

Parks and Forests Manager's report for period ending Friday 28 April 2006

1. Manager's comments (Murray Waititi)

The Regional Outdoor Programme is a big part of Parks and Forest's contribution to the health and wellbeing of our regional community. While we reflect on how successful the programme was, it is also timely to highlight other regional initiatives that we are involved in that are also contributing to the same end.

1.1 Regional Physical Activity Strategy

Comprising representatives of the region's city councils, Sport Wellington Region (SWR) and GWRC, the Wellington Region Recreation Initiatives Group has been meeting every three months to finalise key projects. The group recently finalised and put out for tender a request for proposals to develop a regional Physical Activity Strategy and Implementation Plan. To be funded mainly by Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC – who will provide \$50,000) and sit alongside the Wellington Regional Strategy, this plan will focus on the future physical activity needs of the communities of the Wellington urban region. Its vision is to create a regional delivery system for sharing resources, expertise and practice in order to sustain and improve levels of physical activity for those living in the Wellington Region.

1.1.1 Active communities

Discussions and relationships established through this group also prompted a significant upgrade for Sport Wellington's website so that it provides a "portal" to various opportunities to get involved in both formal and unstructured physical activity around the region. This includes links to selected pages on the Greater Wellington website e.g. walks in the regional parks, events calendar.

We were pleased to have very positive feedback from Upper Hutt City Council and Hutt City Council about the *Keve the Wandering Kiwi* guided walks in the regional parks over the summer. *Active Communities* funding (from SPARC) provided supporting promotion for this series of four walks and paid for the prizes. With our combined resources we attracted 25 – 50 people on each walk (with the low figure resulting only from bad weather).

1.1.2 Energizing Young Women

This is a new campaign being developed by SWR's youth advisor to address the fall-off in physical activity evident amongst adolescent girls. This is a concern to SPARC as they look to overcome the barriers to such activity in two target groups "support seekers" and "others oriented" identified in their Obstacles to Action study. The issue for them is that if there is no strong lifestyle habit established during school years, the natural decline in physical activity that occurs around child-bearing will not be reversed as more time becomes available to do so.

Amanda Cox was recently invited to a reference group meeting to consider how this project could develop in a sustainable manner. The strategy is to adopt a "youth to youth" approach whereby

student leaders would initiate a programme within a school to promote and provide physical activity opportunities. A web-based network would be established with the youth advisor providing ongoing support for often very busy students and sports coordinators. An issue to consider is how to transfer leadership of such initiatives from year to year as students move into and out of the school leadership positions.

The campaign will be launched with a breakfast at Parliament in June, to which the student leaders will be invited along with school sports coordinators. Irene van Dyk has been invited to speak and is interested in being an ambassador for the campaign on an ongoing basis.

Aside from the wider issues we see this as an excellent opportunity to promote the regional parks to schools as a facility for many types of physical activity. With rangers on site, their proximity to urban areas, ready access via public transport and network of tracks, we believe there is plenty of scope for increased levels of use amongst young people.

2. Planning and policy (Dr Philippa Crisp)

2.1 Management planning

Good progress has been made on the management plans for Battle Hill Farm Forest Park and East Harbour Regional Park. The initial consultation phase for the Battle Hill Farm Forest Park management plan is nearing completion, as submissions closed on 28th April. A public meeting was held on 4 April at Pauatahanui with twelve people attending and providing feedback about their ideas for the park. The impacts of Transmission Gully and the management of logging of forests in the park were two key issues raised. Fiona Shaw is currently arranging a Councillor workshop to obtain feedback from Councillors about the plan.

A recent Councillor workshop (7 April) on the East Harbour Regional Park management plan provided excellent direction for Hilary Aikman to draft the new plan. It is anticipated that this draft will be considered at the Landcare Committee in June.

