Awaawaroa land offers spray-free model

Not a drop of herbicide has been used on Rob Morton and Hanne Sorensen’s 170-hectare property at Awaawaroa for 20 years.

Many weeds that others might spray with chemical herbicides are helping native bush to regenerate on the property at Awaawaroa Eco Village.

With a small Auckland Council grant, about 3000 square metres of honeysuckle has been cleared by hand and other climbing weeds have been dug out over the years.

Waiheke Weed and Restoration Advisory Panel officially launched last week with a tour of the property.

Mr Morton is one of the panel members, along with pesticide expert Meriel Watts, environmental activist Flynn Washington, landscape architect Daphne Mitten, gardener Anne Pryor and native tree nursery owner Ivan Kitson.

The panel’s launch included a discussion with Auckland Council bio-security and parks staff and Waiheke Local Board chairperson Paul Walden about the best ways to get rid of Waiheke’s pervasive weeds.

Mr Morton offered his property as a model of what can be achieved without sprays.

“Most people accept that gorse is helpful in regenerating forest. I want to show you that solanum or woolly nightshade is too. It shades the kikuyu and makes a perfect nursery for native seedlings,” he told the group.

“That’s brilliant,” Waiheke council parks ranger Bridget Velvin replied.

While some Auckland Council staff seemed open to considering non-chemical approaches to weeds, council rangers from Whakatane wha Regional Park did not take up invitations to attend the event.

Glyphosate and picloram herbicides have recently been sprayed on kikuyu, woolly nightshade, gorse, honeysuckle and other weeds at Whakatane.

Despite concerns being raised by panel member Dr Watts, Whakatane wha park rangers plan to continue spraying chemical herbicides at the park over the summer.

The council is considering several reserve management plans for Waiheke reserves that include intensive spraying with chemical herbicides.

“A lot of money is used to develop these plans that could be used to pay people to do manual weed removal without sprays,” said Mr Morton.

Mr Walden noted that Auckland Council is considering cutting $300,000 from the island’s parks’ budget by using chemical sprays instead of weed eaters and lawn mowers. Glyphosate and other herbicides could be used at council playgrounds, beach reserves, walkways and parks to save labour costs.

Despite the local board’s spray-free policy, the council has indicated that slashing costs by using chemical sprays could be included in its draft Long Term Plan for 2015 to 2025.

Rob Morton says weeds, such as woolly nightshade and gorse, don’t need to be sprayed because they help native forest to regenerate.

Mr Morton said that with shrinking council budgets, people needed to think about “how nature can help” to resolve its own weed infestation problems.

He led the group around areas where native trees had been planted in a thick kikuyu ground cover, without any spray.


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Rob Morton stands in front of hills that were once bare, where native bush has regenerated without the use of herbicides to control weeds.

Awaawaroa Eco Village has an agreement that none of the residents use sprays.

“Herbicides can seem like an easy option, but we have to think smarter,” said Mr Morton.

Council bio-control officer Deryn Dromgool said council staff sometimes face thousands of hectares of weeds that are difficult to control without herbicides, but they prefer to apply products to the plant rather than spraying large areas of vegetation.

“We all want to minimize herbicide use long term,” she said.

Ms Dromgool encourages people to take responsibility for their own roadside verge, to help make the council's massive weed management task on the island more manageable. • Rose Davis
Community debates council herbicide spraying

Debate is heating up over whether chemical herbicides should be sprayed at Whakanewha Regional Park and on other Auckland Council land.

Waitemata Weed and Restoration Advisory Panel officially launched this week to try to keep Waitemata as spray free as possible.

“The group formed because of issues with the council spraying herbicides around residential areas and the overkill in spraying some areas in parks. There are a lot of people who are very unhappy about the use of chemicals on the island,” says panel member and internationally recognised pesticide expert, Meriel Watts.

However, former Whakanewha park ranger Andy Spence, who has a business selling direct application herbicides containing glyphosate, says that without chemical herbicides, Whakanewha would not be the beautiful park it is today.

“Whilst I agree with Meriel that grasses can be mown to control them, you certainly won’t get rid of kikuyu and buffalo grass from the edges of wetland areas by hand removal and the careful use of herbicides was necessary to create the beautiful wetland sequences you now see on the Whakanewha foreshore,” he writes in a letter to Gulf News (27 November).

Some weeds, such as climbing asparagus, cannot effectively be removed by hand, he argues.

“More than a third of the entire park area was densely infested with this weed and it has substantially disappeared because of the use of glyphosate over the years. Thousands have enjoyed the park with no ill effects as a result of this,” says Mr Spence.

Dr Watts disagrees, saying that it is better for the environment to leave some weeds where they are than to spray them with “toxic chemicals”.

Glyphosate can cause health problems, such as breast cancer, kidney failure and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma and destabilise the environment, damaging soil health, contributing to erosion and causing algal blooms in the sea, she says.

The weed advisory panel is calling on volunteers to help clear moth plant and other weeds from Rangihoua mountain at Onetangi Sports Park, so that Auckland Council will stop spraying glyphosate in the park.

Panel member Flynn Washington says clearing weeds is a “nice, satisfying” activity that will take place every Sunday from 10am to 12pm until Christmas.

Local expert offers pesticide advice in Geneva

Rocky Bay resident Meriel Watts will present a briefing on toxic pesticides in Geneva this month.

Representatives from about 170 countries will attend the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management conference, including people from United Nations agencies, industry, science bodies and non-government organisations.

Dr Watts will be speaking about why highly hazardous pesticides have to be phased out globally.

Helipad among planned developments

A helicopter landing pad could soon be built at 27 Dolphin Lane if Auckland Council grants consent.

Applications were made for resource consent to build new houses at 77, 78 and 92 Coromandel Road, 10 Beresford Ave, 454 Gordon Road, 59 Victoria Ave, 76 Queens Drive, 27 Hekera Road, 39 Burrell Road, 19 Sea View Road, and 78 Te Matuku Point Lane.

A two-lot subdivision, new house and visitor accommodation are planned for 2 Victoria Road North, 105 and 107 Erin St, 170 Parnell Rd and 61 Whenuapai Rd.

Consent is sought to construct a boat accessway, remove vegetation, do earthworks and put a culvert over a stream at 380 Cowes Bay Road.

The council seeks permission to resurface sports fields and install new floodlights at 43 Causeway Road.

Permission for boat sheds is sought at 26 Queens Drive and 510a Cowes Bay Road and two sheds and a sleepout are planned for 57 Junction Road.

Consent is sought for tree trimming or removal at 41 Tiri View Road, 6 Fourth Ave, 25 Shelley Beach Road, 44 Wharf Rd, 9 Hillside Road, 15 Anzac Road, 487 Sea View Road, 54 to 56 Palm Rd, Cowes Bay Rd, 29 Jellicoe Parade, 32 Beresford Ave, 71 Trig Hill Road and 25 Kennedy Point Road.

Applications for consent for additions and alterations to buildings have been made for 20 Marine View Rd, 130 Carsons Rd, 312B and 308D Sea View Rd, 12 and 42 Hobson Terrace, 24 Whakarite Rd, 29 Queens Drive, 68 Cory Rd, 37 and 113 Ocean Rd, 20 Great Barrier Rd, 745 Orapiu Rd and 123 Ocean View Rd.

At 57 Palm Rd, consent is sought to create a right of way, remove a garage and relocate a boundary.

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