



THOMSONS CATCHMENT PROJECT NEWSLETTER | MARCH 2023

Welcome to the Thomsons Catchment Project Newsletter.

Following the positive reaction to our inaugural newsletter, put together before Christmas by our committee and Project Manager Nicola McGrouther, we are keen to provide you regular updates about the great work happening in the Thomson's catchment.

We hope you enjoy this format and content – in fact, please let us have your feedback; you can do this by emailing thomsonscatchment@gmail.com

About us

The Thomsons Catchment Project is a farmer-led initiative to improve water quality in the catchment.

We are part of the Manuherikia Catchment Group catchment group and part of the Otago-wide network of catchment groups that are supporting on-farm change helping to create environmental resilience and vibrant communities.

The Thomsons Catchment Project is part of the wider Manuherikia Catchment Exemplar Project and is funded by the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) Jobs for Nature programme.

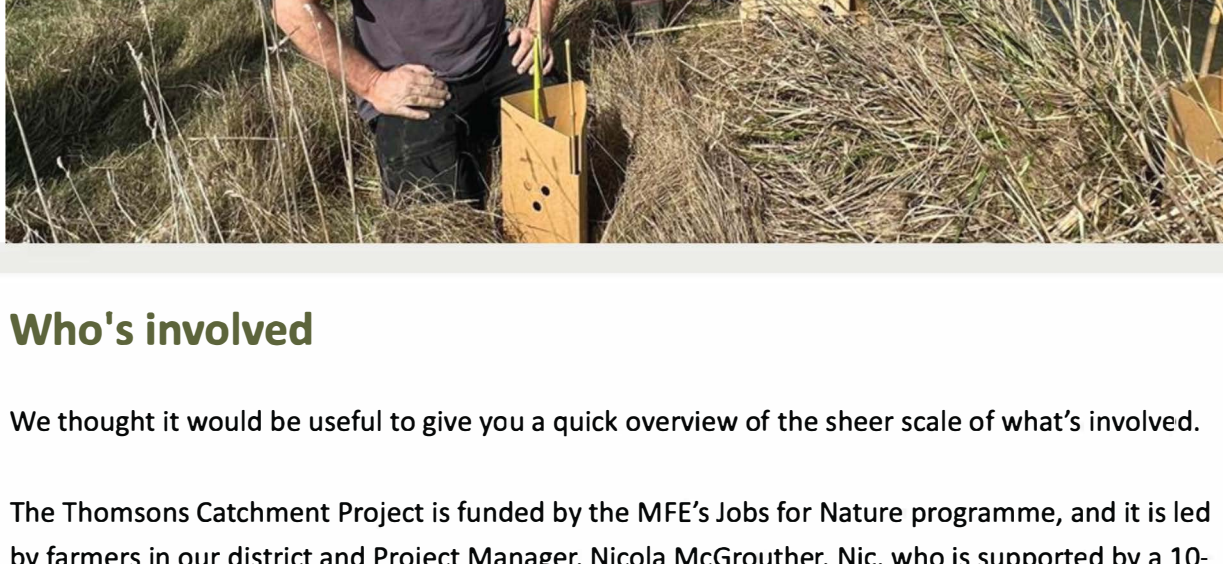
While we officially launched in October last year, our effort has been in planning and undertaking the consenting process for several years now. In fact, such was the enthusiasm of our farmers and others in the community that our first hands-on work got underway a month prior to launch with more than 600 carex secta plants going into the ground in September.

Planting native species will continue to be one of the hallmarks of the project's work.

Along with ongoing planting, at this stage we are committed to three further crucial pieces of work with more initiatives coming up in the future.

- Currently, we are undertaking **fencing** work to augment the massive fencing effort of local farmers in the past decade or more to keep stock out of waterways on their land. Excluding stock greatly assists to enhance water quality, reduces erosion of the margins and the sediment that goes with it and allows riparian vegetation to flourish.
- We are also establishing a **constructed wetland** to help capture sediment and reduce nutrients flowing into Thomsons Creek.
- The third initiative is building **fish barriers** to stop invasive species from moving up and down the waterway. Importantly, this work will help protect the native fish found in Thomsons Creek, including the Central Otago roundhead galaxias, one of New Zealand's most endangered fish species.

Our local Omakau Primary School has been enlisted to help with monthly monitoring of water quality in the creek so we can track the effect of our work.



Who's involved

We thought it would be useful to give you a quick overview of the sheer scale of what's involved.

The Thomsons Catchment Project is funded by the MfE's Jobs for Nature programme, and it is led by farmers in our district and Project Manager, Nicola McGrouther. Nic, who is supported by a 10-member committee, is an environmental consultant and is passionate about working with farmers and communities to help them establish good environmental practise.

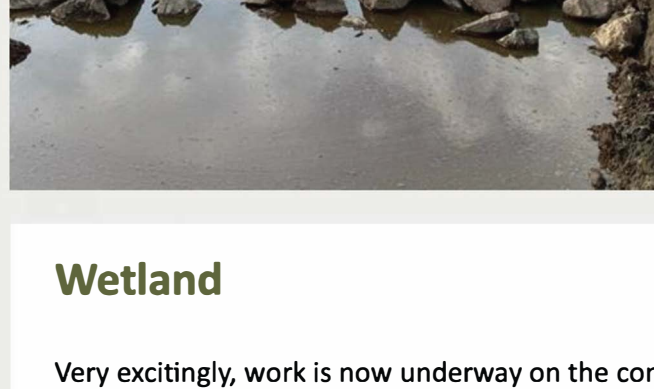
Also essential to the success of our project is the enthusiastic involvement of our surrounding community.

