

# Company pays more than just lip service to environmental stewardship

BY JOHN COHEN-DU FOUR



Forest planting that is set back from fish streams helps to protect fish and maintain water quality. This picture shows the Motueka River with Gordons Stream (centre).



The native falcon population is thriving throughout Nelson Forests' estate.



The discovery of rare native flora like *Ourisia modesta* has led Nelson Forests' Environmental Improvement Committee to take specific action to protect the endangered plant. Photo by Michael North



Nelson Management's Estate Value Manager Andy Karalus is committed to protecting and enhancing Nelson Forests' natural environment.

"In effect we are future-proofing critical areas to protect our downstream neighbours from random weather events and woody debris slips leaving our land."

ANDY KARALUS, NELSON MANAGEMENT'S ESTATE VALUE MANAGER



Nelson Forests upgraded the culvert in Blue Glen Stream to improve fish passage upstream during spawning.

Many people might not automatically include a forestry company in their list of New Zealand organisations at the vanguard of environment protection, yet Nelson Forests Ltd is one of the Top of the South's most determined advocates.

The Company's proactive approach goes back to 1996 when Nelson Management Ltd, charged with the duty of managing Nelson Forests' estate and business practices, established its Environmental Improvement Committee. This undertaking saw Nelson Forests become New Zealand's first forestry company to earn an ISO14001 qualification for Environmental Management Systems, one of only six New Zealand companies at the time in any industry to be awarded such recognition.

"Right from the outset, charged with such an important and ongoing task, the Environmental Improvement

Committee ensured it was widely and strongly represented by including members from Nelson, Tasman and Marlborough Councils, Nelson/Marlborough Fish & Game, and the Department of Conservation," says Andy Karalus, Nelson Management's Estate Value Manager.

The Committee meets quarterly, receiving reports from the Company's various field monitoring operations, and discussing any concerns calling for environmental improvements. Among its many achievements is its own stream classification system, developed in consultation with the Nelson Marlborough Fish & Game Council and the region's local bodies, identifying 'Streams of Significance' where greater protection is required by forestry operations. One result of this classification is that tree planting is now set back so it doesn't intrude on any streams containing fish.

"Another good example of stream enhancement is a trout

spawning stream like the Blue Glen Stream at the top of the Motueka River," says Andy. "Here we specifically upgraded the culvert to improve fish passage upstream during spawning."

Further work has continued to enhance fish passage, including the recent addition of a fish refuge rope, which benefits native fish species too.

Water quality is a big concern in our region. Monitoring stream health is ongoing Company policy, with results published in an annual report on Nelson Forests' website. Quality in the forestry estate remains very good – close to that found in natural native forest.

Nelson Forests and the Nelson Marlborough Fish & Game Council also collaborated on the construction of a natural wetland from a gravel extraction site, near Norths Bridge on the Motueka River. This is beginning to provide a thriving new habitat for waterfowl, and a seasonal

boon to local hunters overseen by the Game Council.

To encourage further environmental reporting, Nelson Management developed a 'Threatened Species Field Guide' for Company field staff and contractors. This has enhanced the Company's ability to minimise impact and protect where necessary. Sometimes it can also reveal surprisingly good news.

Field data has revealed that harvested forest habitat is extremely beneficial to the native falcon *Kārearea* population, who nest happily amidst the cutover (recently harvested areas). Armed with this information, Nelson Forests had specific input into a national Falcon Management Plan. With wide support from forest workers, this has enabled birds to be identified and their nests accorded safe distance from forestry operations at critical life-cycle times.

Biodiversity in the Top of the South is also under the

Company's spotlight. "Across our 78,000 hectares of forest estate, approximately 7900 hectares are in native forest, predominantly beech," says Andy. "This contributes much to the biodiversity of our region, and is currently being surveyed as part of the joint Councils' 'Significant Natural Areas' programme. Results are providing us with good information from which to establish harvesting plans appropriate to protection needs."

This heightened level of awareness is also helping local native flora. Botanist Michael North, surveying areas in Tasman District recently, identified a very rare plant, *Ourisia modesta*, a species of native foxglove in the Scrophulariaceae family. "*O.modesta* is morphologically and ecologically distinct from all our other *Ourisia* species which are generally alpine and/or grow in the open," says Michael. "*O.modesta* prefers forest shade, and rarely flowers, unlike all our other showy species. It was probably always naturally scarce,

but has become 'nationally critical' due to weed smothering and pig damage." The Company is now considering a variety of measures to offer protection from pig rooting and wallowing that threatens this plant, including fencing off particular areas of habitat.

When another botanist, Shannel Courtney from DOC, discovered the rare NZ native *Oleria polita* growing in the Tadmor area, an existing grazing licence was immediately stopped to offer the species vital protection.

Company research following the 2010 mid-slope failure in Tapawera has revealed its estate is most vulnerable to landslide two to five years after harvest, when roots of felled trees are decaying, but new plantings are not yet fully established. Looking at new ways to mitigate the risk, one solution is to plant 'fence-lines' of poplars at the bottom of channels. These deep-rooting trees are not for harvesting, but serve as a natural barrier to catch woody debris.

"This natural approach requires 10 to 15 years to become fully effective," says Andy. "In effect we are future-proofing critical areas to protect our downstream neighbours from random weather events and woody debris slips leaving our land."

In 2010 Nelson Management achieved Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)® Certification. Nelson Forests' environmental performance has been recognised with awards from both Marlborough and Tasman District Councils, and with a national Green Ribbon award in 2002 (when the company was owned by Weyerhaeuser NZ). The independently assessed FSC® accreditation is based on a wide-ranging evaluation of operations, including environment measures and social and economic management.

"The certification is important because it is independent and checks us against recognised good practice in forest operations and

management across economic, social and environmental standards," says Andy.

"The most important thing is people working together to achieve high standards, or in other words, developing and maintaining a highly skilled and motivated team of people. This helps us remain at the forefront of environmental stewardship."

"Having new Iwi landowners is another exciting development for us and we're looking forward to engagement and discussion with them. They have much to contribute through their own observations and abiding interest in sound environmental practices. The future for Nelson Forests and the environment has never looked brighter."

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