

## **Awhitu Peninsula Landcare Volunteers – Care of Local Community Reserves**

**Awhitu Peninsula Landcare volunteers have been growing and planting out native plants on Peninsula Community Reserves almost from the first year of inception (1994). Apart from a few specialist species (such as beach dune plants) which have been sourced elsewhere, all the many, many thousands of plants planted out in public reserves on the Peninsula have been freely grown by Awhitu Landcare volunteers, for the benefit of our Awhitu community.**

### Matakawau Domain

David Craig led off our community plantings with the Matakawau Domain adjoining Awhitu School. This Domain is now home to the Awhitu Landcare Resource Centre and Nursery. The Australian native Coastal Banksia, *Banksia integrifolia*, was the predominant species used, and although this species is now on the pest plant list it does a fantastic job of feeding nectar-loving birds right throughout the winter, as well as providing shelter and shade.

### Waimatuku/Hamilton's Gap

Awhitu Landcare became involved with the care of this reserve following the final clarification of public (Franklin District Council / FDC) ownership of this important West Coast beach access. During Wayne Aspin's leadership of Awhitu Landcare, FDC funded fencing off the stream and protective fencing for the shelter plantings which were established by Awhitu Landcare during a series of working bees. This bleak, windswept area has been made welcoming by these plantings, consisting of mainly local coastal Flax (*Phormium tenax*) with cuttings donated by David Craig, *Pseudopanax lessonii*- Coastal Five Finger, sourced by Leonie Sands from Karioitahi plus Ngaio, Karo and Pohutakawa. Tricia Aspin painted a mural depicting the bittern and original wetland vegetation on the ugly concrete toilet block and the concrete structure has now been replaced, thanks to pressure from FDC's Greg Lowe, with a very appropriately designed ablution / toilet block. This project won the community section of the NZ Steel sponsored Environmental Awards and it has become a very popular place for campers to stay a night or two right through the summer months.

The foredune restoration was sparked by Tania Cumberland drawing attention to the increasing damage to this area by trail motorbikes and four wheel drive vehicles. This coincided with

Landcare people attending a foredune restoration workshop at Port Waikato, thus gaining the knowledge of the foredune plant communities required for stabilizing the dune. The start-up for the project was funded by the ARC's Coastal Enhancement Fund with FDC assisting with fencing costs. Fences are always particularly unattractive in a wilderness environment but it is clear that keeping vehicles out of planted areas is essential and signs alone do not deter wheeled enthusiasts.

A major public planting day at Hamilton's Gap, coordinated by Adam Scattergood, was a great success, with a radio mention bringing people from as far afield as Grey Lynn. Margaret Makgill quickly organized an impromptu beach clean up to utilize the labour units once the planting was completed. These initial plantings have been successful in rebuilding a dune structure and ongoing annual plantings are reintroducing appropriate dune plants such as *Disphyma australe* (Iceplant), *Austroderia splendens* (Coastal Toetoe), *Muhlenbeckia complexa*, *Ozothamnus* (Tauhinu) and Coastal Flax. The healthy buildup of sand has exceeded our expectations, with vigorous Spinifex and Pingao holding volumes of sand and increasing the height of the dunes by several metres.

### Matakawau Walkway

Wayne and Tricia Aspin were also instrumental in establishing a walkway through the bush reserve which adjoins the Awhitu District School at Matakawau, another award-winning project. Working bees cut the track, built bridges and tracks over wet areas. Weeding bees are working on removing Tradescantia and Ginger plants. Restoration of walkway infrastructure is now required. The Awhitu District school has now adopted the reserve as a recreation and natural history study area, a great step forward for community connection to benefit from this little gem. A charity called Head2Head, which organizes a run from South Head to North Head around the Manukau, raising funds to help kids in schools, is about to start working with Awhitu school, helping them to build their own accessway into the bush from school grounds.

It is planned that the adjoining Pine forested area will eventually be cleared and restored to native plantings with walking and cycling tracks envisaged. Meantime the Awhitu Recycle Station, devised, designed and built by the Awhitu Landcare team, headed by M.L. Soong and Gary Marson, sits between the existing Matakawau walkway and the pine forest. The recycle station is

very well used, especially during the summer holiday season, and it is still hoped that a long awaited plastic recycle option will be added to the facility.

### Manukau Heads Lighthouse

Awhitu Landcare involvement with the Awhitu Lighthouse restoration began early on, with plantings around the carpark area to provide shelter, mostly local coastal *Phormium tenax* plus some Karo and Pohutakawa. Plantings have gradually worked their way up the sandy slopes of the Lighthouse approach with the aim of restoring the likely original vegetation of Flax forest with some coastal trees tucked in. Donated Flax cuttings, from David Craig and Scott Rutherford, have provided the backbone of the plantings. Nicky Reynolds obtained funding (EIF) and oversaw the beginning of coastal species planting. Other species have gradually been introduced, mostly low-growing, so that the views from the Lighthouse will not be impeded. An area close to the Lighthouse has been used to showcase the special plants adapted to extreme coastal conditions - Oi Oi, Spinach, *Astelia banksii*, Muhlenbeckia, Disphyma, Tauhinu, Coastal Toetoe, Kawakawa, Hangehange and Mahoe are being planted through the now established Flax plantings. Project Crimson Pohutakawa have been planted on the lower slopes. Weed removal has been ongoing with Landcare removing many Wattle seedlings, Agapanthus and Watsonia bulbs on an annual basis. There is a problem with German Ivy which the Lighthouse Trust have been alerted to, having already successfully contracted out the removal of Pampas and Blackberry. Waiuku College students, led by teacher Jane Patterson, have worked alongside Awhitu Landcare volunteers on this project, weeding, prepping and planting Flax cuttings, as well as plants from the Awhitu Landcare Nursery.

