

A new era for the Catchpool Valley

SEPTEMBER 2009 UPDATE

Harvesting the pines at Catchpool

The hugely popular picnicking and walking spot in Rimutaka Forest Park at Catchpool Valley, just 30 kilometres from Wellington city, is losing its pine trees and has begun the process of reverting to native forest. A contract to harvest the pines began in 2001 under the supervision of PF Olsen Ltd. Once the project is completed, the area will be left to regenerate, and should be back in native forest cover in about 50 years.

Why remove the pines?

The Catchpool Valley pine forest planting began in 1971 by the then New Zealand Forest Service. Over 10 years, 247.5 hectares were planted. These trees have reached maturity and are being harvested. About 83 ha of native forest remains amongst the pines and this will be left. DOC's 10-year Conservation Management Strategy requires that when exotic trees are removed, they be replaced by natural ecosystems. The entire forest was estimated to be worth \$3.4 million at the beginning of the logging operation, though this is subject to market fluctuations. This money will form part of the department's annual budget and be spent as national conservation priorities determine.

What is the logging programme?

The logging began on the hill behind the visitor centre and near the top carpark, where the Orongorongo Track begins and then moved to the "front" faces above some neighbouring properties on the Coast Road. Surveyors redefined the boundaries between the Forest Park and private property.

When the project began, it was expected to be completed in 2010. However, in March 2009 the logging contract ended and operations were suspended, due to the unavailability of logging contractors. In October 2009 logging will recommence, and is expected to be completed in approximately one year. The current logging consent is valid for up to 35 years.

How will recreation in the area be affected?

As part of the requirements of completion of the current contract, resource consent inspections will ensure that the site is left in a satisfactory condition between contractors. In the meantime, horse riders will be able to continue to access some of the logging roads. Access to the Cattle Ridge Road and Mid Slope Road is now available before 7 a.m. and after 5.30 p.m. Monday-Friday, after 12 noon Saturday, and all day Sunday. For a map of tracks, and up-to-date information visit www.doc.govt.nz, and search "Catchpool horse riding".

The Department will consider opening some of the logging roads for mountain biking after consultation with user groups.

For more information on horse riding and mountain bike access please contact Peter Blaxter (04) 472 5821.



What can we expect to see?

Re-cloaking the valley in native forest will be a slow process. From bare ground in the first year, to gorse cover for the next 10, the transition to native species such as mahoe, rangiora, rewarewa, tawa, kaikomako and beech is a gradual thing. The Department of Conservation (DOC) will continue to stop wilding pine growth as far as practical, but the gorse will be left. Gorse has proved to be a useful nursery plant for native species, providing shade and cover and fixing nitrogen to enrich the soil. Native bracken is expected to help in the regeneration process by providing a nursery cover for native plant regrowth. Fires are the greatest threat to regeneration. Any fire could put the process back at least 30 years, so fire risk will be carefully managed both during and after the logging.

Limiting the eyesore

While it is good that the pines are making way for native forest, in the short-term logging creates a bit of a mess. To help reduce some of the eyesore in areas which have a lot of public use, we are giving nature a helping hand. Plant species that provide food for birds and lessen the risk of fire are being planted. Dust and water quality monitoring is being undertaken to comply with resource consent conditions.

If you want to know more

For more information, and to check access to tracks, contact:
Poneke Area Office
P.O. Box 5086, Wellington
Phone 04 472 5821

If you have concerns about the logging, contact Peter Simpson, Department of Conservation Ph 472 5821.

