

Inner city restoration of Tauranga

Geoff Canham¹

Tauranga City Council, a corporate member of Forest and Bird, and Ngai Tamarawaho Hapū are about to commence an ambitious 325 hectare, NZ\$20 million dollar, environmental restoration in downtown Tauranga.

The Kopurererua Valley is about to be transformed back into the wetland it once was, reversing decades of failed drainage projects, abandoned farming, and neglect.

Surrounded by commercial and residential development, New Zealand's only toll road, and criss-crossed by power, gas, water and sewer utilities, the valley is about to begin its transformation.

Consents have just been approved after a three-year visioning and planning process. The Kopurererua River, a spiritual ancestor to Ngai Tamarawaho, will be realigned to its natural course. At least one million native plants will be planted, and a network of pathways will transect the valley. Large wetlands will be created and many habitat benefits are anticipated.

This undertaking is set to be one of the biggest environmental projects in New Zealand, and with keen support from the local Forest and Bird members, the values of the project have meant that the resource consent process has preceded with praise.

According to Tauranga Forest and Bird Chairman, Basil Graeme, wetland habitat was once a dominant feature of Bay of Plenty, but has been trashed with less than 3% remaining. Therefore, this undertaking is a really significant restoration project.

In what may well be a model for other projects to follow, the restoration involved a jointly funded

scoping of the project, between Te Puni Kōkiri, Ngai Tamarawaho, and Tauranga City Council.

Once the vision was adopted by the joint governance steering group of Hapū members and Tauranga City Council elected members, consultation with the 4000 dwellings surrounding the valley and various environmental organisations got underway. The challenge was huge; a 325 hectare restoration with many other features included, and an estimated cost of \$20 million dollars.

Concurrently, a funding trust was set up by four Tauranga Rotary Clubs and Tauranga City Council with an annual funding target of \$150 000 per annum for 10 years. Council had also embarked on its "City Investment Strategy" with at least eight major corporate organisations giving financial support to the valley project at the scoping stage.

Ian Wilson, Rotary Club Chairman of the Kopurererua Valley Rotary Centennial Trust, believes that the project has been a big strategic move for four Tauranga Rotary Clubs. The four clubs have come together and set a funding target of \$1.5 million as a Rotary Centennial project. The trustees will provide



Kopurererua Stream and Waihi Road circa 1920



Kopurererua Valley 1976



Area for restoration back to swamp land



Area for restoration back to swamp land

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funding for the valley restoration as a community pride project. The fundraising will be in either materials, cash, or in-kind services.

According to Tauranga's Mayor, Stuart Crosby, the City Investment Strategy has been a significant success for the Tauranga community. The Council knew that it shouldn't go it alone with major community projects, and there is now a fostering of community pride, environmental improvement, and the achievement of great things through relationships. They are now working closely with tangata whenua, the business sector, and stakeholder groups in an intensive relationship framework.

There are a number of relationship structures around the project. These are either formalised in agreements or in the meeting structure where project groups are each responsible for their component part of the project's future success.

The progress of the valley project will be subject to ongoing peer review by environmental groups, and extensive community involvement for implementation stages is already included. Rotary Clubs and other service groups, schools, "Trees for Survival" projects, and various conservation planting days for the community are being organised within the overall programme. Council will be investing more than \$770 000 next

financial year for wetland planting, and walkway construction. Council will also be recruiting a dedicated Park Ranger for the Kopurererua Valley in early 2006.

This funding contribution is likely to be equalled, if not exceeded by corporate organisations. Naturally Native, New Zealand's largest native plant nursery is supplying thousands of native plants. Council already plants approximately 90 000 native revegetation plants per annum, and revegetation accounts for about 85% of its total landscaping activity. Natural Environments, led by Mark Dean of Naturally Native are supplying technical and planting plan assistance.

Tauranga export furniture company Design Mobil, are supplying plants via Naturally Native, and Perry Environmental have 'adopted' a large wetland area. Works Infrastructure will be supplying a significant sum of machinery hire and services, with horticultural contractor Gardenart also supplying a major sum in services to clear areas of gorse for planting, and spreading Council mulch from prunings on revegetation areas.

Opus Consultants are supplying consulting services in-kind and Marathon Print are producing promotional material in the same way.

