

## **Meeting Paper For West Coast *Tai Poutini* Conservation Board**

### **TITLE OF PAPER      CONSERVATOR'S REPORT**

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**SUBJECT:**                      Conservator's Report for the Board for period ending 23  
September 2011

**DATE:**                              9 September 2011

### **SUMMARY:**

This report provides information on activities throughout the Conservancy since the 8 July 2011 meeting of the West Coast *Tai Poutini* Conservation Board.

### **KARAMEA PLACE**

#### **Visitor Management**

Remedial work has been undertaken on Heaphy Great Walk to repair sections of track damaged by flooding around the Heaphy Valley and Gunner river areas. The track has been reformed incorporating an open-cell plastic matting which is expected to retain track gravels in the event of moderate wash-outs. Work has now moved to creating a new route along the Heaphy beach and coastal section where the track has been over run by the tide.

Preparations have been made for replacement of the Swanburn Bridge (Heaphy) and the Wangapeka Bivi in the next period.

#### **Community Involvement/Initiatives**

International student volunteers have been engaging with staff at Karamea estuary and Kohaihai.

Pest control and planting native species talk was given at Karamea Area School. The School was also involved with planting at the Karamea Fire Station.

#### **Species Management**

Whio/Blue Duck

As part of this breeding seasons Whione (Whio Operation Nest Egg) work, four pairs are being tracked in the Oparara for signs of breeding activity.

Photo points were established to assist in monitoring the coastal plant Charleston gentian.

#### **Animal Pest Control**

Planning work has begun for an aerial 1080 operation to protect ecosystem values in approximately 26,000 of Kahurangi National Park. Possums and rats are the targeted pests.

Goat control operations are programmed to commence around mid September, with 2233 ha planned for treatment around Candle Creek area.

## **KAWATIRI PLACE**

### **Visitor Management**

New interpretation panels and route markers have been installed on the Lyell Walkway together with plantings to improve the campsite area. Track maintenance was undertaken at Cape Foulwind Walkway and the replacement of old fence styles.

Landscaping work at Constant Bay amenity area has been completed, as has the roof replacement and vandalism repairs to the toilet.

### **Community Involvement/Initiatives**

Buller Conservation Volunteers carried out track maintenance at Charleston in Constant Bay trimming vegetation and cleaning drains. The volunteers also carried out a pingao survey at North Beach to establish a knowledge baseline prior to development of tracks etc. North beach stakeholders have compiled a concept plan for the area and are forming an incorporated society to source funding.

The West Coast Minerals Forum was attended by Area staff and this provided a good insight on the local mining community.

The Old Ghost Road proposal, Lyell Management agreement is now signed and work crews are now on the ground.

Buller High carried out planting at Cape Foulwind adding to the past plantings in the location.

Staff obtained Denniston Marketing shots at the Banbury Mine with Buller High School students as models.

The Whitebait Connection was conducted with Westport South School students participating in the event.

Straw bales were installed for whitebait research at Walls Creek and a planting day with St Canices was carried out. Straw bales were also laid out at out for whitebait research at Mississippi Creek over two days with Buller High School.

Staff conducted a Penguin burrow lesson at Charleston with Westport South School. The Department signed a Blue Penguin Trust Management Agreement for the Cape Foulwind location to allow the Trust to participate in future development.

Staff proof read the draft for Kiwi Ranger and it is now in final stages of compilation. Kiwi Ranger is targeted at schools so the school children do various activities and score points. This will eventually see them achieve the status of Kiwi Ranger.

### **Historic**

Work focused on tracks and amenities in this period, historic maintenance planned for Charming Creek and Denniston in the next period.

### **Species Management**

Powelliphanta millertoni snail

Ongoing rat trapping at Millerton. Rat numbers have dropped off permitting a return to the monthly trap checks.

Powelliphanta *augusta* snail

To provide further protection at the Mt Rochfort tower site some fences and signs were installed and vegetation planted. This will hopefully keep visitors to the hard rock areas and reduce the vehicle corridor that may be a barrier to snail movement.

### **Animal Pest Control**

AHB Possum Control

Staff liaised with the contractor before, during and after the Buller South TB reduction aerial 1080 operation.

Goat control operations programmed to commence in South Branch Mokihinui around mid November. 2581 ha planned for treatment around Goat Creek/Sinclairs Creek area.

