

YOUR AIRPORT MINDING THE GAP

Planting and regenerating a patch of undeveloped land in Westshore that locals call The Gap is just one project that will benefit from a prosperous partnership between Hawke's Bay Airport and Biodiversity Hawke's Bay.



Left to right: Marie Taylor – Plant Hawke's Bay, Richard Karn – Westshore Residents Association and Stuart Ainslie – Hawke's Bay Airport Chief Executive.

NEIGHBOURHOOD SUPPORT

An airport is many things – transport hub, business centre, meeting place, employer, regional asset. And an airport is also a neighbour. In Hawke's Bay, our airport borders the seaside suburb of Westshore, and sits squarely within the Ahuriri estuarine environment - a haven for birdlife and other fauna and flora.

Stephanie Murphy is the Airport Planner at Hawke's Bay Airport and also takes an interest in the long-term protection of Hawke's Bay's unique ecosystem. In her spare time, she's a Biodiversity Hawke's Bay Guardian – a passion project for this keen environmentalist.

So Stephanie was thrilled when, earlier this year, her employer signed on as the sole Platinum Sponsor of Biodiversity Hawke's Bay, committing funding and in-kind support of around \$450,000 over the next five years. This support will help build an Endowment Fund that Biodiversity Hawke's Bay will use to create a nature-rich future for our region.

"But the other benefit is that a portion of the funding goes towards a separate Project Fund, which the Guardians use to support community groups with an interest in enhancing biodiversity," Stephanie says.

Established in 2018, Biodiversity Hawke's Bay relies on membership from individuals, schools, local bodies and businesses both big and small. Its overarching goal is to protect threatened priority habitats and rare species in Hawke's Bay, as well as support ecological restoration programmes. It's a goal that fits neatly with Hawke's Bay Airport's own sustainability framework, says airport Chief Executive Stuart Ainslie.

"We see a natural synergy," he says. "The airport takes its environmental responsibilities very seriously, and prides itself on being a committed steward of our biodiverse Hawke's Bay environment, and our local community."



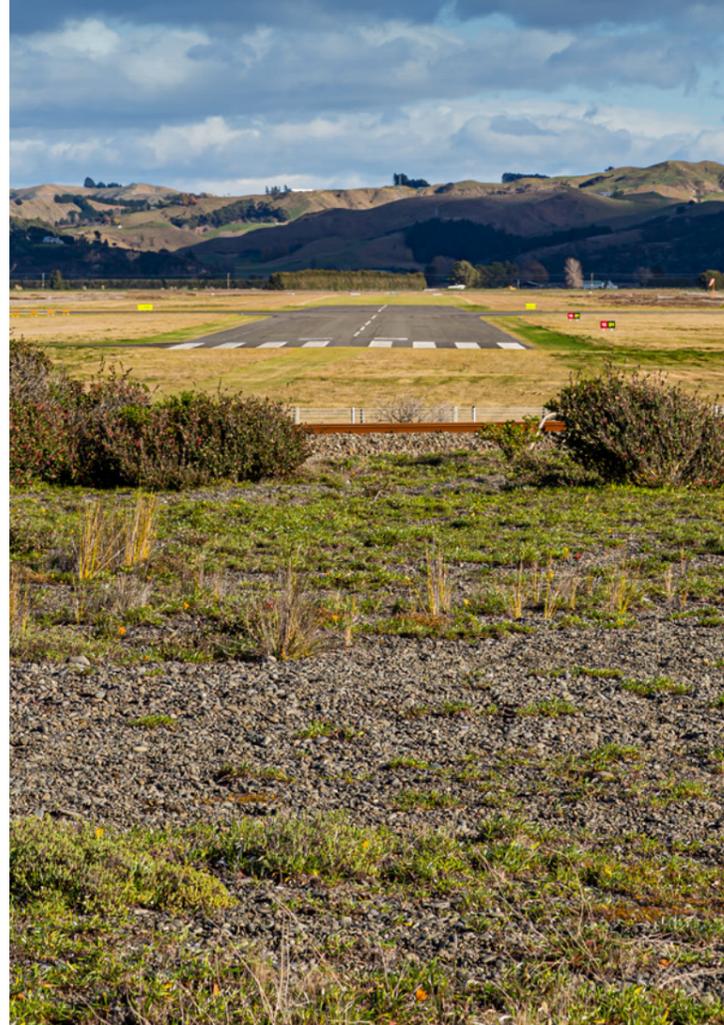
REGENERATING THE GAP

There's a unique piece of gravel beach along Westshore that has been largely undisturbed by development, landscaping or hard engineering. It's called The Gap, and it's a Council-owned protected zone for the airport's cross runway. "It really has been a forgotten part of the Hawke's Bay landscape," says Stephanie. "And while it's a bit overgrown with weeds at the moment, it's been identified by Biodiversity Hawke's Bay as an important part of our regional ecosystem."

Richard Karn from the Westshore Residents Association has led a small team taking care of The Gap for the past three years – largely focused on spraying, watering, hand-weeding, and rubbish removal.

There has also been some trial planting, to ascertain which plants might thrive on the site. "The airport funded a number of native plants and helped with weeding and planting – they have kept an active interest in the project," says Richard.

Now, with The Gap identified as the recipient of Biodiversity Hawke's Bay funding to enable a management plan to be drawn up and establish native planting and long-term weed management, Richard and his neighbours are excited at the prospect of a coordinated, well-funded approach. "Where else could you do a project like this in the middle of a residential area, with a willing corporate partner? It is a great project, and if done properly, will outlive us all."



AN ECOLOGICAL TAONGA

Marie Taylor owns Plant Hawke's Bay and has spent many hours investigating the ecological habitat of The Gap in her role as a Biodiversity Guardian.

"The Gap is unusual because of its location, its gravel beach landscape, and its smattering of remnant natural vegetation," she begins.

The native plants discovered on the site include *Pimelea urvilleana*, sand coprosma, wiwi, and several other interesting shrubs.

However with invasive exotic weeds choking the natives, Marie sees a real opportunity for change, with Biodiversity Hawke's Bay Project Fund support. "The objective is to recreate a gravel beach landscape with an appropriate suite of species adapted to the site. So far the most successful species we've trialled is the leafless pohuehue *Muehlenbeckia ephedroides*, which looks a bit like wire. It's rare in Hawke's Bay, and is only known from a small at-risk population in Te Awanga where it's subject to damage from vehicles. So if we can make The Gap a refuge for this species, that will be a very good outcome."

With airport, Council, Biodiversity Hawke's Bay, Guardians and the neighbourhood working together, Marie is confident The Gap could also become an example of how to manage gravel beach environments in wider Hawke's Bay. "In the future, we would like to see story boards or interpretation panels telling the stories of these specialised plants – imagine if we could get people thinking about our beaches as a taonga and really treasuring them?"

Marie describes the commitment the airport has made to Biodiversity Hawke's Bay as "wonderful" and says it sets a fantastic precedent for other businesses to think outside their boundaries "and look at how they can help improve Hawke's Bay's natural landscapes and biodiversity."