

MEDIA RELEASE FROM UPPER CLUTHA LAKES TRUST:

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Upper Clutha Community Water Management Plan project underway

The Upper Clutha Lakes Trust has commenced its five year commitment to develop a Community Water Management Plan with funding from the Government's Freshwater Improvement Fund, QLDC, Million Metres and Sargood Bequest. The project involves three primary work streams: the Water Management Plan; riparian planting; and research on the effect of urban stormwater runoff.

The local initiative is one of 34 Freshwater Improvement Fund projects nationally to improve freshwater management and the only project funded in the Otago region. The Trust has identified urban growth, farming, tourism, invasive species and climate change as the main factors impacting waterways in the region.

Mandy Bell is leading the Governance Group which is working on the water management plan. The team is tasked with understanding the community's values, assessing where the Upper Clutha catchments and lakes needs to be in 50 years and developing a framework with the community to achieve that objective. Mandy expressed strong confidence in the Trust's direction and stated "our project involves wide collaboration. We are working together to define the challenges for our waterways and explore potential solutions to support water quality and ecosystem function. The Water Management Plan will include measures that the community and councils will progress over the next 50 years."

Te Kākano Aotearoa Trust is managing all planting activities for the Trust, with the University of Otago's Catchments Otago group leading the urban run-off research project. Te Kākano has already commenced work on defining planting criteria and assessing potential project sites to get 24,000 trees planted across the catchment over the next five years. Planting will involve partnerships with local landowners as well as planting on public land. Neil Woodrow from Te Kākano noted "one of the key outcomes is demonstrating an improvement in water quality as a result of our planting. Riparian planting offers other benefits for the catchment, such as improving biodiversity and reducing nutrient run-off."

Gerry Closs from Catchments Otago stressed the importance of robust planning. "The towns in our region are growing fast and this means that more sediments, pathogens, nutrients and chemical contaminants are being washed directly into our lakes and rivers when it rains. As well as understanding the impacts from that runoff, we need to plan and build infrastructure to manage urban stormwater now, as that infrastructure can't be retrofitted in ten or twenty years." The research team will develop multidisciplinary studies over the next few months, integrating with QLDC and ORC plans and linking with other freshwater research to identify gaps and avoid overlaps.

ORC's Director of Stakeholder Engagement, Sian Sutton said "It has taken considerable effort from those involved, to get the Upper Clutha Community Water Management Plan project underway. So we'd like to congratulate the group on this achievement. The ORC is

committed to enhancing our collaboration with the region, and seeing action at a community level contributing to such positive results is very exciting. We are thrilled to be a part of this great initiative.”

QLDC Chief Executive Mike Theelen noted the importance of maintaining the district’s freshwater quality given the extraordinary amount of urban development happening around both Wanaka, Queenstown and a number of the district’s smaller communities. “We have seen the recent effects of development on the streams and lakes during heavy downfalls, and the Water Management Plan work is a key part of improving our understanding of the effects and how to better manage future urban growth.” “Change towards more intensive farming and tourism are also putting a strain on our freshwater quality, so protecting that is also essential to supporting those key economic drivers in our community, it’s an important piece of work for the entire district” said Mr Theelen.

The Trust will share information with the Shaping our Future taskforces in Queenstown and Wanaka and expect outcomes from these and other community forums will contribute to the Water Management Plan.

The Trust is keen to connect with people living locally with a background or particular interest in freshwater management and willing to get involved with any of the project workstreams. For those wanting to support the work of the Trust, donations for planting could be made to Million Metres <https://millionmetres.org.nz/open-project/love-lake-wanaka> or to the Trust’s Givealittle page <https://givealittle.co.nz/org/upper-clutha-lakes-trust-board>.

The Trust’s website www.uppercluthalakestrust.org is in the process of being updated to include information on the Trust’s projects and ways for the community to get involved and learn more about what can be done to ensure that future generations continue to enjoy our lakes and rivers the same way we do today.

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