

‘MAKE LONGBUSH LONGER’

A RIPARIAN RESTORATION PROJECT ON THE WAIMATA RIVER

The Longbush Ecological Trust, a charitable trust registered with the Charities Commission, seeks to restore endangered species of native plants and animals to the Gisborne district. Based on two QEII covenants beside the Waimata River, the Trust is actively restoring the habitat for a number of rare birds, animals and plants. It has already brought back native robins, Williams broom and East Coast kakabeak to Longbush, and proposes to restore an inland colony of titi (muttonbirds) during 2011.

‘Make Longbush Longer’ is an exciting opportunity to engage in a riparian restoration project based on a rare surviving remnant of riverside bush, recognized as a Protected Management Area in the District Plan. The Waimata River has high recreational and environmental values, with upper Riverside Road being frequently used by walkers, runners, cyclists, riders and visitors; and the lower reaches of the river by kayakers, waka ama paddlers, rowers and fishers. The Waimata runs into the Turanganui River, where the harbour, port, marina, sailing club, fishing club, cafes and the Cook Landing Site are located.

For these reasons, the state of the Waimata River is important to many people in the district. At present, large stretches of its banks collapse into the river at times of high rainfall, carrying quantities of silt into the harbour and generating costs in repairing Riverside Road and associated structures (bridges, culverts etc). If over time, the banks of the river and its tributaries can be restored by private and public landowners, this will enhance the river’s health and recreational values, while mitigating the costs associated with flooding.

The Longbush Trust is keen to initiate a project that is likely to inspire others to follow suit, restoring bush to a stretch of road reserve along the gravel road leading to Longbush. At present this reserve holds a number of attractive stands of native bush, interspersed with grassy areas, and quantities of blackberry, Japanese honeysuckle, pampas and other weeds. The Trust does not seek funding from GDC, but permission to restore the reserve as an exemplary riparian restoration project and perhaps assistance with weed control. It has already invested considerable funding in the restoration of its QEII covenants, a project that has aroused widespread interest in the district.

As a first step, the Trust would like to work with Council officers (including Trevor Freeman and Yvette Kinsella) in seeking expert advice on riparian restoration and planning a riverside reserve. It seems likely that this expertise is available locally. The Longbush Trust would seek funding sources and contributions in kind for this project. We see this as a community driven project, and a first step in setting up a ‘Friends of the Waimata’ organization to take care of the river in the long term. There are few, if any negative aspects to this proposal, and many potential benefits for people across the Gisborne district.