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SAND DUNES: Vicki Jones at the Oaonui sand dunes, which are making a comeback.

Barriers help sand dunes recover

By NIKKI NEWLAND

MEASURES to stop motorbikes and off-road vehicles from using the Oaonui sand dunes have been successful.

A joint venture between the South Taranaki District Council, local farmers, Department of Conservation and Shell Todd Oil Services saw a number of barriers and trenches built at the sand dunes to block vehicle access, last November.

STDC policy planner Vicki Jones said people using the area had recently begun to notice increase plant growth and reduced erosion.

"There was clear evidence that the vehicles were damaging the ecosystem," Miss Jones said.

"This meant that the sand dunes were eroding and encroaching on to productive farmland. In addition, the natural population of black backed gulls were rapidly diminishing."

However, locals had recently commented on

the growth of new grasses, Miss Jones said.

"We are delighted with the extent of the regeneration so far. In the relatively short time that the dunes have had to recover, there is every indication that the dunes will stabilise and that the natural ecosystem will recover substantially.

"Large areas that were barren are now looking green and responding to the lack of disturbance by ATVs and motorbikes."

STDC parks and recreation manager John Sargeant was also pleased with the results of the work.

"This is a very positive result that could only have happened by all parties talking and doing their share in a team effort. The next test will be to see whether the bird life returns to the area over the next couple of nesting seasons," Mr Sargeant said.

The council would continue to monitor the sand dunes.