

2025–2026 Impact Report

We will be bold, innovative, and agile

THE NEW ZEALAND
POPLAR & WILLOW RESEARCH TRUST

July. 2026

Our Focus

In 2025–26, the New Zealand Poplar and Willow Research Trust (NZPWRT) continued to play a nationally significant role in helping farmers and regional councils manage erosion-prone landscapes and strengthening infrastructure resilience for communities. Through **breeding**, **research** and **knowledge** sharing, the Trust supports the practical use of poplars and willows as proven tools for erosion control, climate adaptation, and farm system resilience.

Working alongside 13 Regional Councils and Unitary Authorities, NZPWRT helped ensure that fit-for-purpose plant material, consistent technical guidance, and evidence-based practice were available to land managers operating in some of New Zealand's most erosion-prone environments. In 2025–26, an estimated 640 hectares of vulnerable land through strategic space planting programmes delivered by regional councils was protected. These plantings stabilise soils, protect waterways, and provide shade, shelter, and supplementary fodder.

NZPWRT's impact extends beyond individual plantings. By maintaining and enriching national genetic resources, supporting **breeding** and clone evaluation programmes, and facilitating collaboration between researchers, nursery managers, councils, and farmers, the Trust helps ensure poplars and willows remain a credible, adaptable solution under changing climate and land-use pressures. The sale of more than 91,000 three-metre poles through Regional Council nurseries in 2025–26 reflects sustained demand for these species and confidence in their performance when correctly selected and managed.

Knowledge transfer remains central to NZPWRT's impact. Workshops, field engagement, publications, and digital communication channels supported both council staff and land managers to make informed decisions about cultivar selection, planting, and long-term management. Strong engagement with Regional Council staff and consistent enquiry levels demonstrate NZPWRT's role as a trusted national reference point for poplar and willow expertise.

Together, these activities contribute to enduring environmental, economic, and social outcomes: reduced erosion risk, more resilient farm systems, improved landscape stability, and greater confidence among land managers to invest in trees that deliver multiple benefits over time. NZPWRT's work in 2025–26 reinforces the value of a coordinated, long-term approach to supporting regionally delivered solutions for New Zealand's working landscapes.

Who we are

NZ Poplar and Willow Research Trust (NZPWRT) was formed in 2011 to provide longterm funding for poplar and willow breeding programmes.
NZPWRT has four key focus areas:

- **Breeding** and commercialisation of novel poplar and willow clones
- Maintaining and enriching the **genetic resource** of these species.
- **Researching** root-soil interactions, tree management for multiple uses
- Providing **information** and applications of poplar and willows.

Why poplar and willow matter

Poplars and willows provide multiple benefits across working landscapes.

Erosion control and slope stabilisation

Shade and shelter for livestock

Supplementary fodder

Riparian protection

Climate adaptation and resilience

Biodiversity and habitat values

River management

Potential future bioeconomy applications

How we work

Our focus is on providing practical tools that help protect and strengthen pastoral landscapes and communities.



1. Fit for purpose plant material

Continual breeding programme, working alongside Regional Council and Unitary Authority partners to ensure the next generation of material meets the end-users needs.



"The work funded by the NZPWRT is vital in delivering new poplar and willow varieties to reduce hill country erosion and providing lowland flood protection, contributing to water quality and the welfare of people and their livelihoods"

Bruce Wills, HB farmer

2. Research and tools

We invest in research and tools that helps to expand the use of poplar and willows in our environments.

3. Sharing knowledge

We openly share information on cultivars, management, planting of poplar and willows through our website and social media.

