



UPDATE



May 2005

Plans for park and educational area at former opencast mine



Otago University students studying geology at Wangaloa

Public meeting to discuss plans

Anyone interested in becoming involved in developing the plans to create a public recreational and educational resource at the former Wangaloa Opencast Mine is invited to a meeting at 7:30pm on Tuesday, 7 June 2005 at the Kaitangata Presbyterian Church Hall.

Solid Energy wants to meet with the community to discuss options for the development of the site for the benefit of the local area and to form a community-based working group to assist in the planning process.

If you would like to become involved, but cannot attend the meeting, contact Tim Preston, Environmental Programme Manager, Solid Energy New Zealand Ltd, P.O. Box 1303, Christchurch, Tel: 03 345 6000/6087 or email: tim.preston@solidenergy.co.nz.

The former Wangaloa Opencast Mine near Kaitangata, Balclutha was mined between 1945 and 1989, producing some 750,000 tonnes of coal.

At the end of mining a large pit was left, with steep sides (highwalls) to the north and south-east (up to 40 m high), and a small hill of waste rock (overburden) dumped in the centre and to the south-west of the pit. A small lake had been created in the pit next to the overburden dump, which drains through a natural wetland area to the east and south. Immediately around the pit, there were small areas of established native bush



Waste rock hill after grass established (December 2003)

(with significant native bird populations) and some unused farmland which had reverted largely into gorse.

When coal producer, Solid Energy New Zealand Ltd, was set up as a State Owned Enterprise in 1987, along with the transfer of the assets of its predecessor, State Coal Mines, the Crown also transferred the historical environmental liabilities associated with these assets. The financial impact of the environmental liabilities were assessed at the time and are regularly reviewed with the Ministry of Economic Development (MED) with funding for an agreed level of site rehabilitation.

Over the last decade rehabilitation of the 53 hectare site at Wangaloa has been carried out by Solid Energy, with funding provided through MED.

Solid Energy is keen to enhance the rehabilitation plans for Wangaloa and to fund the creation of an ongoing public resource for the local community. We have already successfully carried out a similar project near Huntly in the Waikato where the former Weaver's Opencast Mine opened to the public as Weaver's Park earlier this year, after a 20-year rehabilitation project.



Aerial view – 2005



View from top of highwall over lake, waste rock hill and hillside behind (May 2005)

Work to date

Since 2002 around \$1.2 million has been spent restoring and revegetating the former Wangaloa Opencast Mine, with the aim of creating a biologically diverse area which will become self-sustaining. As part of the physical rehabilitation of the area, the highwalls, some open areas of the overburden and historic mining equipment have been retained.

To date the overburden area has been smoothed over, benches cut for drainage control and 'rip-rap' drains constructed from the benches to the lake. We have established grass on topsoil spread over 11 hectares (about half) of the overburden area and planted 30,000 native seedlings

which has successfully stabilised the overburden area.

The gorse from the 33 hectares of unused farmland has been mulched, and 40,000 native seedlings planted between the windrows of gorse mulch. Weed and pest control (rabbits and possums) has been carried out to protect seedlings over the crucial first few years.

We anticipate that several more years of weed and pest control will be necessary before the site can be left as a self-sustaining natural area. There are a significant number of native birds in the area which will particularly benefit from the expanded habitat range.



Key: Existing and possible features

1. Hoppers, feeders
2. Rock wall
3. Quartz overburden
4. Concrete bins and digger
5. Possible future related excavation
6. Claw marks in quartz
7. Lakeshore
8. Broadleaf forest
9. Lookout point
10. Lake
11. Coal stockpile
12. Stream
13. Lookout point
14. Revegetation project
15. Machinery shed
16. Possible future carpark
17. Possible future interpretation centre

Wangaloa mine site



Aerial photo taken January 2004



Mining highwall plunges into the lake (mid 2004)



Waste rock hill after grass established (April 2004)

Opportunities

There is now an opportunity for the local community to work with Solid Energy and the district council to create a publicly accessible recreational and educational resource for the area.

We will need to reach agreement with the district council and others on future ownership and the ongoing maintenance of the area.

If the community does not support the idea of a public 'park', Solid Energy will leave the area rehabilitated to a self-sustaining native bush cover reserve.

Options for future use of the area include:

- Recreational activities – tracks for walking, mountain biking and horse riding, (3 to 4 km of loop tracks could be provided within the site), picnic area(s).
- Educational opportunities – areas for students (primary to tertiary) to study ecology and geology.
- Historical sites – the retention of old mining equipment and provision of interpretation panels describing the history of the site.
- An interpretation centre – with viewpoints, learning stations and sculptural elements throughout the area.

Solid Energy wants to work with a group of community representatives and the district council to determine what type of resource should be created, and to develop a realistic and achievable concept plan with demonstrable local support. Our target is to produce the plan, together with a construction/annual maintenance budget, for approval within Solid Energy by the end of 2005. To achieve this Solid Energy will provide the financial, logistical and professional expertise. The details of a meeting to carry forward these plans are found on the front of this newsletter.



Hebe seedling (mid 2004)



Old digger on site



Liz Darke monitoring plants using GPS

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