing with others.

Submissions are now closed, hearings have been completed and the review is nearing completion. The existing strategy remains in operation until the strategy review is approved, including any appeal. "Our staff have gathered lots of information in the field over the last five years, and this has led to many of the

changes in the proposed RPMS," says Greater Wellington biosecurity manager Wayne O'Donnell. "There have also been significant changes to the document to make it easier to use."

Mr O'Donnell says there were 23 submissions from organisations and individuals, both regionally and nationally.

"There were suggestions to stop managing some pests and suggestions to start managing new ones. Others suggested further rules for specific pests, and for some pests to be given a higher priority by Greater Wellington. All of the suggestions were useful and some led us to change part of the RPMS. Others will be used as key areas to focus on for future reviews."

"It is crucial we hear how the public views particular issues and that they have the opportunity to shape pest management within the region. There will be further opportunity to take part in shaping the RPMS during future reviews."

KEY CHANGES TO THE ORIGINAL RPMS:

- Increased emphasis on early intervention in the management of pests within the region through the addition of a 'Regional Surveillance' category.
- The removal of some pests from management by Greater Wellington due to them being more widespread than initially thought.
- The addition of a 'Human Health' section for those pests that are a risk to humans.
- The addition of a 'Biodiversity' section for protecting high biodiversity values that are not areas under Greater Wellington's Key Native Ecosystem programme.

To view the proposed RPMS visit www.gw.govt.nz/rpms

Disposing of unwanted agri-chemicals

Otaki organic farmer Greg Fletcher inherited a shed full of unwanted agricultural chemicals when he bought his orchard 'Totaranui' on Otaki Gorge Road.

Four years on, and after missing out on two earlier collections he is pleased to be rid of them thanks to a joint Greater Wellington and Ministry for the Environment programme aiming to rid the region of banned and unwanted agrichemicals. Greater Wellington contracted hazardous substance experts R & S McGregor Limited to undertake the collection over a week in winter.

A total of 1803 kg of agrichemicals was collected from 35 properties across the Wellington region. Well over half of the waste (64%) was intractable (difficult to manage) waste, and this will be shipped to France or Germany and broken down by high-heat incineration. The remainder will be sent to a treatment facility where it is prepared for disposal to landfill.

Greater Wellington environmental protection officer Naomi Middleton said Greater Wellington undertook the collection because the continued storage or onsite disposal of dangerous chemicals could lead to environmental contamination. She said persistent organic pollutants

such as DDT were among those targeted in the collection.

"We are keen to remind rural landowners that holding banned or unwanted agrichemicals can lead to properties being registered on Greater Wellington's Selected Land Use Register as contaminated sites.

In Greg's case many of the chemicals had been there for years and some were well past their use by date.

"It's great to get these things being collected so they don't end up harming the environment".

This is the third agricultural chemical collection Greater Wellington has undertaken following collections in 2003 and last year. Naomi says the amounts collected last year and this year were fairly similar.

"However, anecdotal evidence shows there are still a lot of stocks of chemicals in our region that will keep coming to our attention – people have already started sending in their registrations for next year's collection.

"People often inherit rural properties with old stores of chemicals; they may decide to change to organic land uses, or may suffer health problems which lead them to have to rid their proper-

ties of chemicals. In addition, chemicals that were previously deemed safe may become deregistered.

"There's also evidence of continued inappropriate use and disposal of banned and dangerous chemicals and this poses a risk of environmental contamination." Naomi says that Greater Wellington is considering another collection next year. The challenge will be to try to maximise the amount of agricultural chemicals collected, because the 2008/09 year is the final year of Ministry for the Environment funding.

"As yet there is no alternative strategy for the disposal of unwanted chemicals nationwide, or in our region."

The Paraparaumu golf club was also part of this year's collection and its superintendent Leo Barber hopes the collections will continue – he says that without them the high costs of safely disposing agrichemicals will encourage poor disposal practices.

Naomi says Environment Waikato is currently working with other regional councils to research ways of dealing with the legacy of unwanted chemicals in New Zealand, so that long-term ways of dealing with them can be found.



Greater Wellington staff spent several weeks at various sites in the Wairarapa with a mobile drill rig investigating groundwater

“There’s been a rapid increase in groundwater use over the past decade... mostly due to an increase in irrigated pastoral farming.”

involves detailed modelling of each of these catchments, is scheduled for completion in June 2009.

Phase two has already involved an extensive range of field studies. The drilling – at 11 sites in the middle of the valley – is enhancing understanding of the relationship between the area’s geology and groundwater. Groundwater isotope sampling has been undertaken to age-date water – in some of the sampled areas groundwater is greater than 150 years old – “we are currently awaiting results from Geological and Nuclear Sciences of how much older than this water actually is,” Doug says.