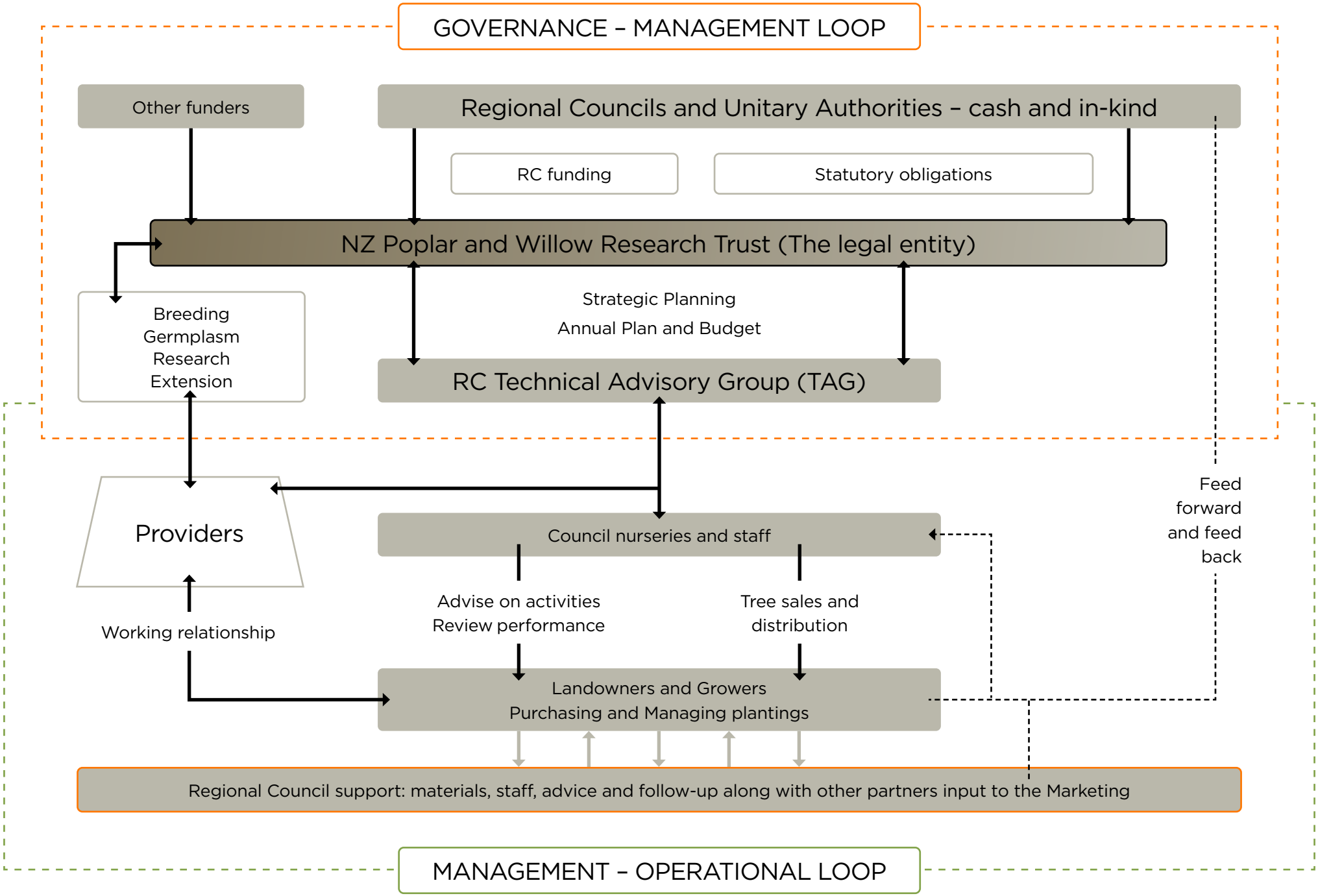


Figure 1 illustrates how NZPWRT connects breeding, research, regional council programmes and on-farm planting outcomes

Our impact

translating from outputs to outcomes and impact

These figures represent the work NZPWRT has directly facilitated or funded

"Genetics – sheep, beef, deer, pasture. We are not using the same genetics that we were using years ago. Everything has improved. Same with poplar and willow"

Guy Williams, Te Parae and Ambassador

Land and Environmental Impact

How NZPWRT contributes to on-the-ground outcomes

91,429
3 metre poles sold by Regional Council Nurseries

2
Demonstration blocks

640 ha
Estimated vulnerable land protected

Capability Building and Practice Change

How NZPWRT strengthens skills and decision making

2
Workshops delivered

62
Professionals trained

Engagement, Advice and Reach

Who supports NZPWRT and how

75
Number of enquiries

35%
Were enquiries from Regional Council staff

27%
Wanted information

23%
Wanted information on cultivars

Knowledge Sharing and Communications

How information is disseminated

12,800+
impressions on LinkedIn

↑ 21% followers

27% ↑
Newsletters recipients

Partnerships and national coordination

Who supports NZPWRT and how

12
Councils supporting us

20
Technical Advisory Group members

16
Ambassadors promoting us

Trend on Impact

The 2025-26 year has seen a stronger demand for poplar and willow material by landowners to Regional Council and Unitary Authorities. This in part is due to some nurseries having severe damage from Cyclone Gabrielle and farmers have taken the time to get their infrastructure back up before reinvesting back into soil conservation.

