

Action steps up on pest

A PEST plant branded the 'new gorse' is becoming a growing problem in the North King Country.

Tutsan (*Hypericum androsaemum*) has already taken hold in neighbouring districts Taumarunui and Ruapehu and action is being taken to stop it spreading north.

Members of the Taumarunui-based Tutsan Action Group (TAG) will speak in Piopio on July 18, to interested people about the plant and how to prevent its invasion.

Believed to have been spread mostly by roadside mowing in recent years, Tutsan is difficult to control once established as many herbicides are not effective.

It does significant damage to pasture areas affecting productivity and land value, is unpalatable to livestock and can cause photosensitisation and dermatitis in sheep and cattle.

Meeting organiser and Piopio farmer Mark Verry has noticed an increase of Tutsan along the roadside near his 700ha sheep and beef property on Haku Rd.

And, he's determined to uproot the pest before it infests the district.

"The Taumarunui Tutsan Action Group is coming here to explain to farmers what Tutsan is, what it looks like, what its history is and the potential damage it can do," says Mark.

"Most of the people here have never heard of it and the first step to preventing its spread is education.

"It seems to be on the march into our area now so my goal is to help people identify what it is and nip it in the bud before it becomes a major problem."

INVASIVE

Tutsan is a semi-evergreen shrub with yellow flowers over summer, followed by round red berries.

The berries later ripen to black and the plant has fragrant green leaves which turn red in autumn.

The plant invades riparian areas, roadsides, banks, farmed land and forest margins.

It can be spread by birds and possums as well as soil and water movements and long-term control on extensive infestations is considered uneconomic and unsustainable.

TO P3



STOP THE SPREAD: Members of the Taumarunui Tutsan Action Group will be speaking at a meeting in Piopio on July 18 to educate local residents about the pest plant Tutsan (pictured) and how to prevent its invasion. This photograph was taken by Department of Conservation staff near the Kakaho Stream, Pureora Forest Park. PHOTO DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION



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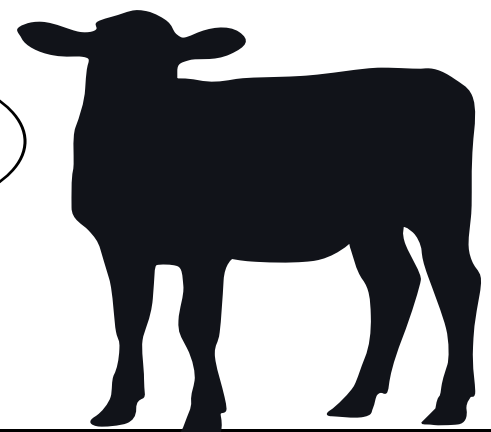
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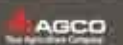
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FROM P2

Seeing firsthand how quickly Tutsan can spread, Mark is urging everyone to attend next week's meeting.

"Just recently I found 300-400 plants alongside a 2km stretch near my home where there were only three or four plants two years ago," says Mark, who has farmed the property for 40 years.

"I've also found the odd plant along banks on Manguotaki Rd, Waitanguru Rd and Mairoa Rd which is clear evidence of a growing infestation in Piopio.

"It seems roadside mowing is doing a good job of spreading the plant which is why local residents including myself need to become aware of Tutsan and educate themselves on how to stop it before it's too late."

The meeting at the Piopio Senior Citizens Hall on Ruru St begins at 7.30pm.

For more information on Tutsan visit - biosecurity.org.nz

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