



WAIRARAPA REGION FIRE SEASON UPDATE

BY Colin Bradley

The 2018/20 fire season got off to a slow start, with 289 mm of rain recorded at Masterton Airport in November/December 2018, compared to the historical average of 112 for the same months. This resulted in a large build-up of grass and other fine fuels, before a very dry January with only 13 mm of rain recorded. Towards the end of January, the Wairarapa was hit by a heat wave the average daily temperature was 5 degrees C above the average for a 5 day plus period. February continued to be very dry, with the fire danger indices steadily increasing to very extreme by the 15th of February, forcing work restrictions to be placed on harvesting crews working in the Wairarapa Region. This was during the time of the Nelson Fires, where a significant amount of the national fire fighting resource, including crews from the Wairarapa had been deployed.

Work restrictions included stopping felling, extraction and machinery working in the cutover by 12 pm, and processing and machinery working on bare sites by 1 pm unless 1000 litres of water and suitable pump were on site. Restrictions ended following a rain event on the 24th of February when 40 mm of rain fell reducing the fire danger level to low. Since then the shortening daylight hours and morning dew have kept the forest fire danger at low to moderate levels, despite any further significant rainfall events.

Prior to the next fire season, IFS Growth plans to install more water access point signage and upgrade access into in-forest dams as harvesting activities open them up. Further in-house training of harvest crews and participation on FENZ courses is planned for both IFS Growth staff and our key contractors to ensure a timely and efficient response to fires within IFS Growth managed forest and in the wider forestry industry and local communities.