## **PAPAROA PLACE**

### **Visitor Management**

We have focused on upgrades to visitor sites in this period such as the construction of a new bridge at Dolomite Point, Cave Creek track maintenance and repairs to vandalism damage at Punakaiki Visitor Centre toilets.

River protection work was completed on Punakaiki suspension bridge and preparations have been made for resealing the main visitor car parks at Pororari and Punakaiki North

### **Community Involvement/Initiatives**

Students from Westport South School were taken on a field trip to Punakaiki Cavern.

### **Animal Pest Control**

Possum control in the area between the Fox and Punakaiki Rivers was undertaken. Approx 3800ha was treated using the aerial low-sow cluster method. A further 500ha was treated using a range of trapping and cyanide poison methods. The post-operation monitoring has yet to be done.

Goat control programme commenced earlier than planned. Current efforts around Bullock Creek, 2793 ha planned 306 ha treated to date. No aerial inspections planned until November.

No known tahr populations present, remains Risk Area.

### **Habitat Protection**

Planting took place at the Punakaiki coastal restoration site.

## **INANGAHUA PLACE**

### **Visitor Management**

Work on the Alborns Track has been completed with new steps and general track alignment improvements. Recently we have focused on facility maintenance such as vandalism on Slab Hut toilets and structure maintenance. Volunteer work has also been facilitated on Reefton tracks.

### **Community Involvement/Initiatives**

DOC staff have been engaged with volunteers on landscaping The Strand at Reefton. This is an ongoing project.

### **Historic**

200 days volunteer work has been completed in Waiuta township and on the Big River/Waiuta track as well as reopening of the old Kinini track. We are working towards a joint management plan for buildings in Waiuta township with the Friends of Waiuta. The Remedial Action Plan for the contaminated site at the Prohibition Ball Mill site is to be completed by CRL Energy by mid September.

### **Species Management**

Maruia Kowhai - sites have been prepared with fencing and grass control in preparation for planting with the Maruia School, the local variant of kowhai, at the end of September. Cuttings and seed gathered with the school 2 years ago are now ready for planting out in an effort to ensure the continued existence of local kowhai currently in serious decline.

### **Animal Pest Control**

Trial of the new Henry self setting possum kill trap will be undertaken in the Maruia with a small scale local trial being established by mid September. The Henry trap is designed to kill 12 possums without resetting, with service intervals as long as a year.

Department staff have been monitoring the large Animal Health Board aerial possum control operations in the Inangahua and Hukarere areas in early August which covered 46,000 and 20,000 ha respectively, and was undertaken by EPRO.

No work planned on goat control until December.

Follow-up of tahr observational report aerial inspections were carried out around Waikiti Downs and adjoining alpine areas. No animals or sign seen.

### **Weed Pest Control**

Trial of a new herbicide Aquathol, has continued in a pond infested with lagarosiphon, on a terrace above the Maruia River. Results appear promising at this stage with significant die back after one treatment, but more time is required before the full period of effectiveness passes and final results can be assessed.

### **Habitat Protection**

Te Maruia Waka Huia (an Integrated Species Protection Programme)

A significant milestone has been reached with the completion of the installation of 300 x “doc200” predator kill traps in the Lake Daniell-Alfred River area. This network defines a ‘core area’ of intense predator control that will directly benefit a monitored long tail bat population plus kaka, mohua, kakariki and blue duck.

A recent fall in rat populations throughout the Maruia Valley has been detected by the monitoring crew in late August. This is in direct contrast to lines run earlier in the month, before a heavy snowfall, when rat populations showed continued growth over early winter. As expected the population fall has justified not carrying large scale aerial predator control at this site (based on seed fall and monitoring assessments).

### **Fire**

Equipment maintenance and pump checks at Reefton completed.

## **MAWHERA PLACE**

### **Visitor Management**

Completed the installation of 4 new timber bridges at Colls Dam and another at Croesus Track. Completed repairs to Coal Creek Falls Track after heavy rain had damaged the track. Recently we have focused on general track maintenance such as side drains, windfalls and swing-bridge maintenance on Croesus Track.

### **Community Involvement/Initiatives**

Discussions with Landcorp about possible joint venture track into giant rimu tree at Mawheraiti Scenic Reserve (ongoing). Public film festival and talks organised for Conservation Week (Sept), DOC staff assisting with Coastal Pathway landscape working bee (July 30th). Talks held with Walking Access NZ and Grey District Council to improve public access through Waikiti Downs Station.

