Report from Waikato Biodiversity Forum
held on Monday, 9 June 2008 at the Waitetoko Marae, Waitetoko, Turangi.

Key outcome
To provide support for the wetland management/ restoration work that is being carried out in various locations near the southern end of Lake Taupo.

This Forum was an opportunity to:
- meet with others who undertake biodiversity related work
- establish on-going partnerships for biodiversity restoration
- highlight the projects of community groups in the area
- contribute and gain information from discussion on Wetland Management/Restoration near Lake Taupo.

Introduction to the Forum day
Members gathered at the entrance to Waitetoko Marae at 9.15am on the morning of 9 June 2008. We were called onto the Marae for the powhiri and greeted warmly by the local tangata whenua. Apologies were received from Taupo District councillors Christine McElwee and Kathryn Uvhagen.

After morning tea the presentations began with a local kaumatua Te Kanawa Pitiroi who gave recollections of what the area used to look like. He recalled looking for ducks eggs in the wetland to eat and watched women going into the 'swamp' with harakeke to immerse in the mud for up to two weeks.

Te Kanawa told of the lake being a cloak. The Waikato-iti River and the Tongariro River water weaves patterns into the southern end of the lake. These patterns can be likening it to the taniko patterns on a cloak which is closest to the head. Over the years the lake has become dirty and taniwha know that the water is becoming degraded and this is no good for Tuwharetoa iwi.

Jim Maniapoto, Pou Kura Taiao at the Department of Conservation (DOC) gave some historical background of the Tuwharetoa iwi which began with the Te Arawa waka arriving during the great migration captained by Ngatoroirangi. After a long journey from Hawaiiki they made landfall at Maketu on the east coast of the North Island, then made their way to the inland regions of the Taupo district. Tuwharetoa are descendants form Ngatoroirangi and their land covered the mountains to the lake including Lake Rotoaira. Tuwharetoa now has a lot of land around the lake which is in farm and forestry. It has taken 30-50 years for farms to be developed. The farms are mainly on the western side of the lake and as the eastern side was not economical to farm, forestry was planted instead.

The Paramount Chief of Tuwharetoa is Tumu Te Heuheu. The Tuwharetoa Trust Board manages the lake and waterway reserves around the lake. The economic base is farming and forestry with some geothermal interests. The population of Tuwharetoa is around 30,000 but the large majority live out of the area. Many left the area in the early 50's to find work in cities.

When Jim was a child there were not many weeds in the wetlands. Now the area is full of willow, acacia, gorse and blackberry. A kuia could look from Korohe Marae and see the lake, but now large stands of pine, willow and acacia trees block the view. Jim spoke of his desire to improve the wetlands and bring them back to the soft look of native trees. Motuoapa could also be a bird sanctuary.

Jim also spoke about Motutaiko Island which covers 11ha and is 3km off the south-eastern shore of Lake Taupo. The island is free of mammalian pests. Nga Whenua Rahui is involved with support and funding to develop long term management strategies for the island to protect its spiritual and cultural values and unique flora and fauna which include land snails and skinks. Ancestors were buried in caves on the island and sadly some taonga have been taken from the area. The caves have now been closed.

There has been a DVD made of the island to educate people about its significance. This DVD is available from Jim by emailing him at jmaniapoto@doc.govt.nz.

Nga Whenua Rahui

Rob McGowan highlighted the work of Nga Whenua Rahui. Nga Whenua Rahui is a contestable Ministerial fund established in 1991 to provide funding for the protection of indigenous ecosystems on Maori land. Its scope covers the full range of natural diversity originally present in the landscape. The fund is administered by the Nga Whenua Rahui Committee and serviced by the DOC. It receives an annual allocation of funds from Government. The committee advises the Minister of Conservation on funding applications from iwi, the placing of kawenata (covenant) and negotiates conditions. The criteria and mechanisms of Nga Whenua Rahui, are geared towards the owners retaining tino rangatiratanga (ownership and control). The covenants are usually for 25 years rather than perpetuity.

