

For immediate release

2 June 2006



Central Plains Water Trust investigates recreational opportunities

Mountain biking, fishing, family-style inner tubing, road biking, hiking, yachting, bird watching, waterskiing, swimming, horseriding, an international standard artificial white-water kayaking course and an international rowing course - these are some of the activities that are being seriously considered for Central Canterbury if the proposed Central Plains Water irrigation scheme goes ahead.

Chairman of Central Plains Water Trust, Doug Marsh says, "Our vision is to incorporate recreational facilities that cater for a wide range of activities into the proposed scheme's ultimate design and operation. These facilities would turn Central Canterbury into a major recreational destination which would have significant benefits to the communities in the area. They would also bolster Canterbury's reputation as being the gateway to the Southern Alps, creating recreational opportunities for local residents and visitors to the area.

"Leading the investigations into the recreational opportunities is acclaimed multi-sport athlete Steve Gurney. He was contracted for the role partly because of his outdoor recreation experience but also because he is a qualified engineer. As an independent adviser to the Trust, Steve is getting unbiased feedback on a range of potential recreational opportunities," says Doug Marsh.

"My job is to talk to a range of recreational groups to find out if there are any opportunities that could be worked into the final design of the irrigation scheme," says Steve Gurney. "Our consultation has posed the question – if Central Plains Water goes ahead, what would your dream recreational facility based on the scheme design be? How can we make this area really great for recreation in Canterbury?"

Steve says he has talked to groups representing interests from recreational fishing, waterskiing, rowing and walking. "Ensuring the area is useful for family recreational activities has been identified as important."

"There is scope to establish an international rowing course on the reservoir, or on an artificial lake that could be established from an area that will be excavated to generate materials to build the dam. In light of the challenges that Lake Isaac trust are facing with their proposed rowing course, we are keeping communication lines open with them for possible synergies," says Steve Gurney.

Chris Freear, the driving force behind the recently opened Little River Rail Trail says he can see huge potential to build a network of trails that connects Canterbury communities. "The Central Plains Water project has the potential to be another arterial link in the network of trails that connects mountain trails at Craigieburn and Broken River to the Little River trail at Banks Peninsula."

A mountain bike trail from Christchurch up the Waimakariri River across the canals and down the Rakaia River back to Christchurch is possible along the style of the Central

Otago Rail trail with stopovers in villages like Coalgate, Springfield, Sheffield and Glentunnel.

Steve Gurney says the focus is to establish a multi-recreational corridor adjacent to selected irrigation canals that could cater for cycling (recreational and racing), jogging, skating, horse trekking and picnic areas.

“We are keen to form partnerships with local communities and recreational groups and the final decisions on what will be built will be developed in consultation with them and the scheme’s shareholders,” says Doug Marsh.

“We are also proposing an Environmental Trust Fund that will be used to support and encourage various environmental enhancement initiatives, for example riparian planting and habitat restoration within and ‘downstream’ of the scheme area. We plan to partner with local communities to identify areas that will benefit from the Fund.”

The scheme will provide significant economic benefits to Christchurch and Canterbury. The scheme’s contribution to GDP will be the equivalent of a Rugby World Cup every year. Canterbury farmers spend around \$750 million annually on goods and services provided by Christchurch businesses. Export income from Canterbury’s rural sector accounts directly and indirectly for 60-70% of Christchurch’s economic activity.

“In April the scheme reached a significant milestone when its application to Environment Canterbury for resource consents to take, use and discharge water became ‘notifiable,’ ” says Doug Marsh. “This means Environment Canterbury is satisfied that our application contains sufficient information for people to be able to make submissions for or against the scheme.

“The scheme’s plans have therefore passed through the first critical stage in moving towards a consent hearing and ultimately having the necessary consents granted.”

The proposed scheme will consist of a main headrace canal, a network of distribution races and a water storage reservoir capable of irrigating 60,000ha of land between the Waimakariri River, the Rakaia River, State Highway 1 and the Malvern Foothills.

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Photo captions

Railtrail 1414 - Central Plains Water Trust is investigating opportunities to include a wide range of recreational facilities, including establishing a bike track that would link up with other established bike tracks such as the recently opened Little River Rail Trail (pictured)

Railtrail 1362 and 1356 - Steve Gurney and Chris Freear from the Little River Rail bike Trail discussing the option of establishing a network of trails in Central Canterbury that would connect recreational biking destinations in Canterbury.