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The Hem of Remutaka Coastal Wetland Restoration Project Profile



Purpose of this review:

To highlight the positive social, environmental, and community benefits resulting from the Hem of Remutaka Coastal Wetland Restoration project.





Project Summary

The Hem of Remutaka is a partnership between Conservation Volunteers New Zealand Taranaki Whānui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika, and the Greater Wellington Regional Council. As part of the project collaboration with the public was undertaken to ensure compliance with fishing and diving regulations along the Eastbourne, Parangarahu, Wainuiomata, and Turakirae coastlines.

The project aims to restore the life force (mauri) of the 'Hem of Remutaka' area by:

- Enhancing the natural environment
- Restoring coastal and wetland ecosystems
- Improving hiking and cycling tracks

Region	Wellington
Recipient	Conservation Volunteers New Zealand Remutaka
Start date	1/06/2021
End date	30/06/2024
Funding	\$ 1,560,000.00
Intent	Ecosystem Restoration, Freshwater Restoration, Pest Control Animals, Pest Control Plants, Recreation Enhancement
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taranaki Whānui ki te Upoko o te Ika (TW) • The Tupoki Takarangi Block Trust • Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) with Friends of Baring Head • Orongorongo Station • Pencarrow Station
Funder	Department of Conservation

Why is the project important for the region?

The project spans from Eastbourne to Turakirae Head. This area is renowned for its rugged, bush-clad hills and stunning coastal landscapes. The Remutaka Forest Park, which spans 22,000 hectares (54,000 acres), is a significant natural area that includes some of the most pristine original bush in New Zealand, largely untouched by early settlers.¹ It is also a popular destination for outdoor activities such as hiking, mountain biking, camping, and hunting and is now threatened with erosion, biodiversity decline and has lost core ecosystem services provided by coastal and wetlands systems.

From 2006 to 2022, Conservation Volunteers New Zealand (CVNZ) has been instrumental in ecosystem restoration efforts, dedicating over 22,207 days to restoring nature in the Wellington region alone. Their work is crucial in maintaining the health and beauty of Wellington's natural landscapes.²



What difference is the project making to people?

8 individuals have been employed and trained in conservation, improving their skills and contributing to the local economy. The project is building practical skills and capabilities among the workforce including training in project management, collaborative work, and specific skills like pest control and plant management.³

Educational and community benefits

One of the highlights of the Hem of Remutaka project is the establishment of a native plant nursery. This initiative began in early 2022 when team members, despite having no prior experience, started propagating kawakawa.

Over time, the nursery has grown significantly, and it now produces over 60,000 eco-sourced native plants annually. These plants are used for various planting projects across the region, including:

- East Harbour Regional Park
- Tupoki Takarangi iwi land block
- Remutaka Forest Park for DOC
- Local schools and smaller planting events

For those involved, watching the seedlings grow and knowing their hard work contributes to a long-term environmental project is deeply satisfying. This sense of achievement and self-belief is something Lee Hunter from Taranaki Whānui hopes to cultivate. He envisions the nursery as an “incubator” for future businesses that will create jobs and opportunities for iwi-based enterprises.⁴

The nursery serves as an educational resource, offering opportunities for community members to learn about native plant species and the importance of ecological restoration. This helps raise awareness about environmental conservation and encourages sustainable practices.

Through their involvement with the Capital Kiwi Project, team members have gained valuable skills and knowledge in conservation, particularly in managing kiwi habitats. The project's goal is to restore a significant wild kiwi population in Wellington's hills, which has already seen the release of 140 kiwi since November 2022. ⁵

The presence of kiwi plays a crucial role in New Zealand's biodiversity and supports our cultural, spiritual, and historical heritage.

