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P11

## STRAIGHTENING THE STREAMS

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P16-17

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## Poachers fire on forestry workers

By SONITA CHANDAR

FORESTRY workers are dodging bullets from poachers, says a forest manager.

They are being fired at by people hunting wild pigs illegally released in the private forests.

“Our staff shouldn’t have to worry about going to work and being shot, but this is the reality,” Ernslaw One Otago regional manager Phil De La Mare said.

“These unpermitted hunters forget it is a workplace and go shooting any time, even when there are people out working.

“Their actions are putting our staff and contractors in a risky situation and for us.

“Providing a safe workplace environment has become a challenge.”

On several occasions, staff have come face-to-face with poachers but have been instructed not to confront or engage with them.

“We have advised our staff to take down details of vehicles and descriptions of the people which we then report to police, because it is a legal matter.”

Security cameras had provided good images of poachers, resulting in arrests, he said.

“One man was arrested only two months ago after being caught on camera hunting in broad daylight. His vehicle was confiscated and he has been convicted and is

awaiting sentencing.”

His two female companions have been convicted and sentenced to community service.

De La Mare said hunters releasing wild pigs were also undermining work to eradicate TB.

“Ten years ago, Otago was a bit of a hotspot for TB, but there has been a huge effort and thousands spent on eliminating it. We don’t know where these pigs are being brought in from but if they are TB carriers, these hunters are re-introducing it back into an area which could have major consequences for farmers.”

Ernslaw One had a dozen hunting blocks in Otago allocated for weekend hunting, he said, but demand outstripped supply.

“We have blocks where permitted hunters can go for a weekend shoot. Blocks are balloted and every weekend we are over-subscribed. We used to get six applications and now we are getting more than 30.

De La Mare said people might think poaching was a minor offence but it was often linked to other criminal activity.

“We have established a good working relationship with police who have told us there is often a correlation between poaching and other crimes. Reporting poaching incidents has helped them with other investigations.”



### It’s good to snow ewe

A skier rescues a snowballing sheep. Only in New Zealand. P4

Photo: Dan Power

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