



Biosecurity Bites

AUTUMN 2019

Wilding Conifer Update

The Crown provided \$16 million over four years (Phase 1) towards a national wilding conifer programme. Phase 1 began in October 2016 with Canterbury receiving about a third of the Crown funding available for operations, an amount of more than \$6.5 million. In 2016/17 and 2017/18 further funding from two wilding conifer trusts, WELRA and the Mackenzie Wilding Conifer Trust (\$541,928), landowners (\$737,000) and Environment Canterbury (\$650,000) was made available.

The work has removed much of the wilding conifer spread from two million hectares of Canterbury high-country stretching from the Clarence River in the north to the upper Waitaki catchment in the south. The intractable areas of closed canopy wilding forests and remaining wildings will be treated as funding allows.

The general strategic approach to control has been the roll-back of widespread pre-cone trees and removal of the seed source where possible. The only exception to this approach was at Craigieburn (near Arthurs Pass), which involved treating a large-scale closed canopy wilding conifer forest as well as extensive spread at a cost of \$2.9 million. It is a highly visible site that was selected to demonstrate that management of dense infestations is possible with appropriate funding.

A business case for further Crown funding has been prepared by a cross-agency/ regional council group led by MPI. The current funding bid is for \$100 million nationally over the next four years. This bid is supported by Minister of Agriculture Damien O'Connor. However, whether the bid is successful won't be known until the budget announcement in May.

Saying that, all parties have agreed that the priority for any additional funding would be to finish the current active management units before commencing new management unit work. The Mackenzie Wilding Conifer Trust secured a further \$245,000 from the Lotteries Environmental Fund, Transpower and LINZ.

Environment Canterbury successfully negotiated with NZTA for the removal of conifers along State Highway 8 from Burkes Pass to Lake Pukaki, at an estimated cost of \$300,000. This work is managed and funded by NZTA and is currently underway.

The management of tree species declared pests in Mackenzie District Council-owned plantations and in Environment Canterbury's Lake Tekapo Regional Park needs consideration. These trees provide an ongoing seed source to adjacent land outside the forested areas.



What is the Biosecurity Team up to?

Summer-autumn is always a busy time of year as we work to complete our control work on pests of limited distribution.

We also have nassella monitoring to complete and site-led pests such as old man's beard to control.

Then it's time to head into gorse, broom and wallaby inspections. Just a reminder, if you have control work to do on gorse and broom, this is a good time of year to do it, while the ground is still warm and there is generally a bit of moisture around.

The team normally has 16 biosecurity officers throughout Canterbury, but due to internal job movements and some vacancies, we are currently recruiting for new biosecurity officers to join our team. The work is challenging and rewarding, and no two days are the same. One of the best parts of the job is seeing some of the gorgeous country we have in Canterbury and knowing that we are helping to protect our environment.

In our next issue we will be able to introduce you to our new staff members.

 *Photo right: Biosecurity team undertaking Chilean needle grass control.*



Biosecurity at the A&P shows

The biosecurity team has been visiting regional A&P shows this season with a focus on farm biosecurity. They have been highlighting pests in our region that are currently in low distribution, but which have huge potential to spread. The regional shows have provided an opportunity for the community to learn more about these emerging pest threats, and best practice when it comes to managing biosecurity on the farm.

Environment Canterbury staff commented on the positive conversations they had with farmers and how each part of Canterbury has its own take on what's hot in biosecurity at present.

At the three-day NZ Agricultural Show in Christchurch, the team was joined by other industry groups eager to share messages about the importance of farm biosecurity. Representatives from Beef + Lamb, DairyNZ, Federated Farmers and Foundation for Arable Research (FAR) joined the team to discuss biosecurity with visitors. We were also very lucky to be joined by Nala the sniffer dog and her handler Geoff from the Kuri Dog Centre. They proved a real hit with visitors and helped to promote sniffer dogs as one of the new tools available to assist with pest programmes.

 *Photo right: Biosecurity team at the A&P show.*



Farm Biosecurity

The Farm Biosecurity programme at Environment Canterbury is aimed at helping farmers find practical ways to improve biosecurity on their farms. Taking the time to plan biosecurity requirements and requesting visitors to follow biosecurity protocols is an important consideration alongside health and safety.

As part of our "Clean on, Clean off" policy, the team has been demonstrating two portable pumps for use out in the field. The first is a pump that can be plugged into a 12V connection (cigarette lighter) and draws water from any available water reservoir. The second is a pump mounted on the biosecurity ute hardwired to the battery and attached to a 110L water tank. For more information on the pumps, or anything biosecurity related, contact our biosecurity team. Free gate signage is also available by contacting Environment Canterbury or visiting your local PGG Wrightson.

 *Photo right: Mounted pump with 110 litre water tank.*





Old Man's Beard

Throughout the first couple of months of this year, old man's beard has been highly visible as it flowers over both native and exotic plant species. It is particularly noticeable along coastal areas and road verges, but also in urban and rural gardens.

The biosecurity team's focus is where old man's beard poses a major threat to areas high in biodiversity value and their surrounds. With a climbing and layering growth habit and the ability to grow many metres in a season, old man's beard can quickly reach the bush canopy where it blocks light, smothers mature shrubs and trees, and restricts access.

