



Far North Branch NZ Farm Forestry Assn. November 2013 Newsletter

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NEXT EVENT:

TOUR OF TOP ENERGY'S GEOTHERMAL POWER STATION at NGAWHA

When: Friday 22nd November, 2pm till approx. 3.30 pm

Group Size Limit: only about 12, so book your place with Brian Simms without delay.

The link between energy generation and farm forestry may seem a little tenuous but all that “waste” material left behind after a harvest operation is a resource that has the potential to be converted into heat and electricity. Both power companies and forest growers could have a beneficial partnership in the years ahead. That said, this is a great chance to visit a geothermal plant which supplies clean energy to our homes and which is owned by electricity consumers in the Far North. The Ngawha station produces 70 % of our needs – about 25 MW. The plant manager, Ray Robinson will be our guide.

Just a stone's throw away are the Ngawha hot pools, with all their reputed therapeutic qualities.

Contact: Brian Simms 09 408 4050; beesimsy@xtra.co.nz

THE PRESIDENT WRITES

Local Body Elections

There are quite a few changes to the make-up of the district and regional councils, and I, for one, am not sorry to see the departure of some of those FNDC members who pushed hardest to foist massive rate hikes on to forest owners. However, I've reluctantly come to the conclusion that our Branch of NZFFA needs to have some sort of dialogue with the district council so that they have an understanding of our concerns, and how we are different from the wider forestry industry. Hopefully this would avoid a repeat of the situation in March last year when, like a bolt from the blue, we learned that FNDC proposed raising rates on forestry land by an average of 234%. Strenuous opposition quashed that, but council had another go this year, and again we had to resist. The result this time was more or less ok, though Mayor Brown indicated he wasn't done with us yet.

Road closures

The district council has decided it will close some roads to logging and metal trucks during very wet weather. While this will disrupt some harvesting operations, it sounds quite a sensible idea to me, as long as the council does it judiciously. And it might help soften the negative public perception that “logging trucks ruin the roads”.

Forest Growers Levy Trust Board

Following a positive response to the referendum for a compulsory levy on logs, nominations are being sought for the seven member board which will administer the funds, expected to be about \$6.5 m. annually. The board will comprise two representatives of forests under 1000 hectares, four for forests over 1000 hectares, and one more to be appointed by these six board members, with voting proportional to their production. The levy for the first year will be 27cents per tonne on all logs from plantation forests when they reach a mill or port and will be used to fund activities such as biosecurity, research and health & safety. Dean Satchell is seeking nomination as one of the small forest representatives and I heartily support him in this. I'm sure he would be an effective advocate for the small foresters' in a forum where the voting power will be dominated by the big companies. What gives the small growers considerable influence is that if we feel we are being ignored we can vote the levy out of existence when it is reviewed every few years.

Brian Simms

REPORT: FAR NORTH FIELD DAY 31 August 2013

Shane Hyde, Ecoland

The field day began with Shane demonstrating his techniques and innovations around possum and rat control. Shane has developed some very innovative and efficient methods for controlling animal pests. His methods are simple and effective, and have reduced the cost down to as little as \$18 a hectare.

Two particular inventions are involved. The first uses modified automatic cat feeders to feed the possums for a week before offering them a poison “treat”. This has the ability to draw possums and rats in from a wide area as they learn to come to the feeder. The big advantage with this over traditional pre-feeding methods is that it saves a lot of daily walking. Also, if fur recovery is involved, a pile of possums can be expected at a predetermined day. Cyanide or other poisons including rat poison can be dispensed from the machine. Shane imports and adapts these Chinese-made cat-feeders for his purposes but is working on having some specially made product for sale in the future.

The second invention involves cardboard "tags" that can be quickly stapled to trees. These bright blue triangles are cut and shaped with factory-made creases so they can be easily stapled and folded with one hand to make a tiny platform on which to daub several blobs of cyanide and lure. A flap at the top can be folded down to provide some weather protection greatly extending the effective life of the poison. Shane prefers to use “Cyanara” paste which has lots of ‘mini-pellets’ of encapsulated cyanide within it. Over this he squirts a concoction of peanut butter and cooking oil for added weather protection and then throws a capful of flour with a lure such as aniseed. These simple cardboard tags are cheap and easy to use and are much cleaner than other methods of cyaniding. Afterwards the tags can be ripped from the trees and buried to help avoid creating poison-shy possums.