International health products company Comvita are evolving with

Tauranga City Council to launch an innovative children's environmental educational programme called "Birds, Bees, Kids and Trees". The programme will involve a sponsored day for classes of children to go to Comvita's visitor centre, followed by an interpretative afternoon, including a valley tour, a picnic lunch and a planting project at a wetland.

The valley will, however, never be safe. Some of the greatest challenges will involve the constant assault by suburban influences like cats, garden plant escapes, incinerator fire risk and weed sources. However, of the 4000 properties involved in the consultation, the vast majority of those that responded were immensely supportive. Many appreciate that the land right next door will become a hugely positive improvement in their neighbourhood, and that Council has committed to becoming an excellent neighbour.

Geoff Canham is the Parks and Leisure Manager for Tauranga, New Zealand, with 20 years of public park management, including International experience at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh, Scotland and Hilliers Nurseries, Hampshire, England.

KOPURERUA VALLEY - CONCEPT PLAN

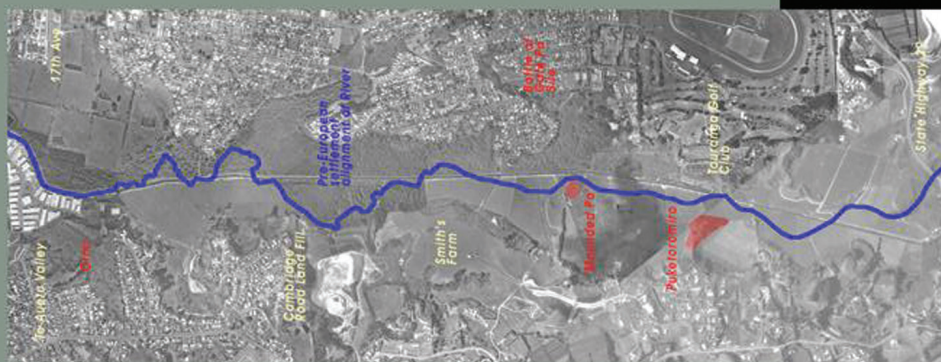
Tauranga District Council and Ngai Tamarawaho, a hapu of Ngati Ranginui have developed the following vision and Concept Plan in a collaborative consultation process.

The plan aims to improve environmental quality, recognise heritage and cultural values, improve public access, provide recreational open space and enhance the natural environment. Proposals include restoring the meandering river course and wetlands, treating pollutants, developing a cultural centre and traditional village and developing a network of open space with extensive planting and access for public recreation.

Reflection of Taurikura, an ancestor of Ngai Tamarawaho, and her journey through the valley provided a base for the development of the vision. This was achieved through the meandering of the river, which was formed by Taurikura as she travelled down the valley out to sea.



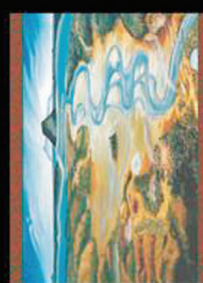
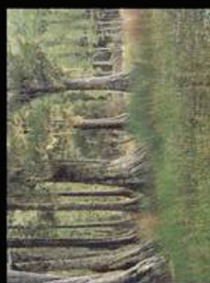
1976 Photos of Kopurerua Valley



Historical River Alignment



Modified River Alignment (Existing)



Examples of potential natural environment within valley

a partnership between..... TAURANGA DISTRICT COUNCIL & NGAI TAMARAWAHO

Recognition of 3 pa sites

- Oriri
- Puketaramiro
- 'Mounded Pa'

Cambridge Tip
Bridle Path
Open Space
Native Wetlands

Ngāi Tamarawaho
Kaitiaki Takekōwhiri
Cultural Centre
Traditional Village
Walkways

River Realignment
Native Wetlands
Ponds
Walkways

Smiths Farm
6 x Sportsfields
Clubrooms
Amphitheatre
Parking
Overpass access

River Realignment
Native Wetlands
Ponds
Walkways

Sculptured lined
walkways from SH29 to
Waikareo Estuary
Canoe Waka Journey's
along the river

SMITHS FARM

Labels on plan: To Aotua Valley, Birch Ave Industrial Area, 17th Ave, Waikareo Estuary, Gate Pa, Tauranga Golf Course, State Highway 29, Cambridge Tip.

a vision.....a partnership.....a future.....

Tauranga City