2.2 Hunting Brochures

Officers have completed a set of new hunting brochures for the parks and forests. There are four brochures; one each for Akatarawa Forest, Pakuratahi Forest, Kaitoke Regional Park and the Hutt Water Collection Area. They feature a topographical map in the centre of the brochure. Relevant information such as parking areas, no hunting zones and details of how to obtain permits is also included. We have six-monthly permits for all hunting areas, which can be obtained free of charge from the Upper Hutt Depot. One permit covers Akatarawa Forest, Pakuratahi Forest and Kaitoke Regional Park. There is a separate permit for the Hutt Water Collection Area, because there are special conditions associated with entering a water collection area.

2.3 Pest control operations

2.3.1 Pest Animal Control

In East Harbour Regional Park, the 300ha mainland island operation is underway. The bait that has been recently placed in the bait station grid is a new non-toxic bait being trialled by this Council's Biosecurity Department. It is a natural cereal pellet that contains a unique type of cellulose that cannot be digested by rodents. It reputedly does not affect any other animals. The manufacturer of the bait and the Department of Conservation are taking an interest in the outcome of this trial. Staff and Mainland Island Restoration Organisation volunteers are undertaking extra rodent monitoring work to assist in determining the effectiveness of this bait.

All 1080 poison warning signs associated with the operations in Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water collection area, Kaitoke Regional Park and the Akatarawa Saddle have now been removed. These operations were completed in spring of 2005. In Korokoro Valley, bait has been replenished in the bait stations, as part of the ongoing possum control operations in Belmont Regional Park.

2.3.2 Pest Plant Control

Wet weather has limited spray work in the past month. The following pest plant infestations have been targeted over the past month however:

- Japanese honeysuckle, old man's beard and wilding pines in East Harbour Regional Park
- Tradescantia in the Wainuiomata Recreation Area
- Alder, old man's beard and Japanese honeysuckle in Akatarawa Forest
- Holly in Battle Hill Farm Forest Park
- Climbing asparagus in Speedy's Reserve, Belmont Regional Park.

In the Wainuiomata catchment, buddleia has been controlled over the past three years as part of the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Pest Plant Control Plan. We are now reaching the final stages of clearing this pest plant completely from both within the water collection area and downstream in the Wainuiomata Recreation Area. This has been a great effort and it is rewarding to see this effective outcome.

2.4 Monitoring

The tawa fruit-fall plots in Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water collection area have been re-measured. It has been a major fruiting year, with up to 750 fruit per plot (and there are a number of plots per tree). There are usually only 1-200 fruit per tree. Very low predation of the fruit was recorded – none attributable to possums and only 5 rodent-damaged. This is again a consequence of the successful 1080 operation.

3. Marketing and design (Amanda Cox)

3.1 Market research

We have completed the first steps of the Visitor Monitoring recalibration exercises at Belmont Regional Park. Report 06.130 details the results of the survey work completed.

Once again we have worked with another council department on a joint phone survey to be conducted in May across the region. This will assess awareness and usage across the regional parks. Last year awareness of one or more parks amongst regional residents was 77%, with 51% having visited at least one park in the previous 12 months. It will be interesting to see if there are any changes over the intervening twelve months.

3.2 Communications

Over the next few months we will see the demolition of two old toilet blocks and construction of new toilets and shelters at Queen Elizabeth Park's Paekakariki entrance. This has presented us with a good opportunity to communicate and consult with park users, local residents and stakeholders over an area that is of great interest to many people. We have written to Kapiti Coast District Council, the Paekakariki Community Board and Friends of the Park, put up signs and posters on site, issued a press release, made the sketch and map available on our website and via our staff noticeboard. People have been invited to contribute their ideas on the new shelters by the end of June so that we can consider their ideas in our plans for the area.

Also of interest to many will be the new flush toilets at Summit on the Rimutaka Rail Trail. A press release will help promote the "long drop no longer" to the thousands of people who visit the area annually.

3.3 Signs

Old photo boards in the two kiosks along the Rail Trail, and the plant identification signs on Kaitoke Regional Park's Loop Track are to be upgraded. Both of these areas experience very high use so this work will be much appreciated by visitors.

3.4 Events

We are currently planning for our two Arbor Day celebrations in June. This year the first will be held at Battle Hill Farm Forest Park's Swampy Gully on Wednesday 7 June. The second event will be at Queen Elizabeth Park's MacKays Crossing entrance on Friday 9 June. Once again we will be inviting local schools along to help with the planting and of course enjoy a sausage sizzle.

