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Report to the Landcare Committee
from Ross Jackson, Landcare Planner - Volunteers Co-ordinator

Friends of Belmont Regional Park

1. Purpose

To seek Landcare Committee approval to the concept of establishing the “Friends of Belmont Regional Park” and to outline a proposal for Parks and Forests officers to work with community representatives towards establishing Terms of Reference for the “Friends”.

2. Why Form a “Friends”?

A group of Hutt Valley residents, mainly from the Western Hills, wish to form a Friends of Belmont Regional Park. They have been meeting regularly over the past few months and have contacted a wide range of groups (including Maara Roa) and organisations who use the Park. At this stage, they are still in the formative stage and Council officers are working through details of what role the group might take, its relationship with the Council, membership, etc, with them.

To promote their proposal, the group worked with Council officers to open a newly formed walking and mountain biking track on the Kilmister Block, 10 December 2000. Several Regional and Hutt City Councillors attended the track opening.

The newsletter produced for the open day, (**Attachment 1**), outlines the Group’s preliminary thoughts on how the Friends may operate. Belmont resident Valerie Smith will give a short address at the meeting during public participation.

3. Policy Backing

The Belmont Regional Park Management Plan (September 1996) establishes the aims, objectives and policies for the Park. It states that the Regional Council will consult with special interest groups (and others) to promote the co-ordinated planning and management of the Park (Policy 1.7) and that voluntary assistance for developing and maintaining the Park will be encouraged (Policy 1.13).

Similar “Friends” groups have been formed in the Landcare Division on the Waikanae and Otaki Rivers. These groups provide community input to implementing and achieving the broader goals of the Floodplain Management Plan.

4. The Friends Group

The Friends are envisaged as an “umbrella” group to help co-ordinate, but not duplicate, other individual groups or organisations already involved in Park activities. The Friends is an inclusive group with strong links to the community. They are anxious to ensure they are well supported on the Porirua as well as the Hutt Valley side of the Park. It is their intention to hold public meetings in both cities and they will actively encourage interested persons to attend.

It is helpful for the Regional Council, as asset manager, to deal with one group which has a public identity and profile. They could act as a communication channel between the community and the Council.

The Friends may also promote, seek funding, and carry out projects with Council approval.

While the group is independent and made up from Community representatives, it is appropriate for Council officers and iwi to work with them to ensure wider input into their work, and that they receive appropriate support. However, there may be instances where the Friends position on issues may vary from the Council’s and they may even advocate against Council policy.

Therefore, it is important that they remain independent. Council officers and the group also need to clearly define their role and the Council’s role, and the parameters for maintaining a good working relationship. A further issue to consider, is that groups like this can be resource hungry, taking up large amounts of staff time. However, overall, officers feel the benefits of the project outweigh the difficulties and support the concept of forming the Friends.

5. Proposal

The Friends representatives are seeking Council approval to the concept of formalising a Friends of Belmont Regional Park. If this approval is granted, Council staff would work with interested community representatives and other Park landowners to scope the Friends role and working relationship with the Council, and develop Terms of Reference for the Group; to be brought back to the Committee for endorsement.

6. **Communication**

If the Committee approves the proposal, officers will work with Friends' representatives to issue a press release on the matter.

7. **Recommendations**

That the Committee:

- (1) Receive the report and note the contents.*
- (2) Endorse the concept of establishing the "Friends of Belmont Regional Park".*
- (3) Agree that officers work with community representatives and other Park landowners to develop a Terms of Reference for the Friends and to report it back to the Committee for endorsement.*

Report prepared by:

Approved for submission:

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Attachment 1 : Friends of Belmont Regional Park