Environment Southland

Focus Activity Farm Plans

Author: Anastazia Raymond – Land Sustainability Officer, Environment Southland

Objective

Environment Southland Land Sustainability Officers (LSO) provide Focus Activity Farm Plans to rural land owners of properties greater than 10 hectares on land use classes I-IV.

The plans were originally developed to deliver targeted advice around three areas of focus for the organisation – nutrient management, winter grazing and riparian management. With the notification of the *Proposed Southland Water and Land Plan*, the plans have expanded to include the requirements of appendix N of the proposed plan – Environmental Management Plans. The land sustainability team has a goal of producing 200 plans per year.

The plans include:

- GIS farm maps with property-specific mapped data
- Factsheets on relevant and targeted good management practices
- Recommendations of actions farmers can take to improve water quality

FOCUS ACTIVITIES AND THEIR GOALS

- **NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT**

  That by the time limit setting is underway we should have landowners at a stage of awareness and understanding of nutrient management.

- **RIPARIAN MANAGEMENT**

  Improved riparian management and reduction in overland flow, in particular within critical source areas, by:

  - Targeted stock exclusion
  - Riparian vegetation retention and/or planting.

- **WINTER GRAZING**

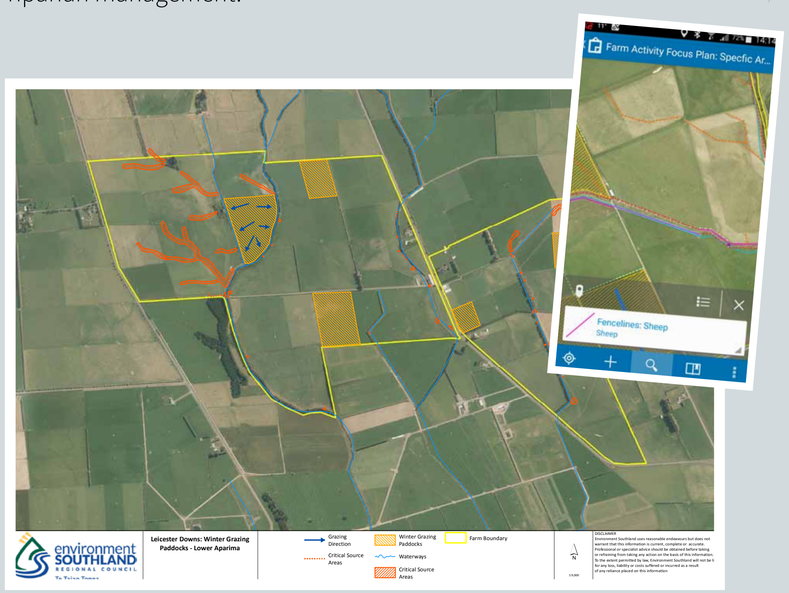
  Promote the adoption of practices to reduce the loss of nutrients, sediment and bacteria from intensive winter grazing.

Collection method

1. Discussion with landowner
2. Record observations with Collector (ArcGIS) on the property
3. Form recommendations from observations and discussions

When meeting the landowner we discuss farm specific practices such as their nutrient management and nutrient budgets, tile drain maps, cultivation plans and wintering plans.

LSOs ground truth and record observations using the spatial GIS system – Collector, and photography on smartphones. Motorbikes and 4WD vehicles are used for getting around difficult country and closer to features in particular, observations of critical source areas, grazing and cultivation directions, and landscape influences for riparian management.



Property-specific mapped data shown as it is recorded with Collector (GIS) and as printed maps for the landowner.

Formulating the plan

Maps

Collector information stored on our Smartphones is synced with the office GIS database. Maps are generated for the property using spatial information, both newly collected and previously known. A report is generated with statistics gathered for the property such as length of waterways and length of riparian fencing.

Letter and recommendations

Covering letters with recommendations for action are written by LSOs based around a templated letter. All plans include farm specific recommendations on riparian management, nutrient management and wintering practices.

Folder and factsheets

Letters and maps are presented in a folder supplemented with relevant good management practice factsheets. LSOs add additional relevant information such as the specific soil and physiographic factsheets or individually requested information.

Spatial information printed on maps of the property include:

- Riparian management, fencing and planting
- Soil types and physiographic zones critical source areas
- Winter grazing and cultivation paddocks
- Tile drain maps
- Slope class and riparian buffer requirements
- Additional recommendations including wetlands, ponds, sediment traps, biodiversity, forestry, shelter belts, culverts, bridges, offal pits, silage stacks

Results & measurements

As a result of the Focus Activity Farm Plan programme, landowners are better placed for future limit setting, empowered to take up good environmental practice and have an established relationship with Environment Southland.

Landowners with a Focus Activity Farm Plan can also apply for an enablement grant of up to $5000 towards completing an on-farm project that was recommended in the plan.

Environment Southland monitors the effectiveness of the Focus Activity Farm Plans through a matrix, measuring baselines and uptake of good management practice recommendations. We are also able to monitor the number and spread of properties with environment plans, length of waterways fenced and planted, and uptake of funding from the enablement grant.

Environment Southland Land Sustainability Officers Sam Dixon (left) delivers a Focus Activity Farm Plan to a Southland farmer.