

**Friends of Waiwhetu Stream**  
**Annual Report, 29 October 2018**

**Committee**

This was our committee for the past year.

Chair:                   Merylyn Merrett  
Deputy Chair:       Michael Ellis  
Secretary:           Grant Webby

Henry Steele	Rosemary Webby
Vera Green-Bargiacchi	Brendan Elks (Co-opted)
Katie Elks (Co-opted)	Rachel Tallon (Co-opted)

**Appointees**

Teri Puketapu (Te Runanganui o Taranaki Whanui o Te Upoko a Te Ika)  
Prue Lamason (Councillor, GWRC)  
Lisa Bridson (Councillor, HCC)

This is the eighth time I have given an annual report on our activities. Over the past 7.5 years Waiwhetu Stream has been transformed by volunteer labour, led by the Friends. Our purpose is to improve the ecological and amenity values of the stream and its corridor, and we are making good progress.

Waiwhetu Stream is about 9 km in length but more than 2 km of the stream through Naenae is channelised. There are about 600 residential properties bordering the stream as well as businesses and parks. My observation is that there are more people using the corridor than in the past. Recently I have seen people picnicking on the grass verges as well as at the picnic tables.

The water quality remains in the GWRC 'poor' category; that means it is unsuitable for swimming or drinking.

It has been pleasing to see that the native pukeko has extended its range along the stream. This pair with five young is breeding near the St Ronans weir. I would like to think our plantings have contributed to them finding suitable sites for nesting.

My report summarises volunteer activities over of the past year with contributions from project leaders.

**1. Strategic plan initiatives (Grant)**

At the beginning of the year, the Committee identified six new initiatives as part of a long term strategic plan:

- (a) Reviewing the Memorandum of Understanding with HCC and GWRC.

- (b) Installation of signs marking historic locations.
- (c) Fish passage improvements at the St Ronans weir.
- (d) Improvements at Rishworth Reserve.
- (e) A footpath and footbridge linking Riverside Drive central and north.
- (f) Naturalisation of 200 m of the Naenae concrete channel below Rata Street.

Progress has been made on four of these initiatives, which are discussed elsewhere in this report. The historic signage project has been stalled for more than two years, although suitable locations and photographs have been identified. A recycled footbridge had been in storage for the linking footpath project but we were told that key elements of this were stolen so this project is stalled. Continuing the distance markers that start at Hutt Park has also been discussed but there has been no progress on that.

## **2. Review of MOU with HCC and GWRC (Grant)**

This is a work in progress. A workshop hosted by an external facilitator was held with HCC and GWRC staff in August which confirmed a shared vision for the stream. An agreed action list was focussed mainly around the most urgent issue of weed management along streamside plantings. Updating the MOU, specifically the HCC component, remains the ultimate goal from this on-going conversation.

## **3. Rishworth Reserve restoration project (Vivien Pohl & Henry)**

It has been a successful year with good plant growth. Recent planting focus has been along the stream edge and gap filling elsewhere. 480 plants were planted this winter.

Where plants grow well so do weeds. It has remained difficult to keep on top of weeds and spraying has had to be used.

Recently eight ngaio trees and some dead plants were removed to allow other native species room for growth. Ngaio are fast growing and although not planted by us they initially provided good shelter but some had become overpowering to the detriment of other preferred species.

Most of the established flax at the southern end of the area has suffered dieback from the yellow leaf disease. Some planted trees in the area are becoming visible with the decline in flax.

A picnic table has been installed at the entrance and is often used by staff from local businesses.

Much of the main path and the new streamside path have been re-mulched. Unfortunately, this was imposed by truckloads of mulch repeatedly being illegally dumped at the front entrance. The remaining mulch there is in process of being removed so the site can be levelled and grass sown.

Much appreciated assistance with weeding and mulching during the year came from Callaghan, Bunnings, Maanaki Trust, Franz and Michael Jones.

#### 4. Naenae concrete channel naturalisation

Last year the Naenae Nature Trust contacted us for help with continuing their stalled planting project along the fence lines of a channelised section of Waiwhetu Stream from Rata St. This is an aerial view of the stretch of channel.

I met with Brendan and Andy from the Trust in September and subsequently developed a concept for not only planting the fence lines, but also naturalising the concrete channel. In October I met with Wellington Water engineers with a drawing of the concept, produced a formal proposal report in November and then met with HCC in December. The concept involved creating mini rock weirs along the 200 m stretch that would pool the water behind them, planting along the edges of the concrete berms which would eventually drape over the edge and disguise the concrete, continued planting along the fence lines, a path connecting Rata St with Naenae Park, and a picnic table. The proposal was accepted by WW and HCC and work began on the path in May this year.

This is probably a novel approach to naturalising a concrete channel so it will be interesting to see how it develops over the next few years. If successful, it is hoped this method can be continued down the rest of the channel.