3.5 Community Liaison

Officers attended the regular monthly meetings of the Friends groups at Queen Elizabeth Park and Belmont Regional Park. The Friends of QE Park invited Community Constable John Stewart along to address the meeting and to discuss policing issues in the Park such as vehicle break-ins, motorbikes in the sand dunes, user behaviour etc. The Friends have been concerned about all the

publicity these antisocial activities receive in the press with very little written about the positive aspects. They also wanted to know what they can do as members of the community to assist the Ranger deal with these issues. Constable Stewart was able to offer a number of positive suggestions to the group.

At the Belmont meeting, which was held in the Stratton Street woolshed, Cr Sandra Greig attended along with Ross Jackson, Ranger Chris Wootton and Murray Waititi. There was a long discussion about the sale and lease agreement for Waitangirua Farm and Murray was able to provide a lot of answers to the Friends on the situation and GW's long term plans. These meetings certainly provide a very good forum to provide information to the community and help eliminate misinformation.

We worked with the ranger staff to host a group of about 25 people from Lucent Technologies for an afternoon planting at Queen Elizabeth Park on 28 April. The ranger was keen to put some emergent trees such as kahikatea in the "Marines" wetland near the MacKays Crossing entrance. The support from Lucent Technologies is appreciated.

3.6 Hutt River Trail Operations Meeting

These meetings chaired by Ross Jackson are held at Mabey Rd every three months and are attended by Parks and Flood Protection staff along with a representative from Rotary, Upper Hutt and Hutt City Councils. This provides a valuable liaison forum for the development and management of the Trail. The group recently produced an A4 Hutt River Trail Concept leaflet which outlines the purpose and the objectives of the Trail. An Operations Manual for the Trail goes into a lot of detail but this is a simplified version to ensure that new council staff, Rotarians, and various community groups understand what the purpose of the Trail actually is. (Copy attached)

3.7 MacKays Crossing development

The draft development plan has been completed showing the locations of existing buildings and options for the future of the area. Still to be determined are the priorities and funding for the various zones.

In the meantime staff are developing a detailed landscape plan for the area around the ranger's office including paving and planting. This will be implemented over the winter months using plants grown in the park nursery.

3.8 Parks Volunteering Network Australia Conference

Ross Jackson recently attended the PVNA biennial forum held in Sydney. The Forum was attended by 30 parks volunteers and volunteer coordinators from Australasia to exchange information and ideas, discuss issues and to benchmark volunteer and partnership activities. This group is aligned to Parks Forum which is a network of large Australasian Parks organisations with a focus on benchmarking and best practice. Auckland Regional Council, DOC and our own Parks and Forests department are all active members of the Forum.

Ross found the opportunity to “workshop” with the group on topics such as risk management, fundraising and philanthropy, benchmarking and best practice a very valuable experience and he was able to establish a range of contacts involved in similar work.

4. Western sector

4.1 Belmont Regional Park

Despite the end of daylight savings, visitors continue to patronise the park in good numbers. An article in the Dominion Post highlighting the Puke Ariki track may have contributed to the increase in use and interest in this walk.

It is good to have reports from local residents (confirmed by Ranger sightings) on the Western Hills and in Stratton Street of increasing numbers of the New Zealand Falcon. Nationwide these birds are fairly uncommon, due to depletion of their traditional bush habitat. People often get the New Zealand Falcon confused with the common Harrier Hawk. The New Zealand Falcon is an endemic raptor species and tends to prey on smaller birds, taken on the wing; its favoured habitat includes bush areas and margins of farmland. The New Zealand Falcon have been recorded sporadically in the Belmont Trig area and Korokoro Valley in the past, but appear to be increasing in number possibly in response to increased possum control work in the park. This in turn is increasing bird numbers, which falcon prey on.

4.1.1 Events Held

A number of successful events were held in the park over the period including the inaugural *Porirua Traverse* multisport race and the *Capital Coast Adventure*, a non-competitive motorcycle ride which utilised part of the park as part of a wider course run through the region.

