

Whangawehi project takes off



□ From back left, Whangawehi group leader and Tuahuru Marae chairperson Kathleen Mato, secretary Rae Tenahu, Sue and Pat O'Brien and project manager Nic Caviale. In front, cultural health index co-ordinator Arthur Bowen and kaumatua Peter Nielsen who gave the blessing.

A COMMUNITY-WIDE project has secured important funding to help protect a Mahia waterway.

It is the first project undertaken by the Whangawehi Catchment Management Group (WCMG) which began its conservation work late last year. In a recent meeting the group learned

funding had been confirmed to build a fence to keep goats out of riparian/waterway sites.

The first conservation project undertaken on Taharoa Trust land owned by Pat and Sue O'Brien was made possible with approval from Ken Hunt of Poutū Ao Tāne in May to fund 1.7km of new fence.

The O'Briens were thrilled and look forward to retiring the riparian margins of the Whangawehi Stream.

"We have been talking about it for a long time but the financial support of the Whangawehi Catchment Management Group has been a catalyst," they said.

The fence will be built over the winter with the first plantings starting in July 2014.

The group's goal is to establish a total of 22,000 native trees on both sides of the stream. The retired area will be covenanted and the farm will benefit from a goat control strategy developed by the WCMG.

Recently a blessing was organised along the Whangawehi stream in order to protect the land and the people involved in further conservation work.

Peter Nielsen, local kaumatua, created a special karakia for the occasion which gave the owners and members of the Whangawehi Catchment Management Group great confidence for the future of the project.

The group and the principal of Te Mahia School are working on a project for 2014 with a different environmental focus for their students each term.

It is rapidly growing in both scope and vision with several ideas in the pipeline including a planting project, bird watching, fish monitoring and learning about sustainably harvesting kaimoana.

□ The long journey to restore the Whangawehi Stream has begun with the WCMG and the Taharoa Trust working together with the O'Briens to fence off the waterway.