Recognising that the future success of our work lies with tomorrow's farmers, as well as the next generations in our neighbourhood, we have established close relationships with the main schools – Omakau Primary School and Poolburn School and Lucy Franke from EnviroSchools.

We are lucky to have so many supporters and we thank them all for their contribution. This includes the Fonterra Otago-Southland sustainable dairying team, the Otago Regional Council (ORC), Central Otago District Council (CODC), Auhaka, the Manuherikia Catchment Group that we are part of, the Otago Catchment Community network, Fish & Game Otago, Department of Conservation (DoC), the Queen Elizabeth II Trust, the Otago University Marine Studies Centre through its Aquavan educators and NIWA. Thank you all.

A number of Otago-based businesses and consultants are also involved in making our plan a reality. A special mention to Brendan Sheehan of Mt Aurum Engineering, Central Excavating, S & B Civil, Breen Construction Company, Jo Wakelin from Koinga Consulting, McKeague Consulting, Landpro, Agriplanz, Freestone and OMS. And also thank you to our suppliers Chamberlain Project Surveying, AON Insurance Brokers, Habitat Restorations, Shelly Maccormick and Sian Player.

What's been happening



Fish barrier

ORC issued the consent for the fish barrier in late January to be installed in a section of the creek running through the Williams family farm.

Breen Construction was contracted to build the barrier starting with the off-site pre-fabrication of some of the concrete parts, and Central Excavating did the rock work and tidy up of the site.

The work was completed mid-March, and soon we will be carrying out electric fishing to remove pest fish, which will help our native fish to flourish.

Wetland

Very excitingly, work is now underway on the constructed wetland following two years of discussions, design and consenting. In December last year initial preparation of the wetland site included draining some artificial duck ponds and removing old crack willow as well as gravel build up. Surveying took place in January and late last month Central Excavating & S&B Civil started carving out the nearly one-kilometre-long meander and ponds that will ensure water moves slowly around the wetland area.



Right now, it is all looking a bit messy but the end result will be one our community will be proud of. It'll be a thriving wetland habitat, with bird and aquatic life and native plantings that cleans the water by filtering out sediment and filtering out nutrients and returning nitrogen to the atmosphere.

Our plant guru, Jo Wakelin, has connected us with three nurseries that we have now contracted to grow 45,000 carex secta seedlings for the wetland with expected delivery in October.

Jo is providing a series of posts for our Facebook page about native plants and what suits our catchment. Keep an eye on <https://www.facebook.com/ThomsonsCatchmentProject> for these.

Sharing our project with the community

Famed management consultant Peter Drucker was fond of saying 'if you can't measure it, you can't change it', and with these wise words in mind the project committee has enlisted the pupils of Omakau Primary School to carry out monthly testing of the water in Thomsons Creek.

Year seven and eight pupils are involved with their monitoring and measurement part of their commitment to EnviroSchools, the national action-based programme where young people design and lead sustainability projects in their schools and neighbourhoods.

Amongst recent VIP visitors were the Minister for the Environment, the Hon. David Parker, and MfE's Director of Policy Implementation and Directon, Sara Clarke, who stopped by on World Wetlands Day (2 February) to inspect work being done on our constructed wetland. Committee member and farmer, and chair of MCG Anna Gillespie helped host them.



Another recent visitor was Rob Wardle from the QEII Trust who is working with landowners, Pete and Robyn McLeod, to put the wetland site into a restoration agreement with QEII. He also got hands-on pulling out some woody weeds, ably assisted by committee member Haines Batrick who helped host him. Haines is one of our team supporting the community to make these projects happen.

With the wetland being close to our section of the Otago Central Rail trail, which each year attracts thousands of cyclists as well as walkers and horse riders, we are working with DoC to provide a short detour off the trail to allow anyone interested to view it. Appropriate signage will be installed telling visitors about the wetland and the reasons for constructing it.

We appreciated the chance to share our progress with the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust recently and look forward to working with them on promoting and creating access to our wetland.

The most recent event, was an awesome tour of the wetland for local landowners, families and workers. It was a chance to see the wetland being created and have a social catch up over a barbecue.

Follow us on Facebook or our new website

We're social here at Thomsons Catchment Project. Check out our Facebook page for the latest about activities and opportunities to get involved www.facebook.com/ThomsonsCatchmentProject.

We have a range of public events coming soon, so please keep an eye on our website and Facebook page for details.

We also now have our own web pages on the Otago Catchment website, where we will regularly upload information about what we are doing, events and working bees you can get involved in, milestones we have achieved and our consenting process. There is also a photo gallery so you can see progress and who is helping get the work done.

Check it out here <https://www.mcwater.co.nz/Thomsons-Catchment-Project>

Here is a taste of the photos and faces you can see in the Photo Gallery.