The experience of releasing kiwi into the wild has been profoundly moving for the Hem of Remutaka team, creating deeper connection with indigenous wildlife. Witnessing kiwi in their natural habitat has transformed the relationship from passive pride to active guardianship, as noted by Capital Kiwi Project's founder Paul Ward.⁶

The collaborative effort between iwi, landowners, and the community demonstrates the power of collective action in environmental management and conservation. The successful reintroduction of kiwi highlights the potential for productive landscapes to coexist with our treasured species, contributing to the long-term survival and prosperity of these unique birds in Wellington's hills.

“I feel extremely privileged to be a part of the Hem of Remutaka Project, working in areas of great ecological significance such as the Parangarahu Lakes and Turakirae native wetlands on a daily basis. Working on this project has given me the opportunity to further develop my skills and knowledge within conservation as well as Mātauranga Māori”

Vyona Broughton, Hem of Remutaka Field Coordinator¹²

Improved health and wellbeing

The restoration of natural environments can have positive effects on mental and physical health. Access to well-maintained natural spaces encourages outdoor activities such as hiking and cycling helps create the conditions for a healthier lifestyle. 30 kilometres of walking and cycling tracks have been maintained, promoting outdoor recreation, tourism, and community well-being.

The project involves extensive community engagement, including the maintenance of 30 km of tracks and the installation of information boards. These efforts help forge and strengthen people's connection with the land.

How is the project contributing to the wellbeing of Māori?

This project created employment opportunities, particularly for locals and descendants of Taranaki Whānui who were affected by the impacts of COVID-19.⁷

The project supported Taranaki Whānui to increase their presence and ability to act as kaitiaki (guardians) of their whenua (land). The project has reconnected the descendants of Taranaki Whānui with their historical sites and other sites of significance. This reconnection is vital for maintaining cultural heritage and identity.

Taranaki Whānui leads the thinking and implementation of a Mātauranga-based approach to kaitiakitanga for this project. The use of Mātauranga (traditional knowledge) principles supports greater protection of biodiversity and freshwater health by applying a holistic view when helping to restore ecosystems.

Impacts on the Environment

Contribution to improved biodiversity and ecosystem restoration

The coastal wetlands and ecosystems in this region are crucial for maintaining biodiversity and ecological balance. Protecting these areas is essential for supporting native species and preserving the cultural and environmental heritage of the region.

The project has helped towards restoring threatened coastal and wetland systems by creating ecological connectivity and improving the health of native flora and fauna. The project has controlled pests and weeds over 4,000 hectares, including possum, rat, mustelid, goat, and hedgehog control. With over 7,000 riparian and coastal plants planted, and 4 km of new fencing will be installed to protect regenerating indigenous vegetation.⁸

The nursery contributes to the restoration of biodiversity by growing and planting native species. By planting native vegetation, the nursery helps to stabilise soil, reducing erosion and improving soil health. This is particularly important in coastal and riparian areas where erosion can be a significant issue⁹

Freshwater Improvement

The restoration of wetlands and riparian planting will improve water quality by reducing nitrogen and phosphorus leaching into nearby water bodies, thus preventing eutrophication and promoting healthier freshwater ecosystems¹⁰

Carbon Sequestration

Restored wetlands can sequester carbon dioxide in their plant biomass and soils, contributing to climate change mitigation efforts.

Resilience to Climate Change

Healthy wetlands improve the resilience of coastal areas to the impacts of climate change, such as rising sea levels and

increased storm intensity. They help to stabilise shorelines and reduce the vulnerability of coastal communities.

Economic Benefits¹¹

Cost-Effective Flood Protection

By reducing the need for engineered flood defences, wetlands offer a cost-effective solution for flood mitigation. The natural flood control provided by wetlands can save significant amounts of money that would otherwise be spent on infrastructure.

Support for Fisheries

These coastal wetlands are vital for the health of commercial and recreational fisheries. They provide spawning grounds and nurseries for many fish species, which are crucial for the fishing industry.

Tourism and Recreation

These Wetlands and coastal areas offer recreational opportunities, such as bird watching, fishing, and hiking. These activities attract tourists, contributing to the local regional economy and creating employment opportunities.



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