Greymouth *Mawheranui* staff are working with other agencies, under the lead of Grey District Council, to develop a plan to establish a Ecological Hub in the Cobden Lagoon-Seafront area. It will showcase and preserve important habitats and species, and provide for community and tourism opportunities. Currently we are providing a report of ecological threats, values and opportunities to assist in the development of the project. Putting this into effect will be dependant on the Development West Coast funding distribution.

### **Historic**

All sites visited by the public have been tidied up, Davidson Loco cleaned, with the main emphasis on Waiuta for this period.

### **Species Management**

Roroa/Great Spotted Kiwi

Seventeen pairs of monitored kiwi have had transmitter replacements in preparation for the breeding season. Monitoring of the ‘smart transmitters’ has commenced, with no egg incubations detected yet. Eggs will again be incubated at Willowbank this

year and chicks raised at the Paparoa Wildlife Trusts “Bois Gentil crèche” at Atarau, before release back into the wild. We anticipate 5-6 sub adult kiwi held over this winter will be released back to the Paparoa Ranges in November.

14 volunteer days at the Atarau kiwi crèche by the Tai Poutini Outdoor Recreation Students plus another 14 days on trap inspections in the Moonlight and Atarau areas.

#### **Whio/Blue Duck**

Greymouth *Mawheranui* Area staff have caught and fitted transmitters onto 2 female Whio in the Kawhaka area to enable a Whione (Whio Operation Nest Egg) operation to continue this year. The aim being to raise more juveniles in captivity, for later release back into the Paparoa Ranges. This should build on last years successful releases.

#### **Animal Pest Control**

Department staff have monitored the large Animal Health Board aerial possum control operations in August. EPRO carried out work in the Kopara area which covered 11,700ha, and Vector Control Services carried out the Moana North operation over 12,166ha.

Goat control was carried out around Cobden Bridge to protect community plantings. Control operations commenced in Ahaura Gorge, with follow up ground and aerial efforts commencing in November - December

#### **Weed Pest Control**

Preparation has begun for the Lake Brunner upper catchment willow eradication programme this summer. To date liaison with landowners in the Orangipuku/ Poerua area has been positive, with support to treat both conservation and private land in this catchment.

#### **Fire**

One staff member provided overnight site security at the Waimak Gorge fire 29<sup>th</sup> July

## **HOKITIKA PLACE**

#### **Visitor Management**

Work at Lake Kaniere has included re-surfacing of the Kahikatea Walk and Canoe Cove Walk and landscaping around Hans Bay toilets and rubbish collection area.

Interpretation for the Mahinapua Walkway has been completed and installed.

#### **Community Involvement/Initiatives**

Staff attended the West Coast Minerals Forum held in Westport recently. Two penguin boxes were installed for a concerned farmer at Ruatapu. Hokitika and South Westland Area staff held a pre-season meeting with members of the West Coast Whitebaiters’ Association which was very positive. Staff attended a local ‘recycled art’ exhibition opening and provided sustainable prizes.

The Area Manager and Community Relations staff attended liaison meeting with Ngati Waewae in Greymouth.

One Area staff member attended a Westland Milk Products emissions trading and climate change seminar with talks by weather forecaster Jim Salinger and Business commentator Rod Oram.

A meeting was held with the West Coast Blue Penguin Trust. Following the meeting “Nesting Bird Zone” signs were placed at ten sites for the season.

The NZ Defence Force held an army live firing exercise at Kawhaka. Area staff liaised in advance with the army and conducted a site inspection on completion. The site was left in good condition.

One staff member provided a presentation/discussion for medical students on “What DOC does”.

Keas (cubs) were taken on a bush walk to Prossers Bush.

A heli-hike for Mt Greenland was planned, but was unable to be held due to bad weather. The reserve day was also unsuitable as most of the helicopter company’s resources were required for other work in South Westland. The event will be held at a later date.

Area staff have been busy preparing for Conservation Week, including speaker and film evenings with a forest theme for the International Year of Forests.

### **Species Management**

Whio/Blue Duck

Stoat trapping in the Styx and Arahura has continued over the winter. The Deerstalkers Association has offered to undertake stoat trapping in the Taipo Valley. They have started putting tunnels in place, and with their help this will boost Whio protection, since the Taipo backs onto the Arahura

### ***Powelliphanta augusta***

The Hokitika *Powelliphanta augusta* captive facility currently houses 1582 snails and 1245 eggs (August 2011). Summer 2010/11 long term mark recapture monitoring results for the translocated populations at Stockton and Rochfort, indicate that they have remained relatively stable. All release sites now have two years data and three years from one site. Before survival estimates can be made with any confidence at least five years data is required.

