



Project Mahitahi

NOVEMBER 2021 NEWSLETTER

Project Mahitahi was launched almost one year ago now, and so much work has happened in the catchment already. Project Mahitahi has planted 30,000 native plants, hosted six community events, undertaken weed control over more than 10 hectares of land, and employed 32 people working across six different host employers. It is particularly impressive considering much of the work had not begun until the early part of this year and has involved a lot of people, many of whom were new to conservation work. This great start to the project has been achieved through their enthusiastic commitment to environmental work, but also facilitated by the generous support of their employment hosts, who have provided excellent mentoring and training.

Many people from the wider community have also been involved in Project Mahitahi planting events over the 2021 planting season. This support has been equally significant in achieving the overall goals of the project.



Planting at Nile Street Bridge by Nelson College for Girls, in Commemoration of Kate Edger, the first Principal of Nelson College for Girls.

What is Project Mahitahi?

Project Mahitahi is a collaborative project aimed at restoring the ecological health of the forest ecosystems of the Maitai / Mahitahi / Maitahi catchment. By controlling pest plant and animal invaders to a level that will give our native biodiversity a better chance of surviving, and supplementing these areas with planting, we aim to support a thriving bio-corridor. The work required to do this is extensive and will take years beyond the life of this Project, but this is certainly a good start!

The Maitai Ecological Restoration Plan was the basis for the operational plan and was needed as part of securing the funding. If you would like to look at this plan, you can find it here:

nelson.govt.nz/maitai-ecological-restoration-plan

While this plan is focused on Council-owned land, Project Mahitahi also works with iwi landowners in the catchment, to restore ecosystems on publicly-accessible lands.



Planting at Peneamine Restoration Site, Sharlands Creek Area overseen by Kaitiaki Whenua rangers employed by Ngāti Koata Trust.

This table shows the outcomes achieved in the first year of Project Mahitahi.

Task	Year One: Target	Year Five: Target	Year One: Actual
Animal Pest Control	12 ha	24 ha	98 ha
Pest Plant Control	8 ha	24 ha	26.3
Planting incl. Taonga Species	4 ha	32 ha	7 ha (30,000)
Wetland Actively Managed	0	0.7	0.6
FTE Roles Created	15	54	15.25
Other Achievements			
Possum Control	1000+ Possums trapped for skins -		
Ungulate Control	20+ Deer and 70+ Goats shot by single hunter		
Community Events	6		
No People Attending Plantings	250+		

Employment through Project Mahitahi – Jobs for Nature

Since the Project began, 40 people have been employed across the various sub-projects, and as at the end of October 2021, there are 32 people in roles. Those people who have left the Project, have moved on to more permanent or more senior roles, which reflects one of the aims of Jobs for Nature – the programme is designed to help find further permanent positions for the people it employs and the training that is being delivered to field staff under Project Mahitahi has successfully helped these individuals into other conservation-related positions.

These roles are spread across six employers: Kūmānu Environmental, Ngāti Koata Trust, Easy Trails, the Brook Waimārama Sanctuary, Fulton Hogan, and Nelson City Council. The range of work involves pest plant control, planting, trapping, visitor and volunteer support, biosecurity, and administration.

Pest Plant Control

To date, weed control has begun or been completed, on 26 ha of publicly accessible land. The focus has been on particularly damaging species such as vine weeds and pest tree species including Sycamore, Wilding Pine, and Crack Willow. The river corridor has some very steep slopes that carry a burden of weed species, however these areas are largely inaccessible to field staff, particularly to those new to this type of work. As always, the health and safety of staff is a very important aspect to consider.

There are limits to how much of the catchment can be managed. Some key sites that have been focused on this year include: Venner Reserve, Mahitahi Wetland, Peneamine sites, and the Groom Road from the Mahitahi Wetland.

