

4WD ban not a workable option

By **DAVID HILL** Local Democracy Reporter

A four-wheel-drive ban on the upper Ashley Rakahuri River would be difficult to enforce, councillors were told at a council meeting on Tuesday, October 1.

The Waimakariri District Council instructed staff to engage with Environment Canterbury, the Department of Conservation (DOC) and community groups to come up with a plan to protect native birds during nesting season, after receiving advice from staff about the mechanics of a ban.

The decision followed a deputation from DOC staff at last month's council meeting calling on the council to consider closing the upper Ashley Rakahuri River to vehicles while birds are nesting between October 31 and January 31.

Utilities and roading manager Gerard Cleary said it would be difficult to block all 4WD vehicles from accessing the river.

“Even blocking all of the access points, people would still find other ways to access the river.

The lower Ashley River from the confluence of the Okuku River to the mouth, which is managed by Environment Canterbury, already has a vehicle ban during nesting season.

DOC manages the upper section of the river, from the Okuku confluence to the Ashley Gorge.

Mr Cleary said there were things the council could do, such as managing signage over the summer period and in the lead up to Crate Day.

Mayor Dan Gordon said he had meet with DOC, the Ashley Rakahuri Rivercare Group and police, who were supportive of the council's proposed direction.

“We will stand side-byside and there will be a joint statement.

“Some behaviours on the riverbed are not desirable, but banning 4WDs isn't really the answer at the moment and there seems to be a willingness of the 4WD clubs to work with the council to come up with a solution.

“I will convene a meeting with the various parties soon to consider the options.”

But Mr Gordon said the council may need to consider “more punitive action” if this approach did not work.

The river is home to several braided river species with many of them endangered, including wrybills, black-bill gulls, banded dotterels, blackfronted terns and pied oystercatchers.

The Ashley Rakahuri Rivercare Group has previously expressed concerns about 4WDs on the riverbed, as the birds are adapted to the braided river environment, with eggs and nesting sites well camouflaged and hard to spot. Volunteers were out in force during Crate Day last November, to protect the birds from revellers out in their four-wheel-drives.

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