

Introduction

The Waikato Biodiversity Forum has been operating for eight years. The Forum membership stands at 426. The Forum was established as a way of forging closer working relationships between management agencies and all groups working to protect and enhance biodiversity across the Waikato region. The Forum is managed by a Focus Group which assists the coordinator to plan and advance the projects of the Forum. The scope of activities includes:

- Facilitating information transfer
- Promoting coordinated biodiversity policy development
- Promoting synergies between participants
- Energising biodiversity activities by supporting existing and promoting new on-the-ground actions
- Influencing decision making
- Prioritising and scoping projects
- Actioning national initiatives at a local level.

Acknowledgements

The Waikato Biodiversity Forum would like to acknowledge and thank the following organisations for their financial support: Waikato Regional Council, Department of Conservation, Thames Coromandel District Council, Hauraki District Council, Matamata Piako District Council, Waikato District Council, Hamilton City Council, Waipa District Council and South Waikato District Council.

The Forum would also like to thank the staff from Forum member organisations and groups for their contribution and expertise during Forum events, workshops and the on-going exchange of information with the public and other Forum members. This collective expertise makes the operation of the Forum a success and is valued by Forum members and the public who attend Forum events.

Waikato Biodiversity Forum days

Two Forum events were held over the past 12 months. The first Forum was held in November at Tamahere which provided information to Tamahere residents and beyond about the unique biodiversity in the gullies of the Tamahere area. It was also an opportunity for participants to learn about the value of the biodiversity in the gullies. The Forum visited a gully off Bollard Road where a group of landowners have joined together to restore and protect their gullies. They contribute to a fund and employ a contractor to carry out maintenance in the shared gully. It was a great example of how a gully can be restored and maintained and provide a higher functioning habitat for flora and fauna. Workshops provided practical skills for the ecological restoration of Tamahere gullies and included building of gully access and tracks, propagation of plants and collecting and growing from seeds, plant ID and planting in difficult areas and providing protection for flora and fauna in the gullies.

The second Forum was a partnership day with Federated Farmers held at Te Miro with a focus on Significant Natural Areas (SNAs) in the Waipa district. The day provided opportunity to visit farms and hear from farmers who have protected areas on their farms, gain information on what help is available for protection of SNAs and discuss what incentives/mechanisms work for landowners to protect SNAs. There were presentations from Sally Millar (Federated Farmers) who stressed the importance of communication with farmers, Gerry Kessels who covered the economic contribution of biodiversity, the number and type of SNAs in Waipa and models for protection. Tony Roxburgh from the Waipa District Council spoke about the present options for protection of SNAs and flags some other incentives the Waipa District Council could explore in the future such as, supplying plantings for restoration, assistance with survey and fencing, establishment of a Waipa District Council Conservation Fund and/or a joint Waikato Regional Council and Waipa District Council Fund. A field trip took place on two properties near Te Miro which had protected SNAs.

0800BIODIV

The Forum coordinator continued to operate the 0800BIODIV number and respond or refer enquiries to an appropriate agency. The 0800 BIODIV number and the Forum website received 41 enquiries. The enquiries ranged from information on wetland planting on a farm to media requests for information on endangered species. There were a couple of calls for information on volunteering on conservation projects and the Forum also managed the WCEET funding enquiries.

Media and Publicity

The Forum continued to have a monthly column in the Waikato Times entitled "Spotting Species" which highlighted an endangered plant or animal species in the region. The Eco Issues page of the Waikato Times was however discontinued in May so this column is no longer an option. Articles were written for the media with a focus on the two Forum events and covered the topics of Significant Natural Areas in the Waipa and the South Waikato districts. The Forums website was updated on a regular basis.

Community Group Survey

During this period the Forum undertook a survey of 20 community groups. The survey covered the types of work undertaken by the groups, the amount of volunteer hours spent on the work and challenges facing the group. The results of this survey are being prepared for publication and will be available soon.

