Environment Canterbury Regional Council

Habitat ECan

A bi-monthly update on Environment Canterbury people and their activities.

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South Canterbury Surprises

Not many people know it, but Environment Canterbury's Timaru office has a long history of environmental management. Formerly, the South Canterbury Catchment Board, today 50 Environment Canterbury staff work there representing all sections but one at the regional council.

Office Manager Sue Seymour says the close-knit Timaru team is always ready to help each other. Recent flood concerns meant an emergency management office had to be staffed over three days and two nights, and everyone chipped in. Some staff even baked biscuits and bought goodies to feed those monitoring the water levels.

"Those events are really great for office morale. Everyone has to give that little bit more effort to allow us to staff both the flood room and the office, everyone pulls together to contribute."

But while South Canterbury's alpine-fed rivers and popular recreational lakes cause concern during high rainfall, in summer they are one of the greatest attractions providing trout and salmon fishing, tramping, hunting, water skiing and close proximity to snow ski fields in the winter months.

And it's not only the high country that delights. New staff are amazed to find that Timaru, a small city of around 26,000 people, boasts a diverse restaurant culture, regular visiting shows and a plethora of sports. "There are plenty of opportunities for a good social life here. And we're only two hours to Christchurch and about the same to Dunedin."

With a large number of staff working in Surface Water and Hydrology and Compliance and Enforcement, a focus on water and agriculture is inevitable.

There are two section managers based in Timaru, and Sue says the atmosphere is relaxed and laid- back. "The atmosphere in the office is great; we all get on well together."

Friendly Vibe

Gaining a job as an environmental protection officer was "a bit of an accident really," says Lydia Carr.

The Timaru-based enforcement and compliance team member originally applied for a Biosecurity role with Environment Canterbury, but missed out. Her skills impressed however and she was recommended for her current position. "It's worked out really well.

I enjoy the variety of the role, getting out on site visits or going to do my sampling." Lydia monitors wastewater and industrial discharges, and while she occasionally experiences tension from those she is monitoring, she says a good attitude keeps things pleasant. "If a consent holder gets angry or upset, I try not to take it personally and instead work with them to fix the problem." Building good relationships is something Lydia prides herself on. Having held the role since February 2007, she's also pretty clear on how her role "fits within the greater scope of Environment Canterbury".

Lydia has worked at Environment Canterbury's Timaru and Christchurch offices. She is keen to stay in Timaru and is interested in other roles the office boasts such as the Resource Care team. "There's a good mix of people here, young and old, and a lot of knowledge as well.

Everything is connected

Outdoor Enthusiast

Straight from university, Owen Payne was initially employed as an assistant hydrological officer in Christchurch. Eight years later, he has progressed to senior hydrological officer in Environment Canterbury's Timaru office.

Owen's role involves monitoring water level recorders set up in Canterbury rivers and rain gauges across the region. To ensure the instruments work accurately, he is regularly in the field.

While a lot of the data is telemetered and is sent to the office automatically, after a big flood or high rainfall, instruments may need to be recalibrated. Owen visits all sites once a month and rain gauges every second month.

He's also involved in a number of investigation projects working alongside Environment Canterbury scientists. A recent example was a study into gains and losses along the Rakaia River. This involved gauging along the Rakaia to show where water was coming in and out of the river.

Owen's fieldwork takes him from the Rakaia River to the Waitaki River, and inland to Danzies Pass, Omarama, Mt Cook and Erewhon. "What I enjoy most is the backcountry, going right to the top of the Rangitata River and into the MacKenzie, and some rain gauges are so inaccessible, that they need to be visited by helicopter!"

Passion Rewarded

Brent Glentworth is passionate about pests – controlling them that is.

The Timaru Biosecurity Team Leader has worked at Environment Canterbury since 1991. In his nearly two decades with the organisation, he has seen pest control move towards an emphasis on biodiversity.

Brent was First employed in Twizel as a pest supervisor. In the 1990s, large scale poisoning programmes to combat rabbit plagues were required. During the Rabbit and Land management programme, 180,000 tonnes of carrots were dropped over three years.

Brent monitored the impact of the release of RHD, and its decimation of the rabbit population, but in recent years he's watched a resurgence in numbers as immunity levels grow and landowners are again faced with the use and cost of traditional control measures.

When the Regional Pest Management Strategy was introduced in 1995, Brent's role moved to a more advisory and compliance focus. As well as other animal pests such as rooks, mustelids and wallabies, his team also inspect for invasive plants that cause havoc for landowners and affect native vegetation.

The shift to working with landowners to protect biodiversity has been a welcome focus for Brent. "It's good to be involved in protection of our indigenous flora and fauna. It is a great role. Hopefully we can continue to make an impact on the pests that threaten New Zealand's biodiversity and agricultural production."

Timaru Impresses

Moving to Timaru was the last thing Wendy Robinson imagined when she applied for a role with Environment Canterbury.

"I had just finished a Bachelor of Resource and Environmental Planning and was thrilled to spot Environment Canterbury's advert for a resource care co-ordinator.

Unfortunately she missed out. She was then offered an assistant co-ordinator's position in Timaru. "I don't think I would have chosen to apply if I had realized it was Timaru."

Since moving to South Canterbury, the Waikato-raised graduate rapidly changed her views of the city. "There's so much to do, it's so close to the outdoors and so many different places you normally wouldn't get to."

The other surprise was how much she would enjoy her role. Initially focusing on a career in environmental planning, Wendy says she is finding the hands-on community group and landowner focus very rewarding. "I love the diversity of it. One day I'm working on reports in the office, the next I'm in someone's dining room giving them advice or I could be out in the hills of the Mackenzie Country."

Because the role is fixed term, Wendy is already looking into other possibilities within the organisation so she can stay in Canterbury. Her advice to other graduates is to keep an open mind and be prepared to look at every position being advertised, as her job location would not have been her first choice and she is blown away by how good it is.