

Owhakatoro fire deliberately lit

A FIRE at Owhakatoro, west of Ruatoki, last week is believed to have been deliberately lit.

Pumicelands Rural Fire Authority zone manager Tony Gillard said the fire started at 7.30pm on Friday, November 6, and fire fighters witnessed two young people taking off from the area on a motorbike.

The same motorbike was seen in the area earlier in the day.

Mr Gillard said the crew fought the fire, 50 metres away from a pine plantation, until 11pm.

They did what they could and returned the next day to deal with hot spots.

Altogether, 1.2 hectares of scrub was

burnt and ruined. A hazard the crew faced fighting the fire was an underground gas pipe running through the middle of it.

Mr Gillard said the rural fire crew had been busy recently and expected to become even busier in coming weeks.

"The El Nino weather pattern is coming our way and the forecasters are predicting

it will be the third or fourth driest season on record."

Mr Gillard said many rural fires were avoidable and he urged people to burn now rather than later.

"Simply, because if we do get this pattern we could be in a total fire ban earlier than previous seasons."