

Rope installed for fish to 'climb'

By NICHOLAS BOYACK

It's hard to believe, but some of our native fish are great climbers.

In fact they can easily climb a rope.

Forest and Bird, the Korokoro Environmental Group and the Greater Wellington Regional Council recently combined to install a fish climbing rope in the Korokoro Stream.

The rope should enable native fish to climb over the first dam in the stream and reach a more favourable habitat.

New Zealand has 35 species of native freshwater fish.

But most are endangered because of a loss of habitat, pollution and the impact of introduced species.

Many native fish are diadromous – they live the first part of their life cycle in the sea and then return to the rivers and streams where they live the majority of their lives.

The Korokoro Stream is perfect for native fish as it is relatively unpolluted and overhanging veg-

etation keeps the stream at a temperature fish like. The big problem is that the stream is dammed and there does not appear to be an adult population of native fish above the dams.

It may sound like an insurmountable problem, but Lower Hutt Forest and Bird chairman Russell Bell believes there's an answer.

Experiments involving putting a rope between two tanks have shown native fish can climb a vertical metre with little trouble.

In the wild, fish will slither over rocks and obstructions to head up stream.

Mr Bell says ropes are a cheap and obvious solution.

The ropes that have been installed are a trial and he says if, as expected, they prove successful, then there are many other waterways in the region where they can be installed.

"In three months' time we will know if this is a bomb-out or a ray of success."

Demolition of the historic dams is not realistic, he says.



Fish ladder: Department of Conservation workers sink a stake in the Korokoro Stream bed for a rope (inset) that will help native fish 'climb' past dams and weirs.