

# **Woodlot/Managed Wilderness**

## **A Short History**

### **2007 Annual Report**

The woodlot was planted in 2001 with eucalypts and acacias in consultation with the Developer's forestry consultant, Olsen & Co. Most eucalypts died in a late frost and were replaced by Olsens on their recommendation with Lusitanicas (**"Mexican Cypress"**) the following year. The objectives were to provide an area of increased amenity value and eventually (40 years hence) the potential for a commercial return. While the acacias and eucalypts have generally grown well, the Mexican Cypress have suffered wind-throw and toppling on the wet sites, which also accounts for the patchy growth apparent. More recently, Kraig has pruned selected trees to grow good quality timber.

Unfortunately, the woodlot was also affected by the July 2007 storm and an estimated 50% of the Mexican Cypress have been blown over to the point where they will not recover. This calls into question the potential of the woodlot to provide a commercial return without significant re-planting. After the storm, Ron Sylvester has walked the woodlot and confirmed Kraig's estimate of 50% toppling of the Mexican Cypress, plus a surprising number of substantial eucalyptus and acacias. Apart from a few areas with little damage, Ron reported widespread devastation. It seems we have a major clearance problem on our hands (not dissimilar to other people in the North).

Given the current situation, we recommend that a brief report be obtained from a locally based recognised professional on the condition and viability of the woodlot as a commercial concern. That report would also cover aspects such as ongoing silviculture costs and potential returns. This information would assist lot owners to determine if the commercial woodlot concept should be persisted with or not. An allowance of \$1,500 for this report has been provided for in the 2007/08 budget.

Regardless of the outcome of that decision, consideration can be given as to what other tree varieties could be inter-planted to provide additional amenity value, either from an aesthetic point of view (liquid ambers, pin oaks etc for seasonal colour) or a practical one (food sources for birdlife - kowhai, puriri, miro etc - to supplement the existing gully plantings).

Should this idea meet with general acceptance, a five year plan could be drawn up setting out tree types, quantities, costs and a planting map and timetable. Depending on the level of interest of lot owners, planting could be undertaken on a volunteer basis or as part of the overall cost. An allowance of \$1,200 has been provided in the 2007/08 budget for plants to allow some limited (volunteer based) planting to take place over the balance of this year, starting with wind resistant shelter belts at each end of the woodlot to filter the prevailing easterly and westerly winds.

### **Jan 2008 Newsletter**

Ron Sylvester (General Committee member and Woodlot sub-committee member) reports on behalf as follows:

- The July 2007 storm damage has been tidied up to some extent. The fallen lucitanicas visible from the main roadway have been cleared away. A larger number, unseen from the roadway, still needs to be attended to.
- Some fallen acacias between the lucitanicas have been cut up, stacked and are available for Lot owners to use. Some other standing acacias have been marked for future attention.
- In 2 sessions, three weeks apart, 80 litres of 'Ban Vine' spray has been applied on to the convolvuluous (bindweed) in the 2 main gullies. However, this will be a battle of attrition and Ron & Co could use any help they can get. If you have some time and maybe even a backpack sprayer, please contact Ron who will coordinate this much needed help.

A proposal, for discussion, is to transform, over time, the "Woodlot" to a "Wilderness" then "Managed Wilderness" by the process set out below. The proposed area of the Managed Wilderness would be that block bounded by the tennis court to the west, the main road to the north, the lake to the south and finally the southern road to the east. The Managed Wilderness would therefore encompass the existing reserves contained within those boundaries.

#### *The proposed Programme:*

A survey to be undertaken to:

1. Define the areas and work required to complete the removal of fallen trees and residual pruning;
2. Consider a route for permanent walkway(s) and picnic area(s);
3. Determine location of temporary work tracks to assist in :
  - the removal of fallen trees;
  - access for weed and pest control;
  - extraction of firwood; and
  - identifying locations for native plantings, amenity trees.....

The area of the Managed Wilderness to be divided into 5 sections, with one section being 'developed' each year. In Year 1, one area would be 'developed' with the other 4 areas just in a pest control 'holding' pattern. So, at the start of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year there would be one developed area in 'maintenance and enrichment' mode; one area in 'development' and 3 areas in 'holding' mode. And so on.....

The Society's 2007/08 budget allowed for;

- a report on the viability of the commercial woodlot (\$1,500)
- plant costs (volunteer planted) (\$1,200)
- Pruning the woodlot (\$6,000)

The need for a viability report was rejected at the AGM confirming the view that there was no support for a commercial woodlot.

The plant costs budget and approximately \$2,000 of the pruning budget remains as at 30 November 2007.