“The age of the water helps us see the groundwater resource in a new light. In some aquifers pumped groundwater may ‘recharge’ in a relatively short time, in other aquifers it may take hundreds or even thousands of years to replenish.”

The study also involves river gauging, groundwater water level contouring surveys, chemistry and seismic analysis, wetland monitoring and a water usage survey of 130 bore holes.

“The water use survey is crucial for enhancing our understanding of the effects of groundwater pumping, and we’re grateful for the help of bore holders in keeping records and telling us how much water they’re using.”

Doug says the study and model will feed into the review of Greater Wellington’s Regional Freshwater Plan and water allocation policies starting in December next year.

“In some areas, such as Parkvale, Kahutara and the eastern Martinborough Terraces, groundwater pumping may be causing a long-term decline in groundwater levels and this has prompted tighter regulations in the Regional Freshwater Plan on what people can and can’t do”.

“Ultimately, this model will give us the ability and the confidence to determine safe water yields and ensure the Wairarapa’s water resources are sustainably managed for the benefit of future generations.”

What flows beneath

Wairarapa residents may have stumbled upon drilling operations in a farmer’s paddock or a suburban Carterton street recently and chances are it was Greater Wellington’s environmental monitoring staff out and about with a mobile drill rig investigating the region’s groundwater resources.

They’re working on a major project to update Wairarapa’s complex aquifers and how they interact with the region’s rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands.

The project is the first major investigation into Wairarapa’s groundwater since original studies in the 1980s and comes at a time of increasing pressure on groundwater use from public water supply, domestic use, stock water and irrigation.

“There’s been a rapid increase in groundwater use over the past decade, with the volume of consented groundwater takes more than doubling in some places, mostly due to an increase in irrigated pastoral farming,” Greater Wellington groundwater scientist Doug McAlister says.

The project is assisting the development of a groundbreaking 3D computer model which will show what has happened to groundwater levels from the early 1990s through to the present day.

“The model will also enable us to test various scenarios for what might happen in the future as well as help us update our understanding of the complex interaction between groundwater and surface water,” Doug says.

“The Wairarapa valley has one of the most complex hydro-geological make ups in New Zealand. The geology splits the valley into a number of different groundwater zones, some with multiple aquifers at different depths.

“The subsurface geology impacts on the way water flows and moves as well as affecting the interaction between ground and surface water.”

The groundwater project has three phases. The first phase was completed in December 2006 and involved a regional review which resulted in splitting the Wairarapa valley into three distinct groundwater catchments. Phase two of the project, which

Greater Wellington toughens stance on dairying compliance

Enforcement through the courts looks increasingly likely after a Greater Wellington audit of dairying in the region shows too many farmers are not complying with some or all of their consent conditions.

Of the 146 farms audited in the summer and autumn about 30% were non compliant in some way, 21% were mostly complying and 49% were fully complying with their consent conditions.

The audit resulted in 38 advisory notices – many asking farmers to address non complying issues around their dairy effluent systems, 13 ‘please explain’ letters and seven infringements. The maximum infringement carries a fine of \$750.

Greater Wellington Environmental Regulation manager Al Cross said non-compliance ranged from leaks in farm effluent management systems to major ponding of effluent, which could lead to run off contaminating waterways and/or groundwater.

“This audit was only a small snap-

shot across the region and indicates a bigger problem. We haven’t seen any decrease in the level of non compliance and that is a major concern.”

Mr Cross said farmers who breached their conditions would face consequences that could include prosecution, particularly for repeat or serious offences.

Greater Wellington Regional Chair Fran Wilde said the Council was committed to the goals of the Clean Streams Accord, to achieve clean, healthy water in dairying areas.

“Dairying in the region has intensified over the past decade and we are starting to see its impact on water quality in our streams, rivers, lakes and wetlands. No one denies its importance to our economy but we want to ensure that dairying is both economically successful and environmentally responsible,” Cr Wilde said.

“A significant part of our commitment is to check progress against the third target of the Accord which is ensuring all farm dairy effluent

discharges comply with resource consents and regional plans.

“Some farmers are doing good work to reduce dairying’s impact on the environment – fencing rivers and streams, planting stream sides to retain nutrients and provide for biodiversity, providing winter pads for cows with effluent collection and nutrient budgeting,” Cr Wilde said. “I congratulate these farmers on their commitment to the environment.

“However, the level of non-compliance shows that others are still not getting the message that dairy waste must be properly managed.”

Cr Wilde said Greater Wellington and Fonterra were organising workshops with farmers to look at best practice in farm effluent management. The first of these is scheduled to take place in November in the Wairarapa.

“With a solid understanding of consent conditions and best practice effluent management systems, the problems we are seeing can be avoided.”