### **Animal Pest Control**

There are confirmed reports of Tb in feral animal populations over the east side of Browning Pass/Wilberforce area. Animal Health Board are dealing with local landowner issues. This may cause Tb in the feral populations on the West Coast neighbouring this area.

Goat control operations programmed to commence around late September. The areas planned for treatment include catchments within Vine and Doughboy Creeks.

Tahr control operations programmed to commence around late September, areas planned for treatment include catchments within the Northern Exclusion Zone and buffer areas in the Whitcombe and Rakaia catchments.

Six new Judas tahr will be caught and released within the Northern Exclusion Zone. This work is planned for September-October.

Otira possum control remains in caution period, awaiting trap catch results, no other critical issues affecting the recent operation.

### **Weed Pest Control**

Darwins barberry searches are underway. Only a small amount of other weed work has been done over winter.

### **Habitat Protection**

No new fencing proposals this period.

### **Fire**

Conservancy equipment inspections and performance testing completed in preparation for the fire season.

## **TE WAHI POUNAMU PLACE**

### **Visitor Management**

The upgrade of Ship Creek *Tauparikaka* has continued, with the boardwalks on the Dune Lake Walk replaced with the first section of the track now upgraded to wheelchair standard, and all boardwalks on the Kahikatea Swamp Forest walk replaced. The Kahikatea Swamp Forest Walk continues to be resurfaced, and will, on completion, also be to wheelchair access standard.

The Moeraki Valley track has had a vegetation clearance, and associated huts – Middlehead and Horseshoe Flat both received maintenance and cleaning.

In the Franz Josef *Waiiau* Area, three retaining walls were constructed on the Lake Wombat Track to allow power carriers to commence the resurface project planned for this year. The area had suffered from storm damage back in 2008 and again in 2009 which had meant no power carrier use on ¾ of that track.

Numerous local walks have received their routine 3 monthly maintenance.

Contractors have commenced the Three Mile Bridge replacement at Okarito.

Roads in the North Okarito and Saltwater forests have been graded.

### **Community Involvement/Initiatives**

On 24 August a biodiversity meeting was held at the Fox Community Hall in anticipation of the upcoming aerial possum control operation to be carried out in mid September. The meeting, which included presentations on the 6 year research

programme which scientist Graeme Elliott is leading in South Westland, and its interim findings, the Haast tokoeka kiwi, and Mohua species conservation projects. The evening was well attended by the Fox Glacier and Franz Josef Glacier communities.

Whataroa School has become involved in monitoring the progress of the North Ōkārito rowi population. Two school groups have assisted with changing transmitters on the young birds, and undertaking health checks. The students are following their progress as part of the studies at school.

On 9 July, the Franz Josef *Waiiau* Area held an information day about the Ōkārito aerial pest control operation, in tandem with the Animal Health Board. The information day was held at the Franz Josef Community Hall, and attracted a moderate number of local community members, as well as a vocal contingent of protesters. The day was generally amicable and was considered to be a success by the area team and AHB.

The La Fontaine Stream Enhancement Project was nominated for the TrustPower Westland Community Awards. This project is intended to improve the water quality of the La Fontaine Stream, and provide a showcase of good riparian management in an area of increased dairy farming use. Students from South Westland Area School were involved in a planting day in June during which 140 plants were planted.

## **Species Management**

### Fiordland Crested Penguin

Seabird scientist Ursula Ellenberg has been contracted by DOC Southland to test the reliability of a new monitoring method for tawaki that we are trialling. Ursula and Biodiversity Ranger Jo Hiscock (Southern Islands Area) joined the South Westland Biodiversity team in August to carry out field work. The team counted more than 40 nests at each of the two sites monitored in South Westland. The research is being conducted throughout the range of tawaki with sites in South Westland, Fiordland and on Codfish (Whenua Hou) Island.

### Haast tokoeka Kiwi

The breeding season has begun for the Haast tokoeka kiwi, with the first eggs retrieved from the sanctuary in mid-August, and now being incubated at the West Coast Wildlife Centre in Franz Josef. The team has also identified two nests in the sanctuary where egg rescues were not possible, these nests will continue to be monitored for a chick rescue later in the season.