For any planting and enrichment work on Year 1 'development' area to commence before the autumn rains in 2008, the following preparation would need to be done;

- Cutting out remaining fallen trees;
- Pruning remainder; and
- Spraying to kill off pampas grass, bindweed, thistles, kikuyu etc.

Kraig will do some of this work to the extent that the budget can sustain it, otherwise volunteer working bees will need to be arranged.

## **2008 Annual report**

At the 2007 AGM there was little support for continuing with the commercial woodlot and the alternative of keeping the surviving trees and augmenting them with a mixture of native and amenity trees to create a 'managed wilderness' was adopted.

Ron and Toni Sylvester, who together are the driving force, report on overall progress as follows.

The conversion to a managed wilderness got off to a flying start, with the assistance of those mentioned:

- Kevin Bayliss and Kraig Steiner removed many of the toppled Luisitanica trees that were visible from Takahoa Drive;
- Kraig pruned the better trees still standing;
- Dean Liggins and Glen Cameron assisted in preparing a conversion programme;
- Acacia trees threatening the juvenile natives in the gully reserve denoted as X on the Property map were cut down, thanks to Glen and Jake;
- The area designated as 'I' on the Property map (south east of the tennis court) was intensively sprayed to kill the thick kikuyu grass and an access way cut through (Kraig and Richard);
- A mix of over 500 trees have been planted to create a Kahikatea lowland forest;
- Release spraying in the gullies marked X and Y.

In all, some 255 trees were bought, with Toni supplying the balance from transplanted seedlings from existing bush or cuttings from local plants. On behalf of the Society, Ron and Toni Sylvester applied for and received a grant of \$1,100 from the Kaipara District Council, specifically reimbursing the costs of purchasing and planting of 100 Kahikatea trees, 30 Mahoe and 20 Lancewoods. Well done!

The next 12 months will not be as intensive as area 'I' is a fairly bare area, requiring significant density of planting, whereas the other areas are already planted in trees and it will be a matter of infill planting only. Work will entail:

- Continue to cut down toppled Lusitanicas (felled in either of the 2007 or 2008 storms);
- Prune where appropriate;
- 'Release' plants (from convolvulus etc) in the Kahikatea 'forest' area and Gully reserves X and Y;

- Planning and developing area 'V' (for planting in autumn/winter 2009).

Area 'V' is a large area (eastern end of the managed wilderness), with big tracts of kikuyu and the sooner we can destroy that, the better. Within this area we can possibly mitigate some of the effects on the north and southern edges of the lake of the strong easterly and north-easterly winds (which are doing the recent damage).

From area 'V' it should be relatively easy to develop a walking track to link to the Kahikatea forest in area 'I' in the west.

## **Newsletter July 2008**

The proposal to transform, over time, the "Woodlot" to a "Managed Wilderness" has engendered support. The area of the Managed Wilderness is that block bounded by the tennis court to the west, the main road to the north, the lake to the south and finally the southern road to the east. The Managed Wilderness would therefore encompass the existing reserves contained within those boundaries.

Work has been undertaken to:

1. Define the areas and work required to complete the removal of fallen trees and residual pruning;
2. Consider routes for permanent walkway(s) and picnic area(s);
3. Determine location of temporary work tracks to assist in :
  - the removal of fallen trees;
  - access for weed and pest control;
  - extraction of firewood; and
  - identifying locations for native plantings, amenity trees.....

The area of the Managed Wilderness is to be divided into 5 sections, with one section being 'developed' each year (please refer to the attached map for provisional areas). In Year 1, one area would be 'developed' with the other 4 areas just in a pest control 'holding' pattern. So, at the start of the 2nd year there would be one developed area in 'maintenance and enrichment' mode; one area in 'development' and 3 areas in 'holding' mode. And so on.....

The Society's 2008/09 budget allows for \$10,000 to be spent on this process which will be expended on sprays, trees, fertilisers and some of Craig Steiner's time in mowing work tracks/paths and removing fallen trees (the latter being part of the continuing tidy up aftermath of the July 2007 storm).

Planting and enrichment work on Year 1 'development' area has commenced with a very successful 'planting bee' that saw 155 trees planted (mainly kahikatea) with another 140 odd assorted trees ready for planting. Work will be ongoing.

## 2009 Annual Report

Ron and Toni Sylvester, who together are the driving force, report on overall progress as follows:

### *Plantings*

The clearing of 'wind-thrown' woodlot trees and the infill planting of other tree species continued. For family and health reasons Ron and Toni did not complete as much work as they had planned nor could they organise any 'working bees' (which would have allowed members an opportunity to assist).

