



Makarewa Headwaters Revival Project

Feral animal management in our catchment

OCTOBER 2023

Welcome to our first Project newsletter and update

About the project

This project was the brainchild of Makarewa Headwaters Catchment Group, a local farmer-led group, who saw the challenges that feral animals were causing landowners and wanted to understand how best to tackle them. Thanks to some funding from Thriving Southland, these farmers set out to understand the extent of the issue in the Hokonuis.

Feral animals are a problem. For this project, we're looking mostly at deer, pigs, and Hokonui Merino. They cost us money through loss of crop and pastures, they destroy native vegetation, and they cause huge damage to our springs and creeks. We can improve our biodiversity by reducing feral animals, we can protect our special plants / vegetation / flora in Headwaters and we can build biodiversity corridors that last the generations. Finally, reducing feral animals will save farmers money and improve farm systems.

Funding from Thriving Southland was received to undertake a feasibility study over a three month period to understand if the wider catchment felt these feral animals were a problem, to find out the extent of the proposed problem and to gather knowledge and ideas around possible next steps.

The next step is to use the study to apply for funding and look at opportunities to best manage these feral animals and to explore markets and opportunities for pest products as a resource.

What the survey told us

We recently asked landowners in the Makarewa Headwaters Catchment what they thought about the issues of feral animals on their land / in their area. The idea was to understand the scale of the problem, the impact and what control methods are currently being used. This feedback along with a report from an ecologist, farm consultant and pest population study will give the community and landowners a baseline of the number of pests, the state of the bush now, identified threatened species and eco-systems, and the financial cost of loss of production for farmers.

The following are a sample of the landowner survey findings. A full detailed analysis is underway currently and the report will be shared with all respondents and the community.

93% of respondents are supportive of information gathering to understand the impact of feral animals in the catchment.



Other concerns included the impact these feral animals have on water quality, bush decimation and regeneration and impact on indigenous species.

Over **30%** of respondents had noticed damage to fencing due to feral pigs or deer, costing them hours in repair work and some estimates were up to **\$5000** in repairs per year.



Almost two thirds (2/3) of respondents were concerned about the spread of diseases from feral pigs and deer, specifically tuberculosis spreading from deer to cattle.



Almost **80%** of respondents were doing something to control these other feral animals, mostly through trapping and shooting.



Respondents were also concerned about other feral animals, with over **50%** of respondents concerned about feral cats, stoats, ferrets and possums. Fewer respondents rated hares, goats, hedgehogs, rats, wasps, rabbits and merino as a concern.



Over **30%** of respondents have made adjustments to their farming systems because of the increase in the number of feral animals, including growing more winter crop, putting kale near the bush as deer don't like it as much, fencing the bush line.

Deer

Over **85%** of respondents have feral deer coming onto pastures.



How many deer varied significantly, and most were unsure of exact numbers, but most estimates ranged between 100-300 a year.



Most respondents felt that the deer were spending at least **25-50%** of their time grazing on their or other farmer's pasture.



Over 65% of respondents felt that deer were eating their winter crops.

And over **90%** of respondents are currently hunting deer in the catchment and hunting is the main way that respondents controlled the number of deer (with a few also using helicopter culls, fencing, trapping and growing crops they don't like).

Pigs



Respondents estimated anywhere between 0 and 200 pigs coming onto their land.

Only **1** respondent had knowingly lost lambs to pigs



Respondents varied in how much damage they felt pigs did on their land annually, from none to 50ha of damage – mostly it was 2-5ha.



Most respondents controlled pig through hunting, and some also used pig traps.

Over **90%** of respondents are currently hunting pigs in the catchment, culling anywhere between none and 170.

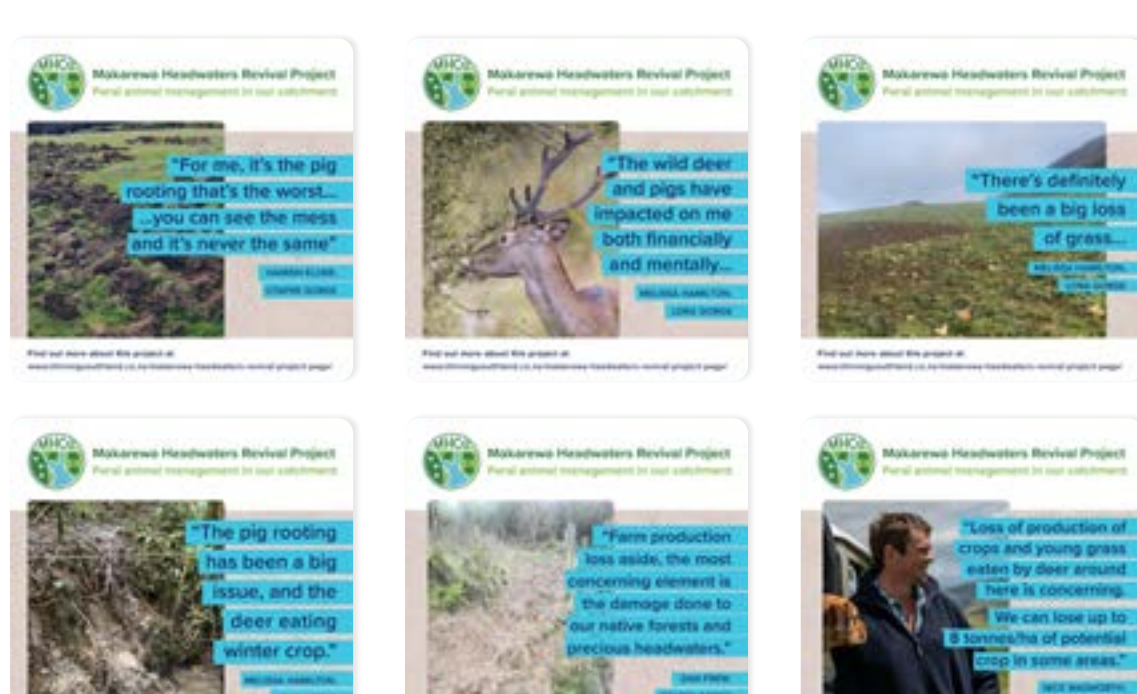


In general, respondents noticed that areas damaged could be reestablished into pasture within 3-6 months.

These results are extremely useful and provide a great insight into the scale of the feral pest problem in the Hokonuis.

Raising awareness

We really want the whole community to know about this project, so are promoting it on Facebook, on the Thriving Southland website and via email updates, Keep an eye out for our posts and please share!



Join us at our community event

Join us the Makarewa Headwaters Revival Project: Community event on Thursday 9th November from 3pm to 6pm, at Otapiri and Lora Gorge Centennial Hall.

Learn about this exciting new project to tackle feral animals in our catchment.

Hear from our expert project consultants on their findings, ask our panel of experts and local farmers your questions and enjoy a taste of local wild game donated by Fare Game Meats and prepared by local chef and Otapiri Gorge farmer, Brett Frew.

Please RSVP at makarewaheadwaters@outlook.com by Friday 3 November to attend.