Presentations and Activities

The Forum coordinator gave presentations on aspects of biodiversity to two classes at Woodstock Primary School, two year 12 classes at Te Awamutu College and all the classes at Westmount School. She also presented to the local Green Party meeting on the Forum's work and

biodiversity issues across the region and the Executive of Waikato Federated Farmers on Significant Natural Areas and biodiversity issues around the Waikato region.

Gerry Kessels from Kessels and Associates and the Forum coordinator ran a stream activity for the Federated Farmers Public Open day at Bill and Sue Garlands property. The activity was extremely popular with families and the children really enjoyed getting into the stream and finding mayflies and caddisflies under the rocks. In fact the families were so interested it was a challenge to move the groups onto the next activity. Approximately 150 people attended the event.

Conservation Week

The Forum organised a Conservation Week activity for Barrett Bush on the edge of Hamilton however the weather wasn't cooperative and the event had to be cancelled. The planned event will be run as part of the 2011 Conservation Week activities.

Funding

The Forum has given advice to numerous groups to assist them with funding applications to a variety of funders. The Forum also applied for funding through the Waikato Community Conservation Fund to provide a discount to community group members attending the National Wetland Symposium in Rotorua. The Forum acted as the referral for the Waikato Ecological Enhancement Trust funding enquiries and the Regional Council's Small Scale Community Initiative Fund. Assistance and advice was provided to community groups to fill in the application forms.

Networking

The Forum members received four newsletters to inform them of biodiversity related information. The Forum continues to provide a link for community group members and management agencies through email dissemination of information and communication with individual members in answer to queries about biodiversity. The Forum coordinator attends the Strategic Planners Network meetings which discusses aspects of the region such as environment, health and transport.

Advocacy

The Forum provided advocacy for biodiversity on a variety of plans policies and strategies including Hauraki District Council Sustainability Strategy, Tamahere Structure Plan, South Waikato draft District Plan review, Hamilton City Council District Plan review, Gully Restoration Business Plan, the Matamata Piako District Council community outcomes, Hauraki District Council biodiversity indicators Regional Transport Strategy, Annual Plans and National Policy Statement on

Biodiversity. The Forum coordinator also provided Forum members with information to assist them on writing submissions on key policy statements and plans such as the Regional Policy Statement and the National Policy Statement on Biodiversity

The Forum coordinator met with the Hamilton West MP and National Party Chair of the Blue Greens to advocate for the re-establishment of the Community Conservation Fund and the retention of the Biodiversity Condition and Advice Fund. During the local and regional Council elections the Forum coordinator provided biodiversity related questions to candidates to highlight its importance. A variety of consultation meetings were attended including the Blue print LAB consultation in Thames, the Land and Water consultation meeting

Community Groups

The Forum maintains a database and map of community group projects which highlights the contribution that these groups make to biodiversity protection and enhancement across the region. The database now has 151 groups working on over 220 project sites. The database has been updated during this period and a few groups have gone into recess. There has been a slight increase in the number of sites groups are working on with one group working on 16 sites. The Forum coordinator also provided information for a Waikato Regional Council study which reviewed the work of a selection of Care Groups in the region.

Workshops

The Forum was involved in presenting to community groups and landowners at two Pest Management and Monitoring workshops located at Raglan and Coromandel. The topics presented include funding available to groups and landowners and biodiversity issues around the Coromandel and Raglan. The Forum coordinator also made a presentation on funding at an environmental workshop held at Pikatu Marae. Hamilton City Council and the Forum worked together to run a workshop in Newstead Gully to inform local residents of plant pest management and follow up planting in Newstead Gully. As a result of these workshops follow up advice has been given to individuals and groups to assist them with their work.

Summary

In summary the highlights of year would be working with Federated Farmers on their Public Open Day and the Te Miro Forum event. The workshops on plant and animal pests were appreciated by community groups and feedback from these was very favourable. It is always rewarding to present biodiversity information to young people and experience their enthusiasm and interest in

nature. Finally the Forum events continue to be well attended and bring people together from a wide range of organisations including members of the public. The networking, presentations, workshops and field trips add value to a variety of biodiversity issues.

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