

Wairarapa Times-Age



MR McKENZIE

Kopuaranga tree removal pays dividends for farmers

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KOPUARANGA farmers are reaping the benefits of a tree removal programme undertaken earlier this year.

Masterton District Councillor Rod McKenzie, a landowner in the area, said payout from the programme has been outstanding during the recent heavy rain in the region.

"If the Kopuaranga River hadn't been cleared earlier this year, we'd have been flooded at least eight times in the past four months. It has had a tremendous effect."

The \$60,000 programme was first suggested to authorities two years ago, after repeated clogging caused the river to back up and housing in the small settlement 12km north of Masterton.

"The council would have to go out about four times a year to put up flooding signs so that cost's been saved already. Another 500 acres of land that always goes under water with heavy rain but that hasn't happened lately. It's remarkable what a few willows can do."

An advisory committee was formed early in 2005 and included local farmers as well as Wellington Regional Council and other representatives. Tree felling was then conducted over a three-month period earlier this year.

Mr McKenzie said the various representations on the advisory committee have meant the river changes are not solely for flood control but include projections for enhancement of the Kopuaranga River in the future.

The committee opted not to clear fell the riverbanks. Instead they removed trees, leaving groups of willows still planted to provide shade and aesthetic enhancement.

Plans have also been made for replanting in the areas where willows were removed, with natives trees top of the list.

"The committee's policy is to have controlled replanting with natives trees, flaxes and willows. It's a beautiful area and a great one we want to look after it."

Mr McKenzie said concern for the environment played a large part in the entire programme, and that farmers in general are now more concerned with looking after their surrounds.

"There aren't many farmers out there that aren't environmentally sensitive these days. Very few, in fact. These things spread like wildfire. One person starts, the others start to pick it up. Even I've grown to it myself."

The main financial backing behind the Kopuaranga River programme came from the Wellington Regional Council and Mr McKenzie is grateful for the input.

"It's got to be appreciated that we get this money from ratepayers in places like Karori in Wellington, which is a great advantage. It's a great thing."