Community planting to protect water quality

Sixty keen people planted 1000 native plants to help improve the water quality of an important wetland west of Carterton this winter.

The trees were supplied by Honda as part of the Honda TreeFund national programme where vehicle emissions are offset by planting native trees.

Senior pupils from Carterton’s South End School, Southey Honda staff, Forest and Bird members, conservationists from around Wairarapa and Greater Wellington staff all helped with the planting.

The trees were planted around a farm pond, belonging to Darryl and Cheryl Shields, that runs into the wetland at Fensham Reserve, owned by Forest and Bird Wairarapa and managed with community help through the Fensham Group.

The three hectare Fensham wetland is home to the native brown mudfish, which is in decline around the country.

Planting the Shields’ pond will help catch sediments and nutrients from farm run-off and stop them getting into the Fensham wetland. It will improve the water quality and the habitat of the native fish.

Darryl Shields was happy to see the area fenced off and thinks the planting will add a lot of aesthetic value to the property.

Fensham Group co-ordinator Chris Surman says the group is delighted with the planting. “It adds to the restoration work we are doing at the Fensham wetland and forest, and it’s great to see landowners taking care of waterways.”

Brendon Southey says this is the fourth year the Honda TreeFund has been running, and Southey Honda is proud to be supporting a project that has planted 343,000 native trees around New Zealand.

Greater Wellington land management

officer Don Bell says this project is a fine example of the community working together to improve the environment. He says the plants were chosen to suit a wetland and stream-side environment and included marsh ribbonwood, toe toe, *Carex secta* (pukio), mingi mingi (coprosma), totara, kowhai, mānuka, cabbage tree, flax, kohuhu and lemonwood.

Mr Bell says planting native trees attracts native birds to a property, along with controlling erosion, catching sediments and nutrients and offsetting carbon emissions.



Tyron Hansen, 12, of Carterton’s South End School, smooths the soil around a young totara for the farm pond planting.

2008 Supreme Award winners of the Ballance Farm Environment Award, John and Yvonne Harvey and daughter Rebecca Madden, who farm at Dyerville, south of Martinborough.



Orders for Pinus radiata seedlings due 10 November

Demand for Pinus radiata seedlings is expected to be higher in 2009 than it was for 2008. If you don't want to miss out on seedlings it is important to get orders in to Akura Conservation Centre by 10 November 2008, so your stock can be grown for planting out in winter 2009. Landowners bought 200,000 pine seedlings through Akura this winter.

Land management officer Stan Braaksma says there is a steady demand for Pinus radiata for timber and erosion control, but there will be other factors increasing demand for 2009. "The potential for earning carbon credits under the Emissions Trading Scheme and the possibility of increased funding from the Hill Country Erosion Fund will mean increased demand for 2009." Landowners can also apply for planting assistance under the Afforestation Grant Scheme. Contact your Greater Wellington land management officer for more details on these schemes.

Rewarding environmental excellence Ballance Farm Environment Awards 2008/09

The Ballance Farm Environment Awards 2008/09 is a great opportunity to get constructive feedback about your farm management practices says Wellington region awards co-ordinator Pip Dalgliesh.

The awards focus on promoting sustainable and profitable farming and have been running since 2002 in the Greater Wellington region.

Mrs Dalgliesh says farm profitability need not compromise environmental values and, in the best examples, can restore and enhance them.

The awards are split into six categories; nutrient management, dairy farming, livestock farming, harvesting, innovation, and land and life. The winner of each category will receive \$1000 prize in cash or product. From the six category winners, a supreme winner will be chosen and will receive \$3000 in cash and product. There is an additional category specifically for lifestyle/small block owners and although not eligible for the supreme award, the winner receives product to the value of \$1000 from Akura Conservation Centre.

Mrs Dalgliesh says winning is only one of the benefits of the awards.

"Past entrants have enjoyed the opportunity to discuss practical farming issues in confidence with the judges."

"The whole farm is looked at; environmental, financial and social factors, not just the bottom line. Constructive feedback is put together in a report describing the strengths and areas of improvement for whole farm operation."

"Many landowners have said entering the awards has introduced them to new ideas and helped them focus on the direction they're wanting to head in."

For further information on the Ballance Farm Environment Awards please visit www.bfea.org.nz or contact Wellington regional co-ordinator Pip Dalgliesh 06 378 8008 or email wellington@bfea.org.nz. Landowners can enter online at www.bfea.org.nz or get an entry form from Pip at wellington@bfea.org.nz or Greater Wellington, 34 Chapel Street, Masterton, phone 06 378 2484.

To order Pinus radiata for 2009 contact Paul Henderson at Akura Conservation Centre 06 3705614 email akura@gw.govt.nz

or contact Stan Braaksma 06 370 5664.

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