The fund provides help to owners of the land with fencing, pest control and planting. The fund will assist landowners to seek a nil rating from councils by confirming formal protection. However, the subject of rates remissions on protected areas is between the landowner and the relevant council. Nga Whenua Rahui covenant is only for land that is of ecological significance and the criteria of significance includes ecological principles and traditional cultural significance such as tuna fisheries.

There are now approximately 220,000 ha under Nga Whenua Rahui covenants including local wetland area Punawhakaata and a covenant at Motutaiko. Pest control has become a focus in covenants as fencing alone does not provide the restoration needed in most cases.

In the Taupo area, 1200ha of the 1500ha is owned by Maori. The kawenata is not signed with Trustees but with the local owners. This may take a few years to negotiate. It is important to get other organisations involved such as regional and district councils and DOC. A lot of talking needs to happen to get local support. Kawenata may be initiated by local landowners at a hui where the process is explained or it starts before this by an idea from DOC or regional council talking to Nga Whenua Rahui about an area land that is of ecological value.

A publication about Nga Whenua Rahui is available from DOC by emailing Rob McGowan at rmcgowan@doc.govt.nz.

Wetlands of Tongariro-Taupo conservancy and Willow control

Nick Singers, Conservancy Botanist gave a presentation about the range and importance of the wetlands remaining within the Tongariro Taupo conservancy. In the North Island there is only 4.9 per cent of wetland areas remaining compared to 1840 calculations. Unlike most other North Island areas, many wetlands here are still remaining and are in a relatively pristine condition, for example those found around Lake Rotoaira. But, grey willow is the most significant long term threat to these areas and if left uncontrolled will totally transform these wetlands into exotic forest, eliminating native birds and plants.

Grey willow now occupies a large part of the Te Matapuna or South Taupo Wetland. Here DOC, the Tongariro Natural History Society, Nga Whenua Rahui and some

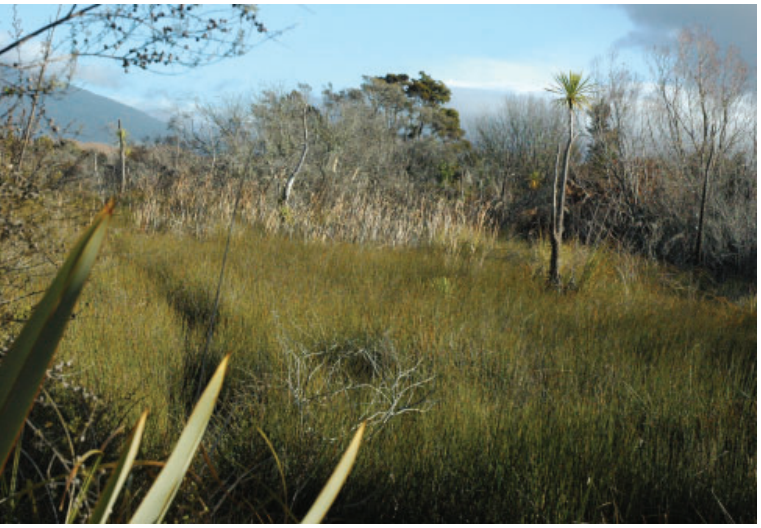
landowners have started to control this weed, including ground based poisoning of trees and trialing aerial spraying from a helicopter. In association with NIWA, a new herbicide (Garlon360TM) was trialed that targets willows and other broadleaf plants but is non-toxic to flax, raupo, toitoi and other similar plants. Though early, this method is showing significant promise in areas that are heavily infested and degraded and would be otherwise too expensive to control by other means. A number of the participants made a field inspection to this trial site.

The full powerpoint presentation is available from Moira by emailing her at m.cursey@xtra.co.nz.