We hosted many visits from schools taking part in the *Take Action* programme, with the Woolshed Education facility being pretty much fully booked this school term. As well as that, the facility has been used in the weekends and evenings for Friends of Belmont meetings and Search and Rescue First Aid courses.

4.2 Battle Hill Farm Forest Park

4.2.1 Maintenance

A lot of maintenance on the park has centred around preparation for the events held over the last month. Infrastructure such as power supply, water reticulation and sanitary facilities have all been given an overhaul to ensure they perform on the day. The park is looking good and has held up well under the pressure of large numbers of people concentrated into small areas.

The farm has been getting a bit of “TLC”. Fertiliser was spread on the flat areas of the farm out of a truck and was on the ground in time to add to the autumn flush. The flat areas are now receiving their fertiliser by truck to ensure that the fertiliser is kept out of the waterways during spreading.

4.2.2 Ranging and Events Held

As mentioned it has been a very busy time on the park with a number of big events being held in a relatively short space of time. First there was the *Pauatahanui Country Festival*, run by the Plimmerton Rotary Club. This was a well run event and the weather was kind. The people all enjoyed themselves and the entertainment highlight had to be several appearances during the day by the Topp Twins. There was something for everyone and the day had a real rural flavour to it.

The *Capital Coast Adventure* ride passed through Battle Hill on an all day ride. The race crossed through Battle Hill en route to Belmont Regional Park and covered much of the area within the Porirua City boundaries before finishing in the city centre. This was a great event and the sight of 300 mountain bikers heading four abreast up through the farm was a real highlight.

Two days later, Livestock films moved on to the park for three days non-stop filming for the film 'Black Sheep'. This involved landing a tiger moth on the airstrip and exploding a replica barn in Transmission Gully. Watch out for it!

On top of all that there have been several equestrian events and a medieval camp.

4.3 Queen Elizabeth Park

4.3.1 Maintenance

Maintenance this period has included a lot of plant releasing and preparation for the planting season. We have worked in the Remnant Bush, this year's Arbor Day site, Marine wetland, MacKay's wetland, Wainui Stream, Whareroa Stream, Northern wetland and also prepared a couple of sites on the foredunes for spinifex planting. We continued our work in the amenity areas, removing exotics and general cleanup of specimen trees. The coastal track has had a good deal of maintenance as well an upgrade near the Raumati Esplanade entrance. We have had a couple of corporate work days with Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) and Environmental Risk Management Authority (ERMA) which have been very helpful in preparing for the upcoming season.

The ranging staff have been busy tidying up from a busy summer. We have had a number of trespasses given due to inappropriate driving. We have also chased a few motor bikes and quads through the park. We've attended a number of meetings with various community interest groups.

4.3.2 Events Held

The regional outdoors programme was a big success. We had our last event with *Botany of the Dunes*, an incredibly popular programme. Two huge corporate picnics took place on the Paekakariki picnic grounds, the New Zealand Equestrian Federation has had a couple of events that have been well attended, and we hosted a popular orienteering event.

4.3.3 QEP Barn – progress

We are currently setting up meetings with Kapiti Coast District Council and the Historic Places Trust to discuss their possible contribution to the upgrade to the barn.

5. Eastern sector (Fraser Oliver)

5.1 Kaitoke Regional Park

5.1.1 Ranging

The Easter break has signalled the end of the camping season for 05/06. This year has seen an increase of usage to approximately 5,000 camper nights. Many families and community groups are regular visitors, reflecting how much they enjoy the park. The park infrastructure has coped with the extra people well however improvements will be made to the water supply in the coming months.

There were several tours given to school groups and to a choir from the Czech Republic who sang all the way around the swing bridge track! Two couples were also married in the park.

5.1.2 Maintenance

We have completed the annual road works programs that included widening the section through the beech trees on the gorge, repairing rock fall damaged sections on the weir access road and resealing two access ways and one car park. We have also upgraded the BBQ locks to prevent them being broken into, and flushed the bore that supplies water to the campground and ranger's office. Workgangs have been bark mulching and planting the Keith Spry lookout area as part of the State Highway II road realignment project.

