

Advertorial

WEATHER BOMBS, FORESTRY & FARMING

When it rains in Biblical portions, bad things happen – Noah knows! More so, when your underlying rock is soft and unstable - a metre of rain in one month will inevitably create casualties.

And that's about the sum of March in Northern Hawkes Bay and Tairāwhiti.

All on the heels of the outrage which dominated headlines when a similar deluge two years back caused Tolaga Bay to be hit by logs and forestry



debris. Then, no question about it, forestry was culpable and so the industry apologised and backed this by cleaning the beaches.

This time, the picture is not so simple. It is not so much wood that is coming off the hills but rather the soil. And for the most part it is not coming from forestry land.

While any mobile debris is bad debris, the latest extreme weather has

provided us with confidence that we are on the right track, that the changes we are implementing are helping.

What is noticeable here is that much of the woody debris is poplar, willow and other species of trees not associated with pine forests. And again, while not always visibly confronting, everywhere there are rivers of silt, the productive and environmental cost of which is massive.

Perversely, much of the problem identified with forestry is from forests created under the 'East Coast Project' back in the 1970's. When a zealous government asked its forest service to acquire whole farms and blanket plant them - pine being the obvious choice as it establishes easily, grows well, and provides a versatile and valued commodity. Besides stemming soil loss another objective was to use forestry as a vector for regional development in an otherwise lagging East Coast.

We knew then that once established, pines would look after the soil, in all but the wettest times when everything is vulnerable.

And we are working hard to reduce the chances of immediate post-harvest debris flows too.

Obviously, with the wisdom of hindsight some areas should not have been planted with commercial intent. This has been taken on board by forestry companies who now are

viewing smaller harvesting coups, not replanting at all on very unstable areas and leaving riparian strips everywhere.

We also expect less soil disturbance in a second rotation forest as much of the roading and harvesting infrastructure was developed the first-time round.

But that's all ahead of us and in the meantime, we will work with what we have got. The forests have a finite life span; weather keeps on getting more erratic and to do nothing is foolish.

That given, it is not reasonable to expect the industry to completely plug the debris leaks. But we can and are always looking to do better.

One can only hope that farming in Northern Hawkes Bay and Tairāwhiti is on a similar trajectory with siltation, because that matters too.

Keith Dolman, CEO



The March 2022 weather has left quite a footprint on the hills around Wairoa. The costs to transport routes and freshwater and marine ecology will be considerable (photo anon 'concerned landowner').



Debris traps are part of the toolkit. - this in a HB forest pictured just after the March rain.