Both of these unique systems have been field-tested over several years in the Puketi Forest under DoC possum-control contracts. Additionally, Shane has engaged movement cameras to observe possum and rat behaviour and prove the effectiveness of the system. These efforts reflect Shane's remarkable energy and determination to pursue more effective ways to address the pest problem. We hope that his investment in this innovative effort will bear fruit for him in the future. Please contact him for the blue tags and pet-feeders for your possums.

After much discussion around pests and their control, with lots of good advice from Shane, we walked down to the block of planted native trees. On the way we walked through productive farmland with swathes of second-growth native trees in the gullies. These were predominantly totara, but also with some rimu, rewarewa, puriri and kahikatea. The crowns of these trees appeared particularly healthy – probably reflecting the fact that the farm and golf-course has a full-time pest-controller along with the effects of fertiliser. The scenery was very picturesque and the farm was immaculate.



The native plantation is 10 hectares and planting began in 2006, originally radiata pine harvested by a digger feller buncher. Slash piles and clear space are a result of this harvest method. Once the radiata was harvested the decision was made to replant in natives. The owner, Julian Robertson, dislikes pine trees. Therefore the project was driven more for aesthetic and ecological reasons. Shane made the recommendation that the plantation should also be production

indigenous forest and the area has since been registered as a "Planted Indigenous Forest" with the Ministry for Primary Production (MPI formerly MAF). This registration secures the land owner's right to cut the trees down in the future, without any confusion about whether the forest is of 'natural' or 'planted' origins. The Forests Act does not apply to planted native forests but does apply to naturally regenerated native trees. Registration is seen as a way of retaining flexibility of land-use in the future.

Species selections were based on what was observed as naturally occurring in the area. The coloniser species were primarily manuka and kanuka, along with some ake-ake, pittosporum, myrsine australis, flax and other species. These were planted at 4000 stems per hectare. Flax was planted around the fencelines to provide a "natural" drench for the cattle - Shane told us that if cattle can chew on flax every 3 weeks they don't need to be drenched for worms.

Shane talked about good quality planting stock and emphasised the quality of the roots as being of paramount importance. There was some discussion around siting of trees and Shane likes to put in more than one species in a site, so that the best species will thrive (according to how nature decides). No releasing was done. Maintenance has involved a couple of days each year dealing with wilding pines and some weeds. There are issues around the fertility of the site, and especially the high phosphate retention of this soil. In low fertility areas the plants were growing slower than in areas with higher fertility. Some pohutukawa were planted at the same time as the coloniser plants and, impressively, most were as tall as the adjacent manuka.

Canopy species (kauri, totara, rimu, puriri, rewarewa, kahikatea) were planted subsequently once the colonisers were established, at around 400 stems per hectare. The canopy trees were all pb3 or pb5 grade (which added to the cost but meant no weed releasing was necessary) and were successfully established with only about 15% mortality. These are now growing well through the colonisers.

This plantation should be viewed as a successful model to establish a new indigenous forestry with well-formed potential timber trees, over an extensive area. The costs are quite high though, and Shane estimated the costs for establishing each tree to be around \$2.50 (around \$11,000/ha). His suggested regime is 2x2 spacing. He likes manuka for its honey production and kanuka for its height, because it grows to 8m+ thus forcing the canopy species up (reducing the need for form-pruning) and produces high quality firewood. The totara and rewarewa in particular were impressive. Overall the stocking rate of the plantings appeared to have found a nice balance between effective mass-cover and cost.

One less obvious issue with diversifying pastoral country into native forest is the continued use of thistle spray on the adjacent paddocks. This can cause much damage to the trees, especially if the pastoral farmer isn't aware of the sensitivity of many native plants. Shane plants Whau (*Entelea arborescens*) as an indicated species around the edges. Its absence in the plantings reflects the effects of spray-drift.



From there, discussions ranged from the wider social benefits of providing employment and training that had accompanied this project, to the ETS. Shane explained that this was not simply a native revegetation planting project, but rather it also embodies some of his wider concerns with sustainable land use and future management options. I think that it was clear to all there that Shane's involvement in this 10ha was a full-package deal and undoubtedly represents a good-value service to the landowner. We enjoyed a casual walk back across the paddocks to hot water, tea and coffee and cakes that Shane and Jitka also provided.

Many thanks to Shane, for sharing so much of his valuable experiences and knowledge with us. What we saw was success, on a very difficult site and at quite a daunting scale. Such a result is not easy to achieve. And of course, the natural appearance belies much of the hard work behind it.

Dean Satchell and Paul Quinlan