Due to the scorching summer weather and drying winds we suffered planting losses of around 25% of the 500 trees planted in Block 1 last year (the area to the south east of the tennis court). This winter, the plan is to replant and fill the gaps with another 200 trees (about 2/3rds being 'home-grown' by Toni). Consideration is being given to accessing the dam water supply and providing some water reticulation around the northern side of the farm. That could provide a partial solution to watering in the early part of the trees' life and assist in the more effective use of the farm.

In selecting the trees for Block 1, we chose fast growing species – ngaio, coprosma, kanuka and cabbage tree – for quick shelter. The second criteria is that the trees must provide food for birds. We also included some rare local species. Kikuyu and convolvulus weeds will require spraying campaigns for the next 2-3 years. In years to come, the 100 kahikatea trees planted will gradually come to dominate the scene. Not only is kahikatea suited to the wet slopes of this site but it has a significant historical connection to the Kaipara. It was the dominant species of the harbour shoreline until the (aroma-free) timber was turned into mundane butter boxes and packing cases for the burgeoning export trade.

Thanks go to Glen Cameron for removing wattles and lusitanicas that were threatening the future of young miro in Reserve X in Block III.

The experience of the past year, the level of resources available (labour and cash) and the size of the managed wilderness area (approximately 9 hectares) has occasioned a rethink of the speed of progress in converting the woodlot into a managed wilderness. Initially it was thought that one of the five designated areas could be converted each year however, that appears to be optimistic. The process involves the following steps:

- Clearing by spraying (relatively easy);
- Planting (again, relatively easy);
- Maintenance – watering; re-spraying; re-staking; poison baits to minimise rabbits and possums (repetitive and time consuming relative to the other aspects).

These problems can be overcome by the copious application of labour or cash. The alternative is to take things a little slower – if that is what members want. The budget of \$10,000 for 2008/09 was under-spent by \$7,000 – a function of not being able to source the right sort of cheap but responsible labour to assist. The current year budget is only \$5,000 and will need a few working bees to make some significant progress (especially after the planting phase).

Depending on member's wishes the conversion can be slowed down or speeded up depending on the resources applied (labour or cash). Perhaps each of the 5 blocks actually needs a 2 year process (clearing and planting followed by maintenance, watering and infill).

Having said that we do propose to start work at the eastern end at Block V with plantings of poplars, with the objective of splitting the dreaded easterly wind. The small blue stakes that can be seen in this area already (peaking above the kikuyu) mark the positions of planted ngaio to create further shelter for planned plantings of kowhai, miro, tawa and kohekohe in 2010.

### *Walking Tracks*

Significant progress has been made on creating some walking tracks in Blocks I to III (see attached map). It is proposed to keep these tracks open and to create further extensions that will eventually join up in and around the northern foreshore in Blocks I to V of the wilderness area. Members are encouraged to walk these tracks which should allow them to enjoy the development of the wilderness area and to access some lovely spots overlooking the lake. A narrative description of the 3 tracks established so far is provided as a separate sheet that members can take with them on the walk(s).

## **March 2010 Newsletter**

Work continues on transforming the "Woodlot" to a "Managed Wilderness" over time. This area is the block to the north of the lake. The Managed Wilderness area has been divided into 5 sections, with the aim of progressively developing each block. Work has been a bit slower than anticipated due to a desire to keep costs down.

Strong winds and drought conditions (lowest rainfall in 15 years) have combined to produce large cracks in the ground, poor growth and some tree deaths in the planted tree areas (east of the tennis courts) notwithstanding valiant watering efforts. The previous method of laborious watering with 2 litre milk bottles filled out of Ron/Toni Sylvester's water tank, up and down steep slopes just won't work in the current conditions.

Several people have contributed ideas and time to developing a better water delivery system. A 1,200 litre water tank has been generously provided by Neville Collett (Lot 10) and Kevin Bayliss (Lot 3) and Kraig Steiner have since established a siphon driven water line from the storage dam well into the new plantings in the Managed Wilderness. Dave Hyndman (Lot16) dug the line in to protect it from stock. This will greatly assist in watering and can readily be moved across as new planted areas are established. Ron and Toni are so relieved and grateful for this breakthrough.

A word of caution thought.....the water line works off the storage dam (above Lot 14) under a siphon system. Therefore, if the tap is left open it will drain the storage dam completely. So, look, admire, applaud but, refrain from having a test run!