Despite the estimated vulnerable land not quite at peak of 2023-24, it is showing the commitment to erosion control planting. With landowners being challenged with tight financial conditions, strong pole sales and workshop attendance demonstrates that erosion control planting is still viewed as a worthwhile long-term investment.

Storms such as Cyclone Gabrielle and more recent ones, have scarred the landscape and provide visual reminders that helps drive the awareness of the value of planting poplar and willow for slope stabilisation.

Support from Regional Councils and Unitary Authorities is important to the survival of the Trust both financially and being able to connect with end users, assisting in the promotion of poplar and willows.

Encouraging demand for workshops and attendance has been positive, educating those that have direct contact with land owners, giving them a good understanding of the strengths of poplars and willows through their fast growth and rapid and expansive root development. Support from Te Uru Rākau for Train the Trainer workshops has certainly helped to spread the word.

The importance of the Technical Advisory Group continues through face-to-face and virtual meetings. A strong focus in guiding the Trust in its Strategic and Annual Plans.

Impact	2025-26	2024-25	2023-24	Trend
Council Support	12	13	13	↓
Workshops Delivered	3	3	1	=
Workshop Attendees	62	38	48	↑
3 metre pole sale	91,429	84,071	113,134	↑
Total material sold	121,818	108,840	N/A	↑
Demonstration block	2	1	1	↑
Estimated annual vulnerable land protected	640	588	792	↑



Stories from the field

Workshops

Autumn 2026, workshops were held:

• Greater Wellington with a focus on up-skilling staff.

• Top of the South and Tairāwhiti with funding from Te Uru Rākau for ‘Train the Trainer’ workshops.

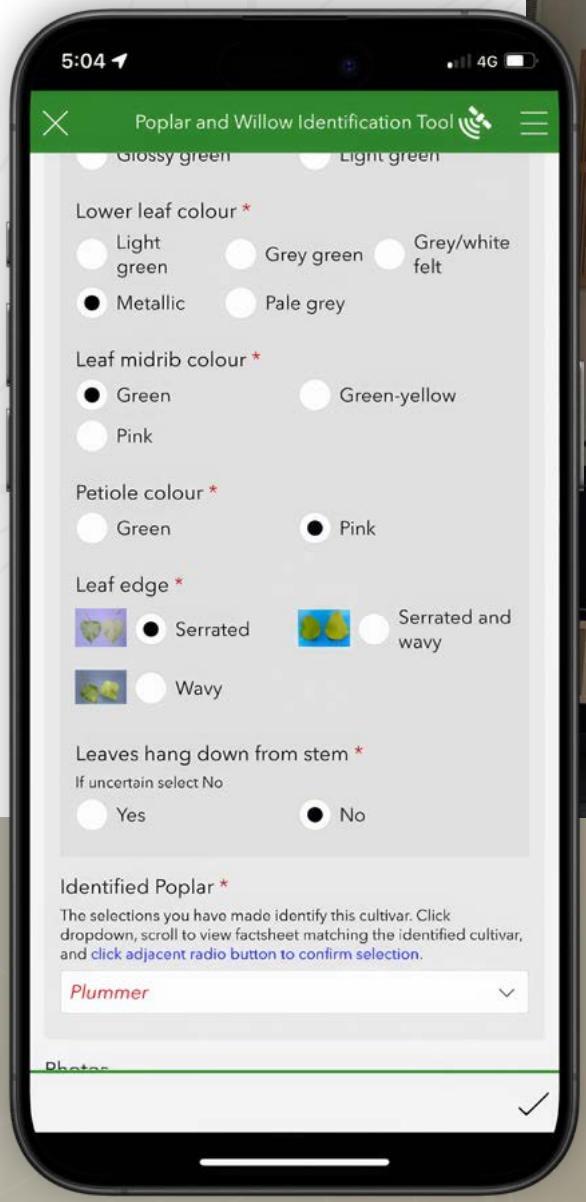
These workshops strengthened the capability of rural professionals to advise landowners on erosion control and tree management. As a result of these workshops, 62 rural professionals became more upskilled in their ability to talk knowledgeably to landowners.



