



Project Mahitahi

PROJECT MAHITAHI MAY 2022 NEWSLETTER

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.

How are we tracking?

Project Mahitahi has several targets to meet for both the Ministry for the Environment and the Department of Conservation, the agencies which jointly provide funding under the Jobs for Nature programme. These targets are shown below and that need to be reached by June 2025.

Task	June 2025 Target	Achieved to Date
Animal Pest Control	24 ha	98 ha
Pest Plant Control	24 ha	26 ha
Plants incl. Taonga Species	125,000	29,000
Wetland Actively Managed	2 ha	1.3 ha
Job hours – new roles	84,240	46,384
Other Achievements		
Possum Control	2000+ Possums trapped	
Ungulate Control	Deer and Goat Control – single hunter, 8 hours per week	

Employment Outcomes

Training is being delivered to the field staff focused on conservation skills, and this has enabled several to have moved into permanent roles outside of the Project, or into team leader roles in other Jobs for Nature projects. This will eventually lead to a highly skilled, motivated, and local pool of conservation workers in the region.

The numbers of people employed at any one time on Project Mahitahi fluctuates, but on average there are approximately 30 people working on the Project across 6 different employers. The staff are involved in a range of work including pest plant control, working trapping lines for rats, mustelids, and for possums, and delivering additional services to support the Brook Waimarāma Sanctuary.



One of the sites for pest animal control being managed by the team is in the Brook Conservation Reserve outside of the fence. This will help protect fauna that make their way outside of the Sanctuary including the newly introduced kākārīki karaka, the release of which involved Ngāti Koata Kaitiaki Whenua rangers employed through Project Mahitahi.

The kākārīki karaka is a new species for the Brook Sanctuary, and this transfer has reintroduced it to the Nelson region. With just 360 left in the wild, the species is the rarest mainland forest bird in Aotearoa.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/environment/128166988/fledgling-endangered-parakeet-spotted-at-brook-waimrama-sanctuary>



Images from Trail Cams on the trapping line within the Brook Conservation Reserve

New picnic sites up the Maitai

Have you seen the work that the Maitai Reserve Caretaker and his crew have been doing to develop picnic sites in the upper Maitai Valley? This has included better access to a picnic table near the Dam, a new table at Jack's Paddock, and a whole new picnic site with access to the river which will be planted by the Project Mahitahi team over winter.



Jacks Paddock on the left and the new track to the Maitai Dam picnic spot on the right.



New picnic spot in the upper Maitai waiting on planting and grassing.

Upcoming planting events

A further 60,000 plants will be planted in the Maitai Catchment this winter, some of which will be delivered as community plantings. Come along and join us to plant a tree along with our community partners on one of these dates. Refreshments will be provided at each event, as well as some activities focused on the restoration work being done – and just for fun!

DATE	ALT DATE	SITE	PARTNER	TIME
18 June	2 July	Waahi Takaaro Golf Course	Community Matariki Planting	1:00 pm to 3:00 pm (BBQ incl.)
20 August	27 August	Mahitahi Wetland (adjacent to the Maitai Campground)	Nelson Tasman Multicultural and Friends of the Maitai	1:00 pm to 3:00 pm (BBQ incl.)
August (exact date TBC)		Peneāmine Restoration, Sharlands Road	Ngāti Koata led Project	TBC

Other key planting sites this season include Groom Road between the Mahitahi Wetland and the Tanragee Saddle, and Venner Reserve in the Upper Maitai Valley. The plants will be a mix of native trees, shrubs, and grasses, with at least 3000 podocarps or broadleaf canopy trees including Tanekaha, Totara, and Matai.



So far 7500 plants have already been installed by Project Mahitahi field staff, who are averaging 1000 plants per day!

In preparation for planting, weed control continues at these sites with one well recognised pest tree being controlled in the Upper Maitai and the Sharlands Creek catchments: the Crack Willow. This will be a gradual process, with a limited number of trees removed in any year, focusing on dead, diseased, or collapsing trees.

Crack Willow is a registered plant on the National Plant Pest Accord, meaning that it can be neither purchased nor distributed. This species of willow is a problem in river and stream systems because the easily broken fragments are transported downstream, where they readily take root to form new trees and colonise whole areas, including through suckering. This can happen some distance from the parent tree, and particularly along inside bends of waterways on silt banks formed through high water flow.

Willows will grow in areas that are continuously wet and can encroach quite well into a waterway, particularly smaller streams such as Sharlands Creek. As debris falls, dense mats of roots then trap silt, build up the stream bed and divert the water flow into banks thus increasing erosion and flooding.

Willows are recognised as having a positive effect on native fish as they provide woody debris, and large roots and fallen trees can deflect river flows, creating undercut banks and deep pools for trout and eel refuges along with shading effects. However, dense shade in spring and summer, with a heavy leaf fall in autumn, suppresses native vegetation and fauna. The sudden and extensive leaf drop, and rapid breakdown of leaf matter, means an extreme variation in cover across the year which can alter the temperature and oxygen content of the water.



Native vegetation will be replanted in place of the Crack Willows and will take the place of these functions once grown, and if necessary, eel tunnels or other enhancements can be added while this establishes.

Stories of the Mahitahi

We are always interested in stories, photos, or footage you might want to share of the Maitai Mahitahi. We will shortly be releasing a new oral history story video, from the recollections of Stephen Clarence Packer after his family generously provided us with their ancestor's recollections of early life growing up in and around the Maitai.

Later this year, we will be putting together a new storymap of the work that the community and the Project Mahitahi staff have been involved in, and some of the stories that have already been shared with us. If you would like to contribute something to this by way of a photograph, or a recollection, even just a couple of lines you wish to share, then please send to our email address below.

The oral histories we already have collected can be viewed here:

[Maitai Oral Histories - Nelson City Council](#)

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 have any questions about the Project, or know of others who may wish to sign up, please ask them to contact:

project.mahitahi@ncc.govt.nz