It is proposed that the next area to be planted is in the eastern end of the Managed Wilderness – a smaller area up from the junction of Takahoa Drive and Manu Drive. Toni Sylvester has been growing suitable plants and others will be purchased. The area has had a preliminary weed spraying with a second due shortly.

We plan on a couple of ½ day 'working bees' when the rains arrive (June/July) to undertake the new plantings and infill the old plantings. We will advise of the days by email nearer the dates and would appreciate similar support to what we have enjoyed in the past (same goes for the lovely weather we seem to encounter).

If you are wandering through the Managed Wilderness and you notice any woolly nightshade growing, would you please pull the small ones out by the roots? If they are bigger, let Ron/Kraig know. The same goes for thistles (if you are tough or have a grubber with you) and pulling convolvuloses off the trees all helps.

## **2010 Annual report**

### *Plantings*

A working bee was held in June which was well attended by some 15-20 people. Our good luck with the weather continued and a productive morning was spent in planting some 100 trees in Block 1 adjacent to Takahoa Drive. Infill planting in Block 1 (tennis court end) replaced some of the trees lost to drought.

As mentioned in the March newsletter, a siphon driven watering system has been installed into Block 1. An additional pipeline is planned into Block 5 (\$1,000 included in draft budget). "Off-shoot" pipelines could readily be added to that main line to support future plantings in Blocks 2, 3 and 4.

Block 5, the "Bellbird" block, had an initial successful planting of some 150 trees and provided an opportunity to meet other members, including new ones. A frost knocked out a few of the trees planted but these have been replaced.

Progress has been a bit slower this year due to reasons similar to those outlined in the last annual report and the additional impost of much more time spent in watering, to counter the effects of a record drought.

The process in respect of each of the five Blocks involves the following steps:

- Clearing by spraying (relatively easy but 2 years minimum);
- Planting (again, relatively easy);
- Maintenance – watering; re-spraying; re-staking; poison baits to minimise rabbits and possums (repetitive and time consuming over several years).

It appears that, with the present level of resources being applied, each of the Blocks actually needs an overlapping 4 year process (clearing and planting followed by maintenance, watering and infill). If members want this to be quicker, additional resources (labour and cash) need to be applied.

### *Walking Tracks*

Walking tracks in Blocks I to III are being maintained and expanded as energy permits. Members are encouraged to walk these tracks which should allow them to enjoy the development of the wilderness area and to access some lovely spots overlooking the lake

## 2011 Annual Report

### *Plantings*

Ron Sylvester gives his thanks to Kevin Bayliss, Kraig Steiner and David Hyndman for their work in connecting water pipelines into Block 1 (Kahikatea block) and Block 5 (Bellbird block). 'Off-shoot' pipelines can readily be added to the main line to support future plantings in Blocks 2, 3 and 4.

Just to be clear, there is no plan to completely replant these areas – we are just augmenting the mix of plantings, given the 'knock-down' of so many of the 'timber' trees (lucitanica/eucalyptus/acacia) in 2007.

Ron notes that the waterlines have been a great success and vital for the infill and replacement plantings. Weed spraying has continued and will be necessary until 'canopy closure' is obtained.

The process in respect of each of the five Blocks involves the following steps:

- Clearing by spraying (relatively easy but 2 years minimum);
- Planting (again, relatively easy);
- Maintenance – watering; re-spraying; re-staking; poison baits to minimise rabbits and possums (repetitive and time consuming over several years);
- Maintaining the quality of 'timber' of the planted woodlot trees.

Progress in the Wilderness will always be slow unless there is a heavy application of labour and time and/or money. To date, other than the end blocks (1 & 5), work has consisted of 'limbing up' the predominant Lusitanicas, acacias and eucalypts, cutting out fallen tress (from the 2007 weather bombs), some infill plantings and spraying for convolvulous, thistles and woolly nightshade.

Already, the trees offer food and shelter for our growing bird populations, who often gather to watch the activities of the animals on the ground beneath them. Ron offers his thanks to those who have helped, and to his grandsons and son-in-law, for step cutting and track clearing a 300m length along Toni's bait station run.

We invite you to visit the tracks and sites in this area to:

- Listen and watch the Tui families rehearsing their songs;
- Pigeons showing how four of them can rest easily on the tops of very small trees;
- Rosellas demonstrating that trees are no obstruction to speed in flight;
- Silver eyes brawling over a turn at a feeding station or bird bath;
- All watched by quiet kingfishers.

All this and more, without a mention of the sea or lake birds! We hope you have many opportunities to watch and enjoy.

While we are grateful to Ron and Toni for their work, for their part, they appreciate being part of the development and maintenance of the park areas of Takahoa Farm Park.