

Restoring Taranaki - initiating regional scale engagement to restore the health of our environment

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Over the last eight years the super group 'Wild for Taranaki' has been on a journey. Their dream was to significantly advance the protection and restoration of biodiversity throughout Taranaki. In 2012 they released the Taranaki Biodiversity Accord. In 2014 a Regional Biodiversity Co-ordinator was employed. In 2015 the Taranaki Biodiversity Trust was formed. The first Trust Board developed a Strategic Plan (2015-2020), and set the top six priorities for 2015-2017. A brand 'Wild for Taranaki' was launched in 2016.

Priority 5 of the Strategic Plan was 'Develop plans for two collaborative, high value, flagship regional projects which achieve the outcomes of the Taranaki Biodiversity Accord'. Steps have been taken to propose an ambitious programme beginning in 2017. 'Restoring Taranaki' will see Wild for Taranaki working with landowners to turn their land into 'my little piece of paradise' with predator control, pest plant removal, native planting, and where suitable, by fencing-off streams and creating QEII covenants. Over 50 years the mosaic of healthy areas will connect until the whole region is covered.

The steps which led to this programme will be outlined. Available data on high value biodiversity areas and animal pest control operations was collated and mapped. A Regional Biodiversity Forum gave attendees an opportunity to review information and identify priorities and preferred approaches to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity on a landscape scale. A report on the discussion was produced by the University of Waikato. At a Trust Board workshop, supported by technical experts, a decision was made.

Fundamental to this decision was participation of local people. The involvement of the Taranaki community is crucial to long-term success. People need to be involved in all aspects of the programme which also incorporates human values. Improving quality of life and restoring and enhancing biodiversity will be achieved simultaneously.