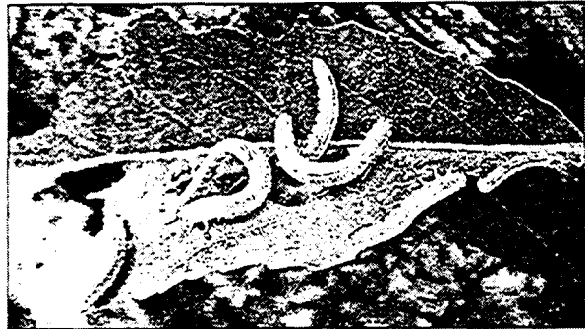


# Willow sawfly threatens flood defences

By PHILIP KITCHIN



Sawfly grubs demolish a leaf on a willow tree

ENVIRONMENTAL groups fear that New Zealand's flood protection schemes, worth billions of dollars, could be seriously damaged by a small American grub that has straggled thousands of miles from the United States to Gisborne and Hawke's Bay willow trees of their leaves.

Damage by the willow sawfly extends throughout big areas of the beds of the Ngauroro and Tukituki rivers in Hawke's Bay, and the grub is widespread in the Bay of Plenty and Gisborne.

"This could have major environmental implications," Hawke's Bay Regional Council land management manager Garth Eyles said yesterday of the damage the sawfly could cause.

The sawfly arrived in New Zealand in 1997 and has been travelling south about 300 kilometres a year since. Last year, it was found in Christchurch.

In the northern hemisphere, willows are not used as extensively as in New Zealand to stop river bank erosion. New Zealand regional councils, which are responsible for flood control schemes, fear the sawfly could have a serious impact on river bank willows.

In parts of Hawke's Bay there has been an explosion of the sawfly grub population with grubs crawling over each other to get to willow leaves.

Where the sawfly has become established, big areas of willow plantings have been defoliated.

The damage the sawfly could cause seemed not to have been recognised by funding agencies because there had been difficulty getting funding for research on



Mr Eyles examines sawfly damage to willows in Hawke's Bay

whether there were effective chemical or biological controls, or whether some willow species in America or Europe were resistant to its attacks, Mr Eyles said.

Few willows that have been defoliated by the sawfly have not recovered, but what will happen to the trees if they are attacked year after year is unknown.

Hawke's Bay Regional Council business unit manager Graeme Hansen said that if New Zealand's flood protection schemes were seriously damaged by the sawfly, it would cost billions of dollars in lost production, flood damage and the cost of trying to replace willows with another form of river bank control.