The following is a summary from Brendan about the Trust's planting progress.

We had a great planting on 17 June and planted 482 plants and we have had some great feedback from the neighbourhood. We have also had a mulch day but there is still plenty of mulching to do

Sadly, a few weeks after planting there were two instances of theft of tree ferns. The stolen ferns were located in Wainuiomata by the Police based on a vehicle observation by Brendan and Andy. The ferns were eventually returned and have been replanted.

#### 5. Plantings (Merilyn)

Plantings went well although one had to be postponed because of rain. This year there were three 'Friends' plantings: Cleary St, the Heather Grove area, and Riverside Dr about 100 m down from Birdwood Rd. In addition, the St Pauls Church group planted an area opposite Lockett St, Kelson School pupils did a planting opposite Heather Grove and there was a small St John Cadet planting assisted by Friends.

Additional smaller plantings were done upstream from Bell Rd on both sides of the stream.

Putting down weed mat immediately after plantings last winter has proved a huge success, especially considering the spring/ summer drought. Weed mat reduces competition from weeds, improves soil moisture retention and reduces the need for weeding. The plants under weed mat have grown at twice the rate and have about 95% survival. In previous years there have been hundreds of plant deaths; for example, last year about 800 plants were needed for replacement planting.

In May I was fortunate in being able to obtain seeds from the native mistletoe *Ileostylus micranthus* from Upper Hutt through Travis Moody of GW. I put seeds onto host plants at three sites in the St Ronans Ave area and at Rishworth Reserve. Barbara put some seeds on plants along Wyndrum Ave.

In August, I noticed germination had started which was exciting. I have been informed that the first summer is the critical survival phase as the seedlings need reasonably regular rain, so we will have to wait and see whether they survive.

In total about 4 200 plants were planted this year bringing the overall total to >30 000 plants along about 5.5 km of stream banks.

Most of the plants were provided by HCC but we also had donations of 178 from the MIRO nursery, 230 from Wellington Forest & Bird nursery and 200 oioi from GW. Being offered plants from F & B has allowed planting of more uncommon species that are not readily available commercially. We thank all sources and are grateful for their contribution.

Before FWS started planting, there were very few native plants along Waiwhetu Stream. Because of our plantings, native plant diversity is > 80 species.

We thank all the volunteers who helped with planting; we appreciate their support. Thanks also to Riba from HCC who organised deliveries and helped with planting.

When I am out there weeding, planting or laying weed mat I receive a lot of positive comments from local residents and passers-by.

## **6. Stream corridor rubbish collection (Henry)**

Regular monthly clean-up of the Waiwhetu Stream corridor commenced in October 2011 and extends from Naenae Park to Hutt Park. The Awamutu Stream is also a source of rubbish and some has been removed this year.

There were 11 collection events this year filling 225 large bags of rubbish and taking almost 300 volunteer hours. A considerable amount of debris has been prevented from reaching and polluting the harbour.

Quantities of rubbish have not changed over the years. More rubbish is found after wet weather events. In terms of items collected plastic in the form of bottles, shopping bags and polystyrene makes up much of the rubbish together with coffee cups and glass alcoholic drink bottles. Larger items are regularly removed from the streambed, tyres in particular. This year we had a large dump of tyres at Rishworth.

Appreciation goes to the eight team leaders supported by 40 or so volunteers. This year has seen a number of retirements of volunteers who have served for seven years. Special thanks are given for their help and dedication.

## **7. Cape pondweed**

On-going removal of vagrant Cape pondweed plants has continued by Franz. He removed only eight plants this year compared with 38 in 2017 and 60 in 2016. We are very grateful to Franz for doing regular patrols and for providing the data. Maybe next year we can safely say that this pest plant has been eradicated.

Other invasive aquatic and semi-aquatic plants that grow along the edges of the stream such as willow weed, *Veronica* and *Mimulus* are being managed regularly by GWRC. This preventative management is working well by inhibiting the weeds invading the stream channel.

## **8. Website update (Rachel)**

This year the website was upgraded and the general look was refreshed. More photos were added and new pages created that are dedicated to specific projects and activities the Friends carry out.

## **9. Liaison between GWRC, HCC & FWS (Merilyn)**

Regular meetings have been held since May 2013 to discuss issues around the stream, and these have always been a positive forum for finding solutions to benefit the stream itself, to discuss new initiatives put forward by the committee, and to help achieve positive outcomes.

Our relationship with GWRC has remained positive. Unfortunately there has been deterioration with HCC over various issues, and especially with me about weed management.

Since 2014 I have been writing weed management reports for GWRC and HCC which have been accepted and actioned. The removal of Cape pondweed and progress with plantings has meant that weed management requirements has changed.

In May this year an updated report was rejected by HCC at one of these meetings. Two key elements were spraying along the mowing edge and the use of weed mat after planting. New and unrealistic expectations were that volunteers were responsible for all weed management, and the use of weed mat would not be supported. These HCC views were behind the need for a facilitated workshop.

