

NZ Farm Forestry Association Middle Districts Storm Survey

In a postal survey conducted by Middle Districts Farm Forestry Association amongst its own members there were 85 replies. These covered an area ranging from Raetihi in the north to Waikanae in the south and from Brunswick, west of Wanganui, to Hopelands, east of Woodville. The area in trees indicated by most respondents totalled 9238+ ha.

To the first question on the questionnaire (pictured) 46 considered they had suffered “significant” tree damage during the week of February 16 to 22. Omitting one reply from a company responsible for 4300 ha of forest in the affected area and another that was purely descriptive of a number of sites and therefore not able to be summarised statistically, there were 44 “small” (up to 1600 ha) growers significantly affected, totalling 3998+, say 4000, hectares.

Twenty-six of these small growers recorded an area of 197+ (say 200) ha of plantations destroyed, rather than simply damaged. Taking the average cost per hectare supplied by those prepared to put a dollar value on the damage, this amounted to a loss of approximately \$2.9 million. The average loss was just under 5% and two-thirds of them had losses of 10% or less.

The area damaged was estimated by the 44 smaller growers to total at least 301 ha. These included people with damaged shelterbelts, so that this was estimated to amount to 7.5% of the total area. This is remarkably close to an area damaged of 7.3% recorded by a second company in its own survey of its forest area of 1348 ha. Two-thirds of small growers suffering ‘significant’ damage had between 2.5% and 34% affected.

Both companies’ forests were on hill country rather than sand country. The company that responded to our survey suffered 140+ ha damaged or 3.3% of that forest. Of interest in the second company’s survey of trees ranging from ages 10 to 17 years was the high damage in two compartments of trees aged 16 and one compartment aged 10. A common observation by small growers was that damage was greater with young pines or pines that had been recently pruned or thinned. By contrast it was usually ‘old man’ macrocarpas that were toppled.

This sort of observation was probably in the minds of those who designed the questionnaire when they asked the third question: What species were most seriously affected? The answer was overwhelmingly radiata pine because this is what most people were growing. Many noted under ‘Any other comments’ losses of willows along stream banks and large top-heavy poplars on hillsides. There were a few losses of *Acacia melanoxylon* and eucalypts but very few young cypresses were damaged or lost.

The problem with surveys looking for yes/no answers is that many respondents want to say ‘some’ or ‘it depends’. This is what happened with Questions 5 and 6. For the record, 17 clearly considered their damaged woodlots to be salvageable and 15 clearly considered them non-salvageable. The rest supplied answers of ‘yes & no’ (depending on the situation) or ‘not applicable’ (NA). Fourteen considered access a ‘significant’ problem whilst 25 considered it not so in their situations and there were several NAs. The farm forester with the largest area of trees, of which 60 ha were destroyed,

understandably had some salvageable and some not, and which were which depended on access. I suspect this was also the case for some of the others.

Twelve had examples where they felt trees had stabilised slopes and reduced erosion. Another six felt the same but also had situations where trees had failed to stabilise slopes. Most often (15) the answer was 'no' to both questions; sometimes this was because the site was not subject to water erosion, being flat or subject only to wind erosion. In such a situation perhaps NA would have been a more appropriate response. Otherwise it is difficult to see how on the one hand surrounding unforested slopes were no more eroded than the forested ones and yet on the other hand, trees have **not** failed to stabilise slopes. Perhaps the negative connotation of the word 'failed' misled some respondents to reply in the negative, as so often happens when double negatives are used in speech and are understood to be negative rather than positive. In only one reply were trees felt to have not reduced erosion any more than surrounding pasture and **had** failed to stabilise slopes.

Twenty-one of the 44 had observed significant tree damage on neighbouring properties, 11 had not, there were a few for whom the question was not applicable (no trees in most cases) and one was unknown. This was the main question answered also by respondents who did not have significant damage of their own. Six of these said yes and 20 said no, indicating for the most part that the rainfall and/or wind was not as damaging in their areas.

Many people took the opportunity to make other helpful comments but they are too diverse to summarise here. Perhaps one of these would be appropriate to end with: "oops—5 minutes are up"!