5.1.3 Events Held

The *Water Walk*, including a trip to the weir, strainer house and Te Marua Treatment Plant, was held as part of the regional outdoors programme.

5.2 East Harbour Regional Park

We are now at a stage in the park management where we are making good headway in both recreational access and conservation of the natural resource. There is now a distinct improvement in tracks and structures throughout the park and this is being balanced by some good environmental achievements. Included in this is significant progress in the 'mainland island' project. This selected 'intensive rodent trapping area' is now up and running and is being backed up by a maze of park wide possum trap lines which are serviced by a host of volunteers. For the community conservation group MIRO, a key provider of volunteers, this has meant that a major goal has come to fruition.

5.2.1 Maintenance

The priority maintenance project for this period has been the upgrade of part of the Mackenzie track at the head of Butterfly Creek. This section between the ridge and the valley floor had progressively become eroded through a combination of high use and lack of previous maintenance. A small excavator, power barrows, tools and materials were flown into the site at the beginning of March and work continued throughout the month. The track has now been realigned so that steps were no longer required and a number of retaining walls have been installed allowing for better maintenance

access and stability. The surfaces have been shaped on the track corners and numerous timber run-offs have been installed allowing for adequate surface water run-off.

The project adds to previous work carried out further down the Butterfly Creek valley. Through this, the Mackenzie track is gradually meeting a standard that befits the surroundings and can cope with increasing visitor usage. As with any project of this type some soil and vegetation disturbance is unavoidable. However, recovery is relatively quick and in the long term an easily maintained, well constructed track has less impact on the surrounding environment. It also means that a wider range of people including families with younger children, the more elderly and those of limited fitness or confidence can also experience these special places.

5.2.2 Events Held

The last of the Summer Events at EHRP, *Lighthouse and Lakes*, wrapped up a very successful summer programme. This event, which was again booked out within a few weeks of the programme being published, consisted of a bus ride along the Pencarrow Road and then a guided walk through the heart of the Lakes Block. This year's event featured a new experience in that people could walk across the Kohangapiripiri wetland via the new boardwalk. Eastbourne resident and ecologist Dr George Gibbs provided some excellent interpretation along the way giving people further insight into this fascinating area.

5.3 Wainuiomata/ Orongorongo Catchments

Rangers have been busy guiding school groups and a Catchment tour in mid March. Three classes from Wainuiomata Intermediate have had visits to the Sledge track in the recreation area. The classes are split into two groups with the teacher taking one group to do water sampling in the river below the Morton dam, and the rangers guiding the other on a walk around the Sledge track loop and then back to the site office for lunch. This programme was repeated in the afternoon with the alternate group. The Catchment tour saw only eight walkers in the Wainuiomata and 10 walkers in the Orongorongo catchments. Although the weather forecast was not the best, the weather turned out to be reasonable with both walks being enjoyed by all the visitors and guides.

The public balloted hunt got under way on 25 March. Once again we had a good response from the public wanting to hunt in the Catchment. Unfortunately the weather in the first period of 5 days was not very favourable to the hunters due to the rain. Hunting was completed over the Easter period. We do not expect the hunters to shoot the average of 10 deer this year. With work carried out by contractors and the 1080 poison operation August 2005, numbers should be well down on previous years.

Several jobs have been completed in the recreation area over the month to tidy up the appearance of the area. Bark mulch has been spread over the roadside bank near the fluoride building. Top soil and grass seed have been placed on the area behind the fluoride building to enable better access for lawn mowers and weed control. Some areas of isolated gorse have been removed from the old house site recreation area and top soil added to the old access track to the Moores Valley gate that is now obsolete. The old access gate will be removed and rails installed. The iron rail fence also at the front entrance that is no longer required will be removed. Parks staff will be looking to arrange more

planting projects with local schools this year and hopefully plant some of the grass area near the front gate.

The Mainland Island rat bait stations and possum traps were once again serviced in March. The traps and bait stations located on the boundary fence and main access tracks (i.e. Skull Gully, Drummond Ridge, West Branch Wainui and Long Ridge) are being checked and re-baited monthly. Bi-monthly the trap and bait lines are also serviced. Mustelid trapping commenced in April. We are already noting an increase in bird numbers with a hunter commenting “the birds are so noisy it’s hard to hear the deer roaring”.

