



Kotahitanga mō te Taiao

Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Media Release:
**Restoring and Protecting Flora Project leaves a legacy
of landscape-scale weed control across the top of the
South.**

6 June 2024



Controlling wilding kiwifruit in the Buller District. Image The Flora Project

Major weed infestations threatening high-value ecosystems at 150 sites across Buller, Nelson, Tasman and Marlborough have been controlled by a Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance (KMTT) landscape-scale weed project coming to an end this month.

Over its three-year tenure, the Restoring and Protecting Flora Project (the Flora Project) led by The Nature Conservancy has worked with landowners, councils, iwi, community groups and the Department of Conservation to manage serious weed infestations at high biodiversity sites, controlling the equivalent of over 20,000 ha of weeds.

As well as controlling invasive weeds, the project will have provided over 132,000 hours of paid labour (84 FTEs). Staff received conservation training on the job with some going on to further careers in the sector.

Sacha Healey, Flora Project Liaison Officer for the Buller District said it had been a great experience working for the Flora Project. “We’ve made a huge difference across the region on weeds like pampas and old man’s beard, and at specific sites like Westport’s Floating Basin, transforming the estuary through weed control and extensive native plantings. I’ve enjoyed seeing the way it’s brought community groups and schools together, working side by side on ecological restoration. I’ve learned a lot and developed useful skills for my future work too.”

The top of the South Island is known for its unique ecosystems, and the project surveyed the region for important areas threatened by invasive weeds such as Himalayan honeysuckle, old man’s beard and climbing asparagus. It also targeted specific weed species to reduce their spread. This included spartina along the coastlines of Tasman and Golden Bays, pampas in the Buller District, and wilding kiwifruit across Tasman and Marlborough. Mitch Seek, the Tasman District operational liaison for the project noted, “Survey and control of wilding kiwifruit in the Riuwaka area will be a long-term benefit to not only the horticulture sector but also our native landscapes in the Tasman District.”

Working with a core group of contractors from the West Coast to Marlborough’s Wairau River Delta, the Flora Project has had a high level of community engagement, with support from volunteer groups involved with maintaining and planting in areas where weeds have been removed. In some cases, the project worked with existing community restoration groups to help them achieve much more with the extra resources provided. In Marlborough, the Flora project controlled old man’s beard and willow at strategic locations like the Hinepango Wetland, where high biodiversity values were threatened.

“The Flora project collaborated with Marlborough District Council, the Department of Conservation, the Hinepango Wetland Restoration Group and the Grovetown Lagoon Society to help do the heavy lifting and open the Hinepango Wetlands up for planting and ongoing maintenance weed control,” said Marlborough’s project liaison, Rob Simons.

In Tasman, the project has been working to control weedy invaders in ecologically significant areas of remnant podocarp forest at public and private sites.

Tasman farmer Judith Rowe said that the Flora Project was able to take on the big job of removing the large old man’s beard vines that were threatening to collapse mature native trees in areas of old-growth forest on the farm.

“There’s still the ongoing work but it’s moved the ambulance further up the cliff. I was doing a lot of this work myself and it was hard to know where to start. It’s a privilege to have this forest on our land, but the physical, mental and financial resources needed to care for it can

be overwhelming. We want it to be in good health for future generations, so it's been great to have that help to give us some breathing space."

Over 60,000 native plants have been put in the ground at 15 sites as part of a longer-term restoration programme – filling the void where dense weed infestations have been removed.

The Flora Project has had a significant impact on biodiversity in the top of the South. Unique ecosystems threatened with collapse are starting to recover, and doing this work at such a large scale will support the regeneration of native species and habitats.

"The threat of invasive weeds is just as concerning as the impact from predators such as rats and stoats," said the project's manager, Hudson Dodd. "Controlling them has been a huge effort, made possible by serious investment from Jobs for Nature and support from other funders, and the on-the-ground efforts of staff and contractors. It's good to see that the project is leaving the land in better shape for the future."

Background:

Restoring and Protecting Flora has been a joint effort [by The Nature Conservancy Aotearoa New Zealand \(TNC NZ\)](#) and the [Kotahitanga Mō te Taiao Alliance](#). The project received \$6 million in funding over three years from the Department of Conservation's Jobs for Nature initiative, and a further \$425,000 from other funders to restore regionally and nationally important native forest and coastal habitats threatened by weed invasions.