“Our region has some of the world’s most erosion prone landscape, and with upcoming changes in legislation, as a consultant, I wanted a deeper understanding of poplar and willow selection and planting, so that I can confidently speak to farmers about their necessity and physical implementation. I’m very glad I attended and the workshop absolutely met my expectations”

Participant at Tairāwhiti Workshop

PopWill Explorer





Decision Support Tools

The Trust released two support tools:

- **Fit4Site** – focus on which tree to plant where
- **PopWill Explorer** – identifying what tree is that

These were launched at the NZARM conference in Marlborough in November 2025. These tools have been used in workshops to help professionals ensure they are providing the right information.



Connection at Field days

NZPWRT collaborated with NZFFA and attended Central Districts Field days and Mystery Creek. These field days help us connect with landowners, rural professionals and organisations that we currently partner with or are looking to partner with. Read more in our July 2025 Newsletter.



Supporting the Nursery Managers Group

Nursery Managers meet once a year to share ideas, ask questions. The April 2025 meeting in the Manawatu with 25 in attendance, including 5 from private nurseries.

The group provides valuable feedback on their experiences growing poplar and willow. This helps build knowledge around what works well and what does not for different cultivars.



Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

This group is critical to the successful functioning of NZPWRT and provides a connection between NZPWRT and its majority funders. They have key input into our annual direction. The focus largely for this year has been on the development of a 10-year Strategy.

Board out and about

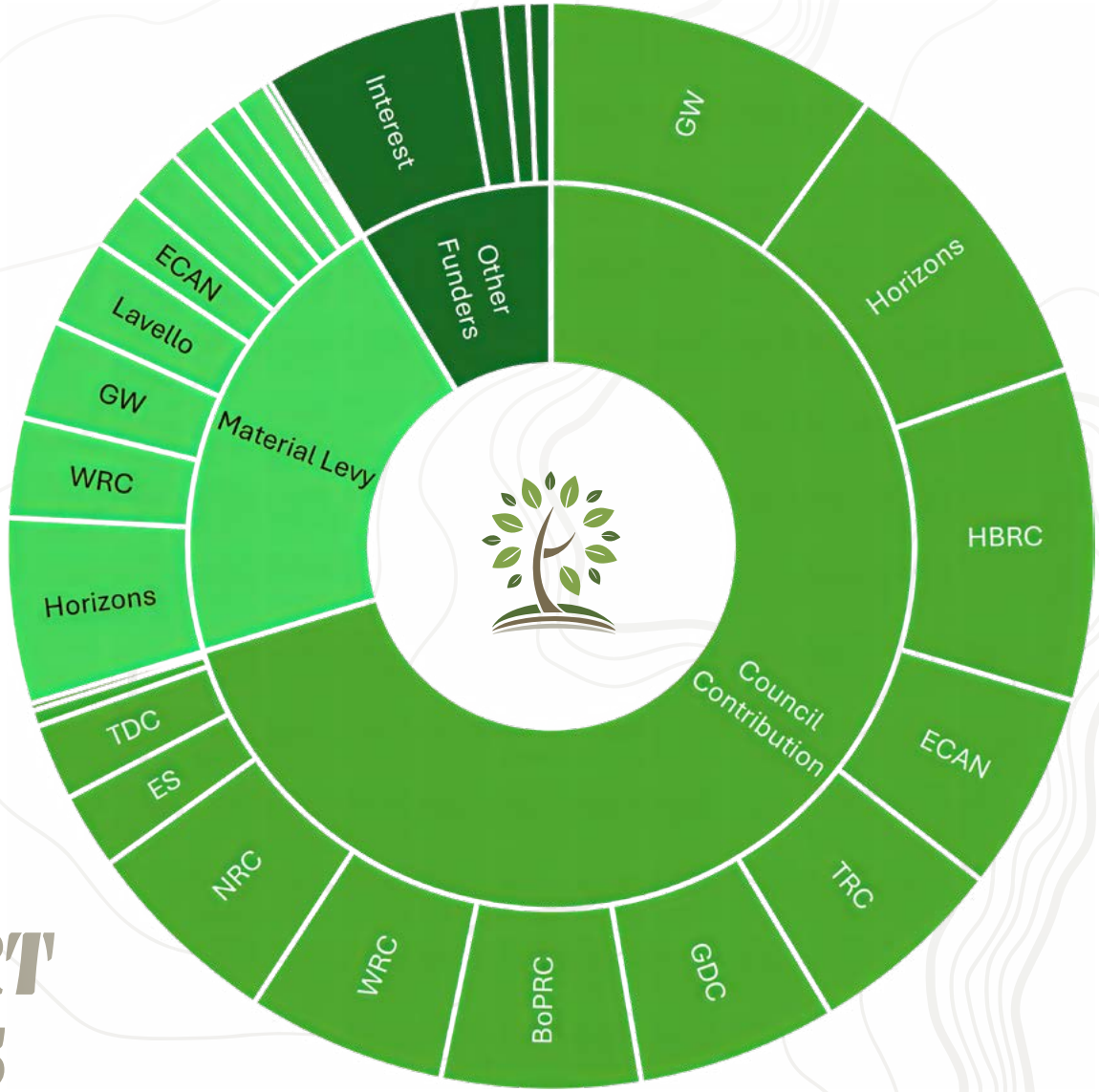
In November, TAG held its face-to-face meeting in Wairarapa. This involved a workshop session, followed by the AGM and a field trip. Board members and TAG were able to look at river management and erosion control first hand, along with being able to visit one of our Ambassador's property – Guy Williams and look at a demonstration planting there.

