Controlling weeds in drains

University of Canterbury biologist Professor Jon Harding discusses water health in the Hinds drains at a CAREX experimental site.

Riparian and weed management was on the agenda at a meeting in the Lowcliffe Coldstream Hall yesterday.

Members of the Canterbury Waterway Rehabilitation Experiment (CAREX) from Canterbury University were in the Hinds Drains district to discuss progress with community members, including members of the Hinds Drains Working Party (HDWP).

CAREX is a collaboration between landowners, industry, government agencies and the community. The aim is to find ways to address aquatic weed management, sediment and nutrient management issues in lowland Canterbury to improve agricultural waterway health.

University of Canterbury researchers have set up two demonstration sites on manmade drains in the district and for the second time invited community members to join their presentation to the HDWP.

Professor Jon Harding discussed problems caused by excessive weed growth, high nutrient levels and bank erosion in the drains, and the experiments under way to combat these.

Since the project kicked off in 2014 more than 17,000 locally-sourced native plants have been planted along agricultural waterways as part of the CAREX experiment.

PhD student Katie Collins has been measuring the results of experimental weed control stations set up at different sites on the drains.

Professor Harding discussed the effectiveness of weed mat, shading and hand weeding to reduce sediment and to keep the stream flowing.

He said the nitrogen uptake of plants growing in the streambed was negligible. However, wetland plants such as rushes and raupo had "done a fantastic job" of removing nitrates in other areas, the downside being these plants tended to block the stream.

There are already positive signs of native fish and invertebrates returning to the waterways.