

Water Supply, Parks & Forests Division Update for period ending 31 July 2007

Reserve Forests and Conservation Forestry (Tom Ward)

Reserve Forests

1. Tauanui Logging

June was another good production month with 1,687 tonnes being produced. This brought the total harvest for the year to 12,702 tonnes.

Post drought conditions allowed the contractor drier than usual access and production flowed smoothly. While the export markets held, material that did not meet the domestic market grades was cleared whenever possible. The volume of timber stockpiled at the wharves finally collapsed the current export opportunity. Alternative markets were found for the export logs on the skids and the contractors were refocused on the domestic grades. Our buyers can accommodate the limited volume of lower grade material arising from the current operations.

The change to the locally based cartage contractor has seen much more regular uplift from the skids. As a result the logging contractor is much happier and this is reflected in the volumes harvested and carted. There are still some issues with truck scheduling which sees some product types accumulating as the available number of trucks struggle to make an extra round trip during the working day.

2. Access

The roads to the logging skids have held up remarkably well with no maintenance required in the last quarter. This highlights the benefits of doing road formation work ahead of the logging operations and allowing a few months for new formations to settle. This is particularly important with the onset of winter.

Options have been explored to identify the most suitable site to cross the Tauanui River. A specialist Forest Roding Engineer has visited the site and is currently preparing a report with recommendations.

The river has several sections that are abnormally steep in gradient as a result of past debris flows and blockages. Degrade through these stretches creates an unstable riverbed so that a simple ford crossing is not sufficient. There are risks that a battery culvert or concrete base would be undermined through degrade and high river flows. In addition high rainfall in the large upstream catchment has the potential to trap contractors on the wrong side of the river leading to safety issues and the potential for stand down payments to logging contractors.

It is anticipated that the best option may be some form of bridge.

3. Silviculture

51 hectares of pruning and 25 hectares of thinning were completed for the year. This is not a large area by comparison to previous years, but represents the priority treatment required in the stands replanted following harvesting in Hiwinui. Typically these stands are made up of a combination of regeneration supplemented by planted seedlings to ensure coverage.

The resulting high stocking has the benefit of reducing branch size which is good for branch removal at pruning and potential clearwood growth, but this is offset by greater hindrance in tree selection and moving through stands.

4. Planting

6,000 seedlings have been planted in the cutover in Tauanui to supplement natural regeneration in the area that has been harvested since the end of last winter

5. Fire Danger

The recent rainfall has provided the much needed relief from one of the most severe Fire Seasons on recent record. There were 5 rural vegetation fires on the night of 6th June. Resources were stretched with some Fire Service appliances attending multiple incidents without returning to base. Resources were brought in from the Wellington region to assist.

Extreme winds were a major factor in these fires, the most serious of which was in a private plantation at Te Wharau. This fire started from power line arcing where a live power line was running through a mature stand.

This particular block was bounded by Juken Nissho Forest (ex Ngaumu State Forest) and a Forest Enterprises Forest. Prompt action limited the fire and prevented it spreading in to a significant forest environment. Despite extreme wind conditions, the fire was kept on the ground and contained averting a potential disaster.

There has been considerable discussion around the Fire and Rescue Service legislation proposal with the consensus being that it is going to happen regardless of submissions to the proposal, that it is based on an overseas model that has been found wanting and that there is a risk that regional and local expertise will be lost. The proposed model has some positive features around the Rescue side of the proposal but lacks detail as to how the proposal will be delivered.

It is considered that if the legislation continues to move forward, it will be at least two years before a new structure will be in a position to deliver the proposed service. As a result Regional and Local interests are continuing to develop Rural Fire Management resources based on the current legislation. Some of these resources are failing through

age and particularly Rural Fire appliances are becoming obsolete with replacement schedules not filling existing needs.

6. Stoney Creek Wind Farm Proposal

Representatives from three different companies inspected the site at Stoney Creek and collected information and photographs to supplement information already available to them. In all cases there were questions about accessing metal for concrete aggregate in the local area.

The Makara Stream at the end of Range road was considered to have limited potential with Stoney Creek and the Awhea River containing even poorer quality material. Transmission to a suitable point on the national grid was considered to be a limitation.

7. Rough Hill Boundary Fence

The fence line has finally been satisfactorily cleared. Mr Frank's machinery and his staff skills have not been as efficient we would expect professional larger contract machine to be. Our concerns over excessive soil disturbance have limited the amount of tracking alongside the fence line.

The small machine had considerable difficulty handling some of the steeper rocky sections. We would not agree to the large amount of sidling tracking and further deviation from the agreed route due to the potential for land destabilisation in ground now covered with native regeneration.

Despite the agreement being based on a conventional fence, Mr Franks is pushing for a deer fence on the information that he has been provided stating that there is no difference in cost.

Now that the line has been cleared and accurately measured materials have been accurately estimated and quotes obtained for a conventional fence and a deer fence from an independent provider. Quotes for the materials required for a deer fence are fifty per cent higher than a conventional fence. Erection costs were estimated to be \$4.00 per metre higher for deer fence. In addition we believe that the on going maintenance costs would be higher for a deer fence.

We have asked Mr Franks to provide an itemised quote to substantiate his advice that there is no difference in cost.