### Rowi

The breeding season is underway. To date, the Sky Ranger fixed-wing monitoring system has detected 15 eggs throughout South Ōkārito Forest. Five eggs have been rescued and are currently being incubated in West Coast Wildlife Centre. One nest was found to have “failed”. The remaining nine eggs will be left to hatch in the wild.

Twenty chicks will be left in the forest and closely monitored to assess the efficiency of the Ōkārito aerial pest control operation as a kiwi management tool.

### Blue Penguin

The blue penguin colonies and Oneone and Three Mile Beach will be monitored again this year by DOC staff. Initial monitoring shows the penguins are beginning the breeding season with similar numbers to last year.

### Yellowhead Mohua

A team of 12 bird catchers will be descending on Haast from all around the country in October to catch mohua in the Landsborough Valley. Up to 80 mohua will be flown from the Landsborough to re-establish a population on Resolution Island in Fiordland. Resolution Island has been undergoing a restoration programme, which includes getting rid of mammalian predators like stoats and rats that mohua are particularly vulnerable to. Mohua are endemic to the South Island and used to be a common member of the forest bird community. Now predation has mostly reduced them to small remnant populations in areas of southern beech forests. A handful of mainland sites like the Landsborough Valley are managed to keep predator numbers low and protect mohua. Safe refuges like Resolution Island will help to protect them from extinction and also safeguard the genetic diversity important for species to survive in the long term.

### Animal Pest Control

Goat control operations underway in Te Taho, 750 ha planned for treatment 390ha treated 2 new Judas goats captured and released – 3 goats killed.

Tahr control operations programmed to commence around late September - November, areas planned for treatment include Whataroa, Poerua and Callery catchments.

After several months of waiting for a suitable weather window the Thomas, Billy, Macfarlane and Clarke valley (18,500ha) aerial possum control operation was completed over 2-3 August. Planning for the Abbey Rocks aerial rat/possum aerial control is well under way with sowing to occur in September weather and consents permitting.

The Ōkārito/Franz Josef/Waitangitaona aerial pest control operation has been undertaken. The operation, designed to give protection to a valuable ecosystem and provide valuable scientific information about rowi and kea, was planned in 2008. The operation and was subsequently postponed for three consecutive years until an appropriate density and distribution of rodents was reached. Plentiful and widely distributed rodent vectors were the primary prerequisite for enabling the toxin to be transferred to stoats via secondary poisoning. Small mammal indexing in May and early-August 2011 indicated that the rodent population density and distribution were such that a 1080 operation was highly likely to be effective. Prefeed was sown on 18 August, followed by 1080 on 04 September 2011.

The Animal Health Board undertook a concurrent operation to control the spread of bovine Tb through possums in the North Ōkārito and Franz Josef areas. A combined total of approximately 30,000 hectares of land was treated. Small mammal indexing, planned for the week beginning 18 September, will give an accurate indication of the effectiveness of the operation.

On a sad note, post-operational kea monitoring through the Sky Ranger fixed-wing aircraft system indicated that seven individuals had died, from a total of 38 monitored kea. Subsequent analysis has revealed that the birds succumbed to 1080 poisoning. All of the rowi monitored to date are alive and well.

### **Weed Pest Control**

Weed control has been focused on the sites in the Fox township and surrounds. A trial has also been set up at the lower Whakapohai River to determine the most effective herbicide to use on Wandering Jew (*tradescantia*). Eight sites have been established and monitored over the coming months.

### **Habitat Protection**

Franz Josef *Waiiau* Area has taken possession of 2400 carex secta, toetoe, mahoe and marble leaf from Titoki Nursery to be used at Lake Wahapo, as part of the Air New Zealand sponsored *Glaciers to Wetlands Restoration Project*. The plants are the product of Lake Wahapo and Ōkārīto sourced seed and will be valuable in consolidating degraded native vegetation at the site.

The *Glaciers to Wetlands* Nursery at Ōkārīto has a good variety of seedlings of local provenance, which will form the basis of future restoration at Ōkārīto and Lake Wahapo.

### **Visitor Centre Statistics**

<b>Visitor Centre</b>	<b>Total Number Visitors from 1 July to 31 August 2011</b>	<b>% Increase or decrease for same period last year</b>
Punakaiki	12839	6.37% increase
Reefton	5465	9.5% Increase
Franz Josef	7843	3.3% decrease
Haast	4184	10.9% decrease

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Board notes the information in this report.

Mike Slater  
Conservator