Concentrating on these key areas helps to ensure that work is contained to a level that will be sustainable following the Project's end. The expectation is that once Project Mahitahi officially concludes, these key areas will be well planted with canopy closure, and key weed species will be controlled to a level of surveillance control.

Tree Planting Programme

The Project has a planting target over the five years of 125,000 plants, including taonga species such as Matai, Tanekaha, and the more endangered plants of the Maitai / Mahitahi / Maitahi ecosystems.



Planting at Venner Reserve

This first season has seen 30,000 plants in the ground, including more than 3000 taonga species amongst existing first-generation plants.

The planting has been undertaken by field staff but has also been assisted by six community planting projects supported by the Ministry for Primary Industries Commemorative Planting Programme. The Ministry for Primary Industries has also provided more than 25,000 native trees for hillside plantings in the catchment, including Venner Reserve.



Some of the planters at the Mahitahi Wetland Planting: Nelson Tasman Multicultural Council

SITE	COMMEMORATION	COMMUNITY PARTNERS
Shakespeare Walk	Thomas Cawthron and the contribution to science in Whakatū Nelson	Cawthron Institute
Nile Street Bridge	Kate Edger, First Principal of Nelson College for Girls, and first woman to receive a BA in the British Empire	Nelson College for Girls
Mahitahi Wetland	The journeys of people who have made Whakatū Nelson their home	Nelson Tasman Multicultural and Friends of the Maitai
Sunday Hole	Kākati – the common ancestor of the iwi of Te Tau Ihu (Matariki planting)	Community wide planting
Peneamine	Ben Peneamine Hippolite	Ngāti Koata led planting on Ngāti Koata whenua
Smith's Ford	Botanical knowledge of the Whakatu Nelson Region, and those who have contributed to this	Nelson Soroptimists (this wider event was limited due to Covid restrictions)



Members of Nelson Soroptimists, hitting some stony ground at Smith's Ford

Next year's planting season will involve at least three community plantings, as planting continues at the Mahitahi Wetland, Sunday Hole-Waahi Takaaro Reserve, and Peneamine. Something to look forward to is the catchment bus tour, which was postponed and will now be held in summer. If you would like an early alert of this event, please contact Project Mahitahi at the address at the end of this newsletter.

Pest Animal Control

Project Mahitahi has now established three pest trapping networks, covering more than 98 ha of our conservation reserves, including the Brook Campground to help protect the newly-introduced tīeke. These trapping lines are being serviced by Project Mahitahi Field Staff from Kūmānu Environmental, with the intention that they will eventually become community trapping projects.

Possum and ungulate control is being undertaken in the Maitai Waterworks Reserve, overseen by Fulton Hogan. One hunter is employed for an average 8 hours per week, and two people are employed to trap possums. These three Project Mahitahi staff have trapped more than 1000 possums and culled 20 deer and 70 goats over the last few months. An impressive effort in a difficult landscape. Browsing animals have a devastating impact on our native ecosystems - ungulates browse understories, feeding off emerging plants and preventing regeneration from occurring, while possums kill plants by reducing tree foliage to an unsustainable level, as well as destroying bird nests and impacting on native populations such as Powelliphanta.



Tieke settling into its new home in the Brook Waimārama Sanctuary.

Other Highlights

Project Mahitahi was profiled nationally through the release of a video by the Ministry for the Environment. You can view this video here:

https://youtu.be/h61sF_BFBeI

The Brook Waimārama Sanctuary currently employs five people across two full-time roles, and these Project Mahitahi roles focus on supporting the Sanctuary to deliver its various visitor and volunteer programmes. One particularly interesting project that has been overseen by Project Mahitahi Staff has been the: [Glowworm and forest-after-dark tour](#)

Information about Project Mahitahi

You are currently signed up to our mailing list to receive early notification of any events, and any changes to these events because of weather or unforeseen circumstances.

If you know of others who may wish to sign up, please ask them to contact:

project.mahitahi@ncc.govt.nz or call Alesia on 546 0232.