Field day focus on plant trials

After poplars have come tree lucerne, prickly acacia, robinia and natives

RESULTS from trials with native and exotic plants on Waituku Station were discussed at a field day at the Hershbergy woolshed.

- Other trials around the region — manuka plantings in Tuwhin, incorporating evergreen planting into hill country farming and making better use of flat land pasture — were also on the agenda.

Presenters included Okepuhia Station's Richard and Hannah Cooper who talked about their successful riparian planting, along with the challenges ahead for the property.

Facilitated by John Ross and Hawke's Bay Regional Council land management adviser Peter Manso, the field day was hosted by Nick Broad, who began with a discussion about tamarisk (tree lucerne) and native plant hill country trials on Waituku Station.

Mr Broad said he and his family and brother-in-law came to the property 14 years ago.

They began by planting 150 poles of poplars each year and in 2015, Mr Manso and Nic Caviale approached Mr Broad about planting different types of trees, and land was put aside for the trial.

Following the 2011 storm, he wondered about the number of trees farmers would need to plant.

"It was pretty scary," he said. He not only felt he had step up to plant the trees but also look after his infrastructure, so if he upgraded a track, trees were also planted to protect it.

The tree planting continued with more poplars and willows and he tried tamarisk and natives with different type of protectors, along with robinia or prickly acacias.

"It is expensive and I am lucky it is a trial with regional council paying the hills.

Mr Broad had also planted along waterways with manuka and trialed different trees along a drain.

Trees like robinia which suckered could not go anywhere near forestry or blocks of natives.

Around 1000 robinia had gone in with one tree every eight metres.

One reason they were chosen was because they did not shade the pasture so badly and were easy to thin.

He used the rains to keep on top of the suckers and said the trees could survive dry spells.

Kowhai and cabbage trees were growing well on another tough block.

He noted there had been an increase in weeds like inkweed under tree lucerne and that the plants had struggled with the wet winters.

Mr Broad said the survey was still out with tamarisk and perhaps the area's rainfall was too much, particularly with winter rains doing a lot of damage.

Preferring drier conditions and not such heavy soils, they still followed stock protection during lambing time, he said later.

Whangawehi project involved only native species

The large turn-out of farmers for the Heberbereau field day held at Waituku Station woolshed also heard from Mahia farmers Richard and Hannah Cooper.

The Okepuhia Station couple contributed an award-winning community restoration project for the Whangawehi catchment.

After successfully applying for a planting project covering 10 hectares, around 27,000 natives were planted in one block.

The farming family have targeted gullies and erosion prone areas and began with up to 700 poplars and willows.

After planting the natives they did a second weed release by spot spraying around the young plants and had a 90 percent survival rate.

They have found nares to be the biggest threat to the closely planted area of flax and cabbage.

Copia was also used to provide ground cover and now they were putting in another proposal for the other side of the farm for fencing off the creeks and blackberry clearing.

Broad said the fencing off the blackberry out would be an ongoing issue and they expected annual knapsack spraying would be required.

Farmers at the field day said once the cover was established, blackberry would stop growing.

Mrs Cooper said they were going to do more of this planting and securing it for future generations.

She also expected it to build its own momentum once seedbanks were established.

Planting poplars, willows and cabbage trees and flaxes on their hill country areas was the long-term plan, if they could make it work.

They were also looking at manuka and said fencing was the big thing, especially on steeper country where it was a challenge.

One question was raised about how far did tree planting go with the steeper country while still maintaining grazing.

Another question was about planting manukas in wider spacings on this type of country.

The good performance of pohutukawa on steep slopes was noted. Cabbage trees and flax also coped well with the cold winds.

Banksia and its attraction for birds along with puriri, kowhai, karaka, nikau, totara and rewarewa were also discussed as alternatives. The cost of tree planting, labour and stepping with two sprays per year for two years was put at around $15,000 per hectare.

But Mr Cooper said there was "a lot of funding out there".

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