In an urban or rural garden, hedgerow or tree block, old man's beard quickly smothers desirable species and doesn't respect property boundaries. If you have old man's beard on your property, the biosecurity team encourages you to control its vines. This can be a very rewarding task, as the removal of just one root system can result in the control of an extensive area of aerial vines.

Control work of aerial vines does not require large amounts of herbicide or expensive equipment – just a pair of secateurs or loppers for larger vines and a stump treatment herbicide such as glyphosate as a spray or gel. Cut vines at waist height and then again as close as possible to the ground, ensuring all vines are cut at the root and treat the fresh cuts with herbicide.

If you are sharing a problem with old man's beard with your neighbour, have a chat and work together to carry out control.

The team will only undertake inspection and control where projects to protect high-value areas are underway or opportunities exist to work in partnership with other agencies and groups. Biosecurity staff will respond to complaints from adjoining neighbours. This involves a letter and pamphlet being sent to the occupier concerned - no physical inspection will take place. The best result would be to work with your neighbour to help resolve the issue.

 *Photo above: Old man's beard.*

Pest Management Liaison Committees

As part of the new Canterbury Regional Pest Management Plan (CRPMP), Environment Canterbury has been reviewing how we communicate with our rural communities and the role that Pest Management Liaison Committees (PMLCs) have to play.

Currently, we have 11 PMLCs throughout Canterbury whose focus has traditionally been on production pests. There have also been two pest-specific committees, the Chilean Needle Grass and Hurunui Nassella Tussock committees.

After a lengthy review about how to make these committees more successful and better supported, there is a proposal to restructure to four committees: Northern

(Waimakariri River – Marlborough boundary), Banks Peninsula-Christchurch (incorporating all of the Peninsula, the Port Hills and Christchurch City area), Central (Waimakariri River – Rangitata River) and Southern (Rangitata River – Otago boundary). The scope of these committees will be broader, acting as the interface between Environment Canterbury and the community on biosecurity, and committee members will provide advice and champion regional initiatives.

These proposed changes have been shared and discussed with the current committees and a final draft proposal should be in front of Environment Canterbury Councillors in March. Following this, current committees will be advised of the outcome.

This is an exciting opportunity for those with an interest in supporting the CRPMP and the wider biosecurity and pest-led biodiversity programmes to get involved at a strategic level. If you are interested in being involved or would like further information, please contact your local biosecurity team leader.



Nassella Tussock

Another nassella season has come and gone, and it was disconcerting to see the amount of live tussock left behind on some properties in the spring when the biosecurity officers were out doing their inspections. Vigilance is the key to ensuring tussock numbers are reduced on your property. Remember that every plant left behind creates tens of thousands of seeds that could potentially germinate.

Nassella tussock is a windborne seed and if left unchecked, it can and will impact on your neighbours if your control programme isn't early and thorough – be a good neighbour and do the right thing.

Last season there were issues for some farmers with their contractors not turning up or turning up late. There were several reasons for this, but for those of you who engage a contractor, it is important that if your usual crew can't make it to your property before the compliance date, to look for alternatives. Also, please provide feedback to your contractor about the standard of their work. Early grubbing is effective if it is thorough and Environment Canterbury is always happy to undertake early inspections. If you need a contractor to grub your property, ring now and book them in. They get busy from July onwards and may not be able to accommodate you if you leave it until then. Be specific about when you want them to arrive on your property. Seasonal variations create challenges for everyone, and both farmers and contractors should have a contingency plan. Most people do a really good job and we encourage you to keep it up and work with your neighbours to help them achieve a good level of control.

If you require further information regarding nassella tussock, good control advice or a list of known contractors, please phone your local biosecurity team on 0800 ECINFO or email biosecurity@ecan.govt.nz

African Love Grass

African love grass was recently spotted by a vigilant biosecurity officer on a roadside in the Greta Valley area of North Canterbury. Until the find, the grass was only known at four sites in the southern part of the region.

A vigorous, clump-forming perennial grass that can grow up to 1.5 metres tall, African love grass leaves are narrow, harsh to touch and curly at the tips. The leaves are usually bright blue-green, turning bronze-red after a hard frost. A prolific seeder, seeds are blackish, olive-purple and attached to over-arching stems over one metre long.

African love grass will rapidly invade bare and disturbed land and, once established, forms dense stands, suppressing other herbaceous species. It can affect both production and environmental values.

The biosecurity team would like to hear from you if you spot African love grass in the region. Please google African love grass or *Eragrostis curvula* for more images of this pest.

 Photo above: African love grass.

X-IT GRASS Herbicide on Trial

Last year a trial was undertaken to determine the effectiveness of the herbicide X-IT GRASS on the control of pest plants nassella tussock and Chilean needle grass. The trial ran from late March when the herbicide was applied, until October.

The trial was set up using the Department of Conservation's herbicide experiment specifications.

Results showed the herbicide to be very effective in the targeted control of both nassella tussock and Chilean needle grass, and it may prove to be another tool in the management of these pest plants.

Application resulted in very targeted control, with no by-kill.



Photo right top: Pre-treatment.
Photo right bottom: Post-treatment.