### Hatton's Road / Sergeants' Beach Walkway

The Hatton's Road/Sergeants' Beach Walkway was established by Geraldine Oliver of Awhitu Landcare and Peter Sergeant of the Matakawau Ratepayers. Awhitu Landcare supported plantings at both ends, some coastal species lightly planted at the Sergeants' Road end with Flannelweed removed. The Hatton's Road end has been more intensively planted, linking the walkway to the restored area on the Awhitu Regional Park side and the Presbyterian Camp. Early plantings were decimated by careless weed sprayers, but finally there are some healthy established Manuka, Hebe and Cabbage tree, Mahoe, Pohutakawa and Karaka plantings. Flannelweed and Wattle are now

well controlled but Japanese Honeysuckle is a rampant weed which will require Council assistance to control. The clay track which links the beach with the Campgrounds and Hatton's Road is also a problem, being extremely slippery when wet, again Council assistance with improving this part of the track is essential.

Pollok Wharf Reserve, with a remnant of coastal forest, was overrun by Eleagnus and huge 100 year old Pine trees. Local farmers, Jock Patterson, Gary Marson and Brian Johnston removed the Eleagnus and FDC removed most of the Pines. Awhitu Landcare volunteers were now able to start infilling the areas where pines were removed, and restore native plantings. Weed control has been ongoing thanks to Gary plus Alan Finlayson and Margaret Makgill - Flannelweed, Pampas, Himalayan Honeysuckle, Wattle and Pine seedlings are being removed. Tradescantia, Watsonia and Asparagus Fern are an ongoing problem. Plantings of Pohutakawa, some from Project Crimson, plus Kowhai, Karaka, Flax, Cabbage trees and Coprosmas are thriving. The parking area/access would benefit from re-surfacing, as it is too slippery for all but four wheel drive access most of the year. Development of a footpath through to the waterfront would also add value to this small coastal gem.

#### Awhitu Central Bush Reserve

Work on the Awhitu Central Bush Reserve was sparked by Denise Shepherd who was grazing alongside this delightful remnant which adjoins the Ngati Te Ata-owned Taitua Bush. FDC were helpful in fencing off the wetland area which was being browsed by stock, and assisting with the major Gorse clearing job in the Kemp Road access. Adam Scattergood enthusiastically took up the challenge of leading the Awhitu Landcare restoration of the depleted bush margin and grazed-out areas of the wetland. Awhitu Landcare was funded by Council to purchase Manuka for infilling the Kemp Road access area. Forest species of Kauri, Totara and Rewarewa have been planted along the southern boundary of the bush and the wetland restoration plantings have included Kahikatea, *Carex virgata*, *Cyperus ustulatus* (Umbrella Sedge), Flax, Cabbage, Manuka, plus Coprosma spp. on the margins. For the future the infestation of asparagus fern will need diligent attention and the idea of a walkway circuit, including forest and wetland zones is on the agenda. Long term, a linking path with the Awhitu Hall area and a walking track through the Taitua bush appeals greatly in a district very short of walking opportunities and public open space.

### Awhitu Central Community Hall

The Awhitu Central Hall surrounds have become an adjunct to the reserve, with Awhitu Landcare removing Flannelweed and Euphorbias and planting the steeper faces adding to the existing mature Flax plantings. Lower growing plants are used as the Hall has wonderful all-round views of bush, pasture and harbour. Gorse has become a problem, regrowing rapidly and choking the pathway between the Flax plants; this will require vigilant attention for some time.

### Craig Lookout, Cochrane's Gap

The Craig lookout which overlooks the Craig family farm and the coast at Cochranes' Gap was developed by the Craig family and planted out by the extended family and Awhitu Landcare Volunteers. Adjoining covenanted mature coastal forest remnants, this area was planted with low-growing natives, predominantly Flax and Manuka, so that the coastal views are retained. Council sealed the access and provided a picnic table, which is well used.

### Big Bay, Orua Bay, Awhitu School

A small coastal reserve at Big Bay was planted with the assistance of Landcare volunteers, and Awhitu Landcare donated Project Crimson Pohutakawa and volunteer labour for one of the Orua Bay Ratepayers' organised coastal cliff restoration projects.

The Playcentre / Awhitu School access was originally tidied and planted by Awhitu Landcare volunteers and senior Primary students under the leadership of Ann Lee. The low-growing natives of Flax, Coprosma, Corokia, Rengarenga and Carex spp were planted and mulched. However, the planting suffered from access tracks cut through it, particularly by bike riders.

The construction of the Awhitu Landcare Nursery in 2012 has protected the area from these intrusions, and provided shelter so that the planting is now thriving. A working bee weeded and infill-planted some gaps winter 2014 and - with assistance from students and parents from Awhitu School - also planted a bird-attracting native area by the school netball courts. Plants, all from the Landcare nursery, included Rewarewa, Kowhai, Corokia, Carex spp, Flax and Hebe.