

Te Waihora Flagship

Annual Report 2017-2018

Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere is an outstanding wetland nationally and internationally and supports the most extensive area of wetland habitat in the eastern South Island. Exotic willows pose a serious threat to its indigenous biodiversity. The Te Waihora Flagship Project aims to protect this high-value area from environmental weed invasion and degradation. It is a collaboration between landowners, the Environment Canterbury-funded Whakaora Te Waihora work programme of the Te Waihora Co-Governance Group (Ngāi Tahu, Environment Canterbury, Selwyn District Council, Christchurch City Council), the Selwyn Waihora Water Zone Committee, the Regional Committee, and the Department of Conservation.

Key Achievements

- The Mahaanui Weed Strike Force was established. This is a joint workforce between the Department of Conservation and Environment Canterbury. The partners will deliver coordinated willow and weed control, primarily around Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere, over an initial three-year pilot period. The Strike Force is funded by Environment Canterbury's Te Waihora Flagship Project, the Te Waihora Co-Governance Group's Whakaora Te Waihora programme, and the Department of Conservation.
- The Weed and Willow Control Strategy for the Te Waihora Flagship Project has been reviewed and updated. The strategy will inform the Weed Strike Force three-year work plan.

Progress of overall programme

- Willow control was undertaken at the Ward Wildlife, Boggy Creek, Harts Creek, Lakeside Wildlife Management Reserves, and LII River and Selwyn Delta sites, as well as on a number of private properties.
- Targeted control of Reed Canary Grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) was undertaken for a fifth year, focusing along the northern lakeshore, including around the LII/Ararira River, the Selwyn/Waikirikiri Delta and Boggy Creek Reserve areas.
- Purple Loosestrife control was undertaken along waterways in the Tai Tapu and Prices Valley Drain areas.
- Preliminary findings from the 2017 Te Waihora lakeshore vegetation survey show that overall the state of lakeshore wetland vegetation has improved during the past 10 years; there are now some spectacular examples of recovery of native freshwater wetland vegetation following control of crack and grey willow. Control during the past six years has reduced willow extent within targeted areas (mostly Department of Conservation reserves). However, willows continue to spread in other areas, and the survey shows that the extent of willow-affected lakeshore has increased from 170 hectares in 2007 to 358 hectares. The spread of willows (especially grey willows) and other weeds, continues to pose a threat to indigenous vegetation, particularly in freshwater wetland habitats. Although analysis of the data is still being completed, the results will guide the Te Waihora Flagship project and Weed Strike Force.



Native planting along the riparian margin of Harts Creek.
Photo: Frances Schmechel



Willow removal and fencing along Harts Creek.
Photo: Nichola Marshall

Harts Creek enhancement

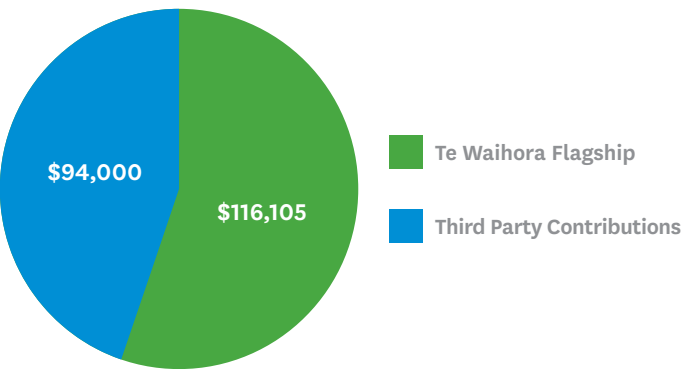
Harts Creek is a spring-fed stream and is one of the key tributaries leading into Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere. With upper reaches between Leeston and Southbridge, it flows through the Lakeside district for approximately 10 kilometres before entering Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere along its western shore.

During the 1990s the declining health of the creek reduced fish numbers. This prompted local landowners, with help and support from the local community, Environment Canterbury, Selwyn District Council, the Department of Conservation, and many others, to undertake restoration projects on their properties around Harts Creek and other tributaries. The Harts Creek and Birdling’s Brook Streamcare Group was also formed. Harts Creek has since become clearer and wildlife has returned.

The Te Waihora Flagship Project has continued to fund projects that add to the already extensive work carried out, contributing towards fencing the waterways, the removal of willows, and the planting of riparian margins with native species.

Budget information

Total funding 2017-2018: \$210,105



What’s next?

- Implementation of the Mahaanui Weed Strike Force three-year work programme, led by the Department of Conservation.