

Media release – Sunday 3 July 2022

Protecting existing biodiversity the priority for Hurunui

The greatest threats to the survival of biodiversity in Hurunui District are pests such as wild deer and pigs.

That was one of the sobering messages delivered to a community meeting held in the Waipara Memorial Hall on Wednesday 29 June. The meeting was organised by the Hurunui Biodiversity Trust to discuss the development of a district wide biodiversity resource, which would be available online and in hard copy.

Trust Chair Dave Nicholls says when completed the biodiversity resource could provide local landowners with the information they need to take action and protect and enhance the biodiversity that exists on their land.

“Everyone interested in protecting biodiversity wants to know where to start”, says Nicholls. “We hope that by developing an accessible biodiversity resource everyone in the district can learn more about the value of the biodiversity on their land, the threats from pest species, and the steps they can take to protect biodiversity.”

There were three speakers from the Hurunui Biodiversity Trust who addressed the community meeting. In addition to a welcome from Chair Dave Nicholls, Trustees Michael Bennett and Jamie McFadden spoke about protecting biodiversity from the dual challenges of pest species and climate change.

Michael spoke about how communities needed to understand and appreciate biodiversity in order for it to thrive. While there is plenty of information around about biodiversity Michael said the Trust had identified the need to consolidate relevant information in one easy to access resource for the local community.

One example of the information that could be compiled into an online resource was the spread of pest species. Jamie McFadden shared a map identifying where deer were a pest across the district. Deer are a chronic pest in coastal hill country. The prevalence of pest species greatly inhibits natural regeneration, and means efforts to establish biodiversity, for example through planting trees, were often a waste of time said Jamie, as deer could easily trample or eat plantings. In many areas protecting existing biodiversity from being destroyed by pests was a greater priority in the short term than new plantings.

Dave Nicholls says the biodiversity resource could help inform people about the threats to their biodiversity so they'll be able to make informed decisions to protect what they have on their properties.

“There's a lot of information required to make informed decisions about biodiversity”, says Nicholls. “You need to know what you have and why it's worth protecting. Then you need to know what the threats are, including pests such as deer and pigs and invasive weeds. And finally, but most importantly, people need to know what steps to take to protect their biodiversity and what support and funding might be available to help them.”

The second part of the meeting was a discussion followed by attendees being invited to write down their needs and ideas for the biodiversity resource. Dave Nicholls says the group discussion tapped into the challenges many people have with managing biodiversity.

“There's been a shared experience of disappointment and disillusion when pests or the climate destroys new native plantings”, says Nicholls. “People want to do their bit for the environment and planting natives seems like the right thing to do and it can be in the right place. However, landowners need to know the factors that influence biodiversity, including its value, the threats to it and the opportunities to enhance it, across their properties and the district to be able to understand what will give the best return to biodiversity from their efforts. It confirms the value of bringing all the relevant information together in one easy to access resource.”

Nicholls says the Hurunui Biodiversity Trust will start developing the resource. Further community meetings will be held as the resource takes shape to get feedback on the content and discuss potential next steps.

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