The last stage of the boundary fence is underway and will be completed by the end of June.

On 8th April wedding photos were taken on the swing bridge recreation area. As arranged a helicopter then picked up the wedding party and flew them to the Pencarrow Lodge. They had arranged access with the ranger prior to arriving on 8th April.

5.4 Akatarawa/ Pakuratahi Forests

5.4.1 Maintenance

The wind has caused several wind-thrown trees to fall across tracks in different parts of the forests but once again these have been fairly small scale and easily removed by hand.

A boundary fencing project with an adjoining owner in the Kaitoke basin has now been completed to the owner’s and our satisfaction.

During this period we have replaced the main logging access gate at Totara Park. As this gate is a very heavy security gate, the sheer weight of the gate meant the original post was unable to sustain it. We therefore needed to remove the old one and reinstall a new steel beam post set in concrete.

We continue to receive vandalism to several of our gates, i.e. this is often having the padlocks broken off and then thrown away. Due to the isolation of these gates it is very difficult to apprehend the offenders.

5.4.2 Access – Rimutaka Incline

The first 2km of the main access for the Rimutaka Incline walkway also provides access for the Upper Valley Gliding Club and the Kaitoke Go Kart Club. The volume of traffic using this first 2km stretch at times becomes quite excessive, and the road surface reflects this. Several years ago the idea was suggested to seal this first 2km of road, but there were issues as it is part of the historic rail formation, and the Historic Places Trust was not comfortable with this idea. It makes you wonder if we should perhaps rethink this situation and try again.

5.4.3 Rebuilding of the Orange Hut

We continue to liaise with the Akatarawa Recreational Access Committee (ARAC) on the rebuilding of the Orange Hut. When the original Orange Hut was built by ARAC, a large amount of

the materials used were donated by commercial enterprises and a large amount of second-hand building materials were sourced by ARAC. Although this system worked back then, this process may not work this time around. The proposed structure requires Resource and Building Consent and the materials used must conform to the current building practices. This situation can make it difficult for voluntary clubs because this means they must have properly qualified tradespersons using the appropriate materials. Fortunately though, as we had the previous structure insured, the insurance money we have received is sufficient to cover building a complete new structure. Having basically built the Orange Hut originally ARAC are keen to be involved in its rebuilding again.

5.4.4 Disabled Access

As identified in a previous report we have had several enquiries regarding access for disabled people. We are pleased to report that all feedback has been very positive. Allowing these people to have controlled key access enables them to have the freedom to come and go as they please and make the best use of their time in these areas without having to be accountable to set times.

5.4.5 Events Held

During this period we have had the last national event of the season in the Akatarawa Forest, being the Kapi Mana Enduro Motorcycle Ride. This event went very well with no injuries and no complaints from adjoining land owners or our own internal departments.

We also had the last of the summer programme events which was the Mt Climie 4WD trip and involved taking members of the public up to the top of Mt Climie in Greater Wellington vehicles to not only take in the fantastic views of the Wellington/Hutt Valley/Wairarapa/Martinborough areas, but also to educate these people on the changing indigenous forest that is present in this area. For example starting at the Tunnel Gully reserve we have some very good examples of lowland podocarp forest and then as you continue to climb you have a very good range of the various forests that exist at the various altitude levels, right through to sub-alpine type vegetation at the top. This day was thoroughly enjoyed by all, not only the participants but also the Greater Wellington staff that assisted on the day. Feedback was extremely positive.

We have also had numerous visits by the local 4WD clubs throughout the Akatarawa Forest and the Kapiti Car Club have also held a rally sprint event on the plantation forest access into the Puketiro Forest.

Other events have included a duathlon by the Trentham Harriers Club, an adventure motorcycle ride that goes throughout New Zealand and training exercises by the NZ Army, the Royal NZ Police College (motorcycle training) and lastly the NZ Military Police.

All of these events have proceeded without any issues, injuries or problems.