Funding

Jan Hoverd, key contact from the Biodiversity Advice Waikato presented on funding for community groups, including a summary of points on what to cover when applying for funding.

Jan is compiling a more detailed version of her presentation which will be posted on the Waikato Biodiversity Forum website www.waikatobiodiversity.org.nz.



Grey willow and insect communities

Dr Corrine Watts, a Landcare Research scientist has provided some information on the impact of grey willow on insect communities. Wetlands provide habitat and resources for many native insects, but it is unknown whether wetlands invaded by willows provide the same habitat and resources.

In December 2007, at Whangamarino fen and Toreparu wetland, the insect communities from an area dominated by willow, an area recently invaded by willow and an area dominated by native wetland plants were sampled. Initial results indicate that the insect communities, characterised by introduced species, within habitat dominated by willows are completely different from those in the native wetland. The willows have transformed these communities as they provide more deadwood, habitat structure and introduced plant species. In addition, the invertebrate communities were sampled from the wetland at the edge of Lake B where willows were removed in 1999. The communities are different from the willow-dominated fauna and are returning to a similar community to those found in native wetlands.

Black swans fowling the lake

Andy Garrick responded to a question about the impact of black swans fouling the lake.

There is a report by NIWA from a Science and Technology Series No 25 entitled 'Review of the Ecological Role of Black Swan' by PM Sager, AM Schwarz and C Howard-Williams. This publication is available from NIWA PO Box 11 115, Hamilton.

Taupo District Council

Kara Maresca from the Taupo District Council alerted the Forum to proposed updates to the District Plan. The changes include:

- protection of landscape values
- protection of significant features.

There has been a study carried out to identify significant natural areas. Landowners have been notified to obtain their feedback on content of rules to protect these areas and also find out what landowners are doing well in relation to these areas. It is important not to double up with rules, for example between Environment Waikato and the district council. Public notification of the changes is due in October/November 2008. The council have spoken to 250 landowners so far during the process.

Contact Kara kmaresca@taupo.govt.nz for more information on the proposed changes.

Hancock Forestry Management (NZ) Ltd

Robin Black presented information about the wetlands projects that Hancock Forestry Management (NZ) Ltd is working on. He highlighted the work of willow control, including:

- initiation of two year programme for enhancement of Opareiti Stream wetlands
- continuation of Waihou catchment enhancement – Moth Road
- wetland bird survey in Opareiti catchment wetlands
- enhancement planting at Lake Road wetland.

Wetland project –what does it entail

- Waikato Catchment Ecological Enhancement Trust grant expenditure of $48,580
- three year project
- grey willow control main activity
- removal of pine along margins to define riparian area
- wetland bird survey to identify current species and numbers
- pest survey – possum, rat and mustelid
- developing an ongoing pest control programme
- identify iwi and community involvement/and use of area.

Field trip

The field trip took place from the reserve a few kilometres south of Waitetoko. After an initial explanation about the area and viewing of the wetlands from the side of the road, a group of hardy individuals donned waders and waded into the wetland area just north of the reserve. This was a valuable experience to see first-hand the difference the trial spraying has made and to discuss with others various aspects of wetland management.

Feedback from participants/outcomes from the day

- Gained ideas for wetland protection in East Coast forests and ideas to relate the willow trial to projects in Kinleith.
- Networking really useful to help with future work.
- Topical presentations.
- Interesting discussion with a range of perspectives.
- Great way of bringing people together to talk with each other.
- Great experience culturally.
- Beautiful setting.
- Good to know about what is happening in other areas of the region.
- Good to hear about how DOC is going about willow control.
- Met people like the Biodiversity Advice Waikato contact – might contact her in the future.
- The networking is really valuable.
- Field trip great opportunity to go and view the site and talk with people along the way.
- Meeting people who work on the ground – the ground crew were great.
- Knowledge sharing is important.
- Awareness of what is happening in other places.
- See the bigger picture in terms of biodiversity work.