



**Funded:** \$2.8m by MfE's Public Waterways and Ecosystems Restoration Fund as part of the Jobs for Nature programme

**Total project cost:** \$3.2m

**Project duration:** 5 years

**New jobs expected over project life:** 16

Waikato Regional Council received \$29 million for multiple environmental restoration, biosecurity and climate resilience projects from the Government as part of the economic response to COVID-19.

This riparian fencing and planting project, which is one of them, seeks to reconnect the Kopuatai wetland to the Firth of Thames. The vision is to have a continuous green corridor along the true right bank of the Piako River, from the restiad peat bog of the Kopuatai wetland through the mangrove forests, salt marshes and chenier plains of the Firth of Thames foreshore. There will also be riparian planting to drainage systems between Kopu and Waitakaruru.

In total, a quarter of a million plants will go in the ground and 35 hectares of land will be retired. All the plants will be eco-sourced with a preference to them being grown by local nurseries and social enterprises. This is a new project, but it builds on discussions with local iwi and planned and existing programmes run by Waikato Regional Council. Much of the work will be on council managed flood scheme land.

#### Project benefits

- Enhanced instream and terrestrial habitat for native fish and birds, and waterfowl.
- A connection of high biodiversity sites by the creation of an ecological corridor.
- Reduction in contaminants and sediment entering the Piako River and Firth of Thames through riparian planting and riverbank stabilisation.
- Improvements in water quality.
- Increase in survival rates of native aquatic species and waterfowl in periods of drought (providing shade for native fish including tuna, kōkopu and inanga which live in and/or use the river as a migratory pathway to and from the sea).

#### What does this mean for me as a ratepayer?

This project does not impact on your rates as it is fully funded through the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) grant, work in kind by Waikato Regional Council, and the regional council's existing budget for such works. Should there be a requirement for maintenance beyond the five years of this project and outside the current budget provision, this would be considered through a long term plan process. The Piako River Green Corridor also supports compliance with MfE's recently introduced National Environmental Standards for Freshwater at no additional cost to ratepayers.

#### What does this mean for my land licence?

For many land licence holders, the change in land area available will be minimal as the planting and fencing will generally happen on the riverside berm of the stopbank. Where changes to individual land licence areas could occur, as a result of this project, we will be directly contacting the licence holders well ahead of time.

#### Is there a risk to the Piako River flood scheme?

The Piako River flood protection scheme will continue to deliver the same level of service with the green corridor in place. In fact, the planting will help stabilise the riverside berm of the stopbanks, thereby providing additional security during a major flood event, with the aim being to reduce maintenance over time.

#### How is the council procuring services and materials?

The largest expense of this project is the supply, planting and maintenance (up till June 2025) of a quarter of a million native plants. This will be delivered through an open tender process, to be advertised in September/October 2021. The assessment criteria for evaluating tenders will be based on council policy, central government funder requirements and cost. There is a greater emphasis on procuring services that include Māori/Pasifika, women and youth and this will be considered in the development of the criteria. Depending on value, the tender process may be approved by our Tenders Board or Contracts Subcommittee. In the meantime, a small area in Ngātea has been planted under our existing purchasing processes to kickstart the project in the 2021 planting season.

#### Who is the council engaging with on this project?

We have set up a working group to ensure a variety of ideas, experiences and knowledge are fed into the project. The working group includes representatives from Hauraki District Council, two landowners from the Waihou-Piako Flood Protection Advisory Subcommittee and the Thames Valley Land Drainage Advisory Subcommittee, the Department of Conservation, Fish & Game and iwi.

#### How can I get involved?

A driver for this funding is creating employment so volunteer opportunities are limited. However, we are looking at ways to engage with schools and community groups. Sign up to our e-newsletters to stay connected by emailing [shovelready@waikatoregion.govt.nz](mailto:shovelready@waikatoregion.govt.nz).