This was a great opportunity for the two groups to connect and share thoughts and ideas. Having the AGM with attendees both in person and on-line makes the work of the Trust more visible to our supporters. The last day, the Trust held a board meeting. More can be read in our December 2025 newsletter.

How our work is funded

Our programme is funded primarily by Regional Councils and Unitary Authorities. Other support has come from Te Uru Rakāu and NZARM enabling us to deliver workshops. Councils benefit from this funding through:

- Independent coordination and long-term continuity
- National consistency in plant material and advice
- Reduced duplication of research effort.



Revenue for NZPWRT 2024–2025

Northland Regional Council
Te Kaunihera ā rohe o Te Taitokerau

Auckland Council
Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau

Waikato Regional Council
Te Kaunihera ā Rohe o Waikato

Bay of Plenty Regional Council
Toi Moana

Hawke's Bay Regional Council
Te Kaunihera ā-Rohe o Te Matau-a-Māui

Te Kaunihera o Te Tairāwhiti
Gisborne District Council

Taranaki Regional Council

horizons Regional Council

Greater Wellington
Te Pane Matua Taiao

tasman district council
Te Kaunihera o te tai o Aorere

Environment Canterbury Regional Council
Kaunihera Taiao ki Waitaha

environment SOUTHLAND
Te Taiao Tonga

Looking ahead to 2026–27

Focus areas for 2026-27 include:

- Embedding the 10-year Strategy
- Develop a clear pathway for breeding to release
- Willow breeding
- Ensure our germplasm stocks are reviewed and protected
- Develop a research programme around bioeconomy
- Maintain and strengthen our influence and profile
- Continue the development of material and opportunities for extension
- Website development
- Supporting our our Ambassadors as representatives of NZPWRT

Summary

In 2025–26, NZPWRT continued to make a tangible difference across New Zealand's pastoral landscapes. Through strategic breeding, the provision of fit-for-purpose plant material, applied research, and knowledge sharing, the Trust has supported councils, land managers, and communities to protect vulnerable land, reduce erosion, and enhance farm resilience.

Over 91,000 3 metre poles were deployed, safeguarding an estimated 640 hectares of erosion-prone land, while workshops, guides, and digital communications strengthened skills and informed decision-making nationwide.

The Trust's coordinated approach, underpinned by strong partnerships with Regional Councils, Unitary Authorities, and industry groups, ensures poplars and willows remain a practical, science-backed solution for managing New Zealand's changing landscapes.

Building on this foundation, NZPWRT looks forward to continuing its work in 2026–27, delivering enduring environmental, social, and economic outcomes for the benefit of both current and future generations.

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Our Supporters

Northland Regional Council – Te Kaunihera ā rohe o Te Taitokerau
Auckland Council – Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau
Greater Wellington – Te Pane Matua Taiao
Bay of Plenty Regional Council Toi Moana
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Environment Canterbury Regional Council – Kaunihera Taiao ki Waitaha
tasman district council – Te Kaunihera o te tai o Aorere
Taranaki Regional Council
environment Southland – Te Taiao Tonga

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Full information is available on our website
www.poplarandwillow.org.nz

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