

Timber industry moving with the times



Waipa Forest Management manages forestry block harvesting and selling for farmers, private and iwi land-owners across an area straddling the Bay of Plenty, central North Island and Hawke's Bay.

In his 24 years working in forestry Rob Angus coDirector of Waipa Forest Management has seen lots of changes impact on the industry – many of them for the good.

Along with Todd Cheesman, Rob manages forestry block harvesting and selling for farmers, private and iwi land-owners across an area straddling the Bay of Plenty, central North Island and Hawke's Bay.

"It's our job to support owners to make the right decisions which will bring them the best return at any given time," Rob explains.

A number of factors go into that conversation, including when and how owners want to see a return on their investment, how that timing ties in with other operations, if any, on the land, what are the future uses for the land once the harvest has taken place, along with harvesting and consenting processes, if required.

"We are certainly in a busy period now, due to the large scale plantings in the early 90s, that are coming up for harvest. Many of the regional areas, such as Hawke's Bay, the East Coast, the southern North Island and King Country to name a few have large areas of privately owned forest that were planted in this period and will be due for harvest.

"We are in the middle of the of the harvest of these plantings and this has coincided with high log prices that are currently stable."

Rob is also pleased to observe how modern-day harvesting methods and environmental restoration systems are leaving areas, when felled, in a better situation that in previous eras. The National Environmental Standards for Production Forestry came into being in May this year.

It was created by MPI with input from the industry to bring a consistent level of environmental standard for all parts of New Zealand.

“With respect to environmental considerations there’s a big focus on protecting water-ways, stabilizing steep terrain and managing slash debris once an area has been felled given that forestry has moved into much steeper areas that experience high rainfall.”

New harvesting systems are also helping to create a safer working environment. More mechanisation is creating greater efficiency and a safer workplace particularly on steep and marginal forestry blocks.

Safety practices and systems are constantly being improved and adapted to cover all work scenarios.

Forest safety is a balance between good systems and training, and also keeping things simple and easy to understand. Along with incentives through Carbon tax credits and the governments current one billion trees policy, more and more diverse landowners are considering planting trees.

“I think a future challenge will be to find enough people wanting to go into planting, which is still largely done manually, given it is winter work. It’s heartening to see wage rates for planters have improved in recent years.”

Waipa Forest Management also assist land owners with initial decisions regarding if, when and what to plant, by providing assessments of internal rates of return.

“We give them accurate forecasts on which to make their decisions,” says Rob.

Looking back on two-plus decades in forestry Rob says that the ownership model for large forest blocks covering sizeable tracks of land throughout the country has changed, and for the better – moving from ownership by a sharemarket listed company with a short term model to a longer term investor.

The New Zealand Super Fund is now invested in forestry.

“Our largest forest, for example, is now owned by a pension fund rather than a publicly listed company.

“This is a better way to fund a forest. You’re managing the forest in ways that bring about better outcomes for the forest and ultimately a greater return on investment because it is long-term. It brings stability to the industry.”