At the beginning of September HCC advised that weed mat could be used for this year's plantings. The delay until spring has more than doubled the time taken to lay it because of weed growth and the job is still unfinished. Spring is when I usually focus on weeding but I haven't been able to do this because weed matting is the priority so weeds are out of control in some areas.

In 2012-13 we tried biodegradable materials with mulch but this proved useless. The non-woven weed mat has been the best, most cost effective option.

Regular spraying is required along the mowing edge to prevent mowers from damaging plants and tearing the weed mat. Recent due diligence by Riba, the new Community Ranger has meant that contractors have provided a reasonable price for regular edge spraying; This is due to start this week.

The HCC Waiwhetu Stream budget has often been used as an excuse to prevent actioning committee initiatives. The budget has remained the same for at least eight years despite the improvements that have taken place. It is unclear why this hasn't been addressed by HCC to ensure progress can continue.

Over the past three years until a couple of weeks ago we had not been given access to or made decisions on expenditure of the budget. We are now able to plan activities that fit in with the current budget so that is also progress.

## **10. Stream advocacy meetings with Wellington Water (Grant)**

- a. Water quality – We meet with WW on a 6-monthly basis to discuss matters affecting the water quality of Waiwhetu Stream and value these meetings as an opportunity to provide on-the-ground information about relevant issues. *E. coli* monitoring at Tilbury St and Rishworth St by WW showed an improving trend at Tilbury St until April this year but the trend reversed so they are redoubling their efforts to trace the source of contamination.

WW has an on-going programme of sewer pipe renewals, particularly in Naenae.

The sewer pipe in Rossiter Ave has also recently been upgraded and includes an inverted siphon under the stream. Although previously prone to frequent overflows, none have been recorded since the upgrade became operational.

- b. Community engagement – The Friends and other community care groups in the Hutt Valley and Wellington continue to meet with the Community Engagement team to discuss environmental impacts such as stormwater discharges into waterways. WW have indicated they want to establish this group on a more formal basis to act as an advisory panel to challenge its objectives and strategies.
- c. Seaview WWTP temporary discharge consents – The HCC consents application for a new discharge outfall to the Hutt River is on hold until the proposed Regional Natural Resources Plan is confirmed.

## 11 Citizen science activities

GWRC has supported the Friends with various citizen science investigations to help understand the health of the stream and how this is changing as a result of stream bank planting. We are involved in three initiatives:

- (a) macro-invertebrate monitoring with 3-monthly surveys and annual habitat surveys (Rosemary & Grant)
- (b) fish monitoring upstream and downstream of the St Ronans weir with surveys in November and February (Rosemary & Grant)
- (c) an inanga habitat survey between Bell Rd and Whites Line E. The results showed that most of the stream bank vegetation was fairly good for inanga spawning (Merilyn).

Training and support for the first two activities has been provided by the Wellington Mountains to Sea organisation. Some of the findings from these activities will be presented later.

## 12 Fish passage (Grant)

During last summer's holiday period, the Friends supported two university interns employed by GWRC's Flood Protection group. They worked on a project investigating options to improve inanga passage at the St Ronans weir. They suggested trialling a low cost floating fish ramp and one was installed at the end of February.

FWS have continued their observations of inanga attempts to climb the weir. Under suitable flow conditions, some larger fish are able to burst swim up the weir. This was confirmed by our February fish survey done prior to the ramp being installed. A significant number of inanga were recorded upstream although there were greater numbers downstream from the weir.

Work on permanent improvements to inanga passage at the weir is continuing.

### 13 Amenity improvements

Another picnic table has been installed this year, near Rungay St, making six altogether along the stream. It is pleasing to see they are well used all year round.

The inner concrete walls of the weir picnic table have had a lovely mosaic done by Rachel Silver who was contracted by HCC.

#### **Volunteer hours**

This year volunteers have contributed more than 2,660 hours. This is a significant contribution by the community and a reflection of the value placed on the stream and its corridor. Since 2011 the total number of volunteer hours is nearly 14 500.

#### **Acknowledgements**

The success of our community group and its activities over the past year is the result of the interest, time and commitment of the many volunteers who have helped with our activities and for this, as Chair, I say thank you.

I would like to thank Michael for chairing tonight, and our monthly meetings, Grant for doing a great job as Secretary and for organising the AGM, and the rest of the committee for their contribution and commitment to the success of the 'Friends'.

I would also like to acknowledge non-committee people who have made a significant contribution:

Vivien for her commitment to the success of the Rishworth Reserve project; Barbara for planting and maintaining along Wyndrum Ave, helped more recently by Matthew; Roy for helping with a range of activities including looking after both sides of the stream between Birdwood Rd and Te Whiti Park and Franz for his Cape pondweed patrols.

Merilyn  
Chair