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Report to the Landcare Committee
from Andrew Annakin, Divisional Manager, Landcare

1. Purpose

To inform the Landcare Committee about activities and matters of interest within the Landcare Division since the last Landcare Committee meeting, 4 May 2000. Departmental activity reports are also attached.

2. Third Quarter Review, 10 May

The Chief Financial Officer's regular reports to the Policy and Finance Committee continue to show the Landcare Division substantially under spent in both the operating and capital budgets. While this is a concern, the reasons are explained as:

- Flood damage repairs account for the bulk of the opex variance. \$564,000 was rebudgeted from 1998/99 and Flood Protection Operations remain \$430,000 in surplus. This includes gains from lower than expected tender prices. The Third Quarter is a bow-wave of pending expenditure;
- Difficulties with rock supplies mean that \$334,000 has been rebudgeted to complete the Hutt River flood damage repairs. This is a shame because all of the design work was completed and tenders let. However, the rock supply issues are beyond our control;
- Further opex variances (\$347,000F) come from timing issues (calendarisation); internal revenue crossovers; slow project start-ups (weather and other delays in Natural Forestry and Regional Parks Operations); permanent savings from Rural Fire (no fires!), and saving in financial costs (\$125,000 in Flood Protection);
- Favourable revenue variances, across the board are from several unbudgeted gains.

- The significant favourable capex variance mainly follows earlier delays commencing Kapiti Coast flood protection works, savings in construction costs and the significant Boulcott Land Purchase (now approved). The capex forecast position at year-end is \$256,400 unfavourable, slightly worse than the Second Quarter forecast.

At the Third Quarter, the Division's year-end operating surplus forecast variance is \$378 favourable.

3. **Forest Lands Workshop, 23 May**

The workshop usefully aired some of the issues; though most of the discussion centred on the continuing vexed question of commercial forestry on Council land. However, officers still did not get a sufficient steer to progress the policy model to review the Forest Lands Plan. We are also some way off shaping a vision for the forests in 2025.

Therefore, I propose that the workshop continue at the conclusion of the formal meeting. It need not be a long session. I may recap on the information presented at the 23 May workshop, but my aim is to seek feedback on the questions; for which we ran out of time. These questions are very broad and the idea is to stimulate discussion rather than reach a resolution. However, they are important for the policy framework to be recommended to subsequent committee meetings.

4. **Regional Parks/Natural Forestry Integration**

Following the staff consultation phase, the General Manager confirmed the revised *Parks and Forests* structure, 23 May. An explanatory memo to Landcare staff and Council managers, including the review of submissions, was copied to the Councillors' Bulletin.

Many staff took the opportunity to comment. While most supported the proposals, some issues arose. The substantive structure is unchanged, but several of the issues raised, especially the speed of transition to the new geographic maintenance teams, will be acted on.

The three new positions are now advertised: Senior Rangers (2) and the Landcare Advisor, Environmental Stewardship. The Landcare Volunteers Co-ordinator position remains subject to the final LTFS approval.

5. **Out and About**

Bambi Award, 5 May: The recipient of the Divisional Manager's special award to noteworthy individuals was Chris Wootton, Ranger, Belmont Regional Park. This recognised his careful handling (in association with Susan Edwards) of the many issues surrounding the proposed sale of the Kilmister Block. Chris epitomises a key competency for our park rangers; the ability to navigate the real-time minefield of always having a measured response for park users, public opinion, and political pressure in its many guises.

I also recognised the group who so successfully put together, at short notice, the Wainuiomata Water Collection Area “Roar” Hunt. This was the first major public access to the catchment since the area was secured after the August 1998 contamination scare. While a poor excuse for a pest control operation, the Roar Hunt turned out to be a good Community Connection opportunity. The balloting process went well and the operation proceeded without a hitch. Particular thanks went to Kerrie Chudleigh, Helena Firth, Scott Farrell, Geoff Cameron and John Bissell. The Roar Hunt may become an annual feature. The exercise was expensive in staff time, supervision and extra security. However, it showed that controlled public access to the Water Collection Areas is achievable.

Upper Hutt City, Hutt FMP Presentation, 10 May: As part of the consultation process for introducing the concept of non-structural measures for the Hutt FMP, Alistair Cross led a presentation at Upper Hutt City. The concepts were well received. The same presentation will be given to Hutt City Council, 13 June.

Wainuiomata Recreation Area, 16 May: On one of my programmed catch-ups with Landcare field staff, I went to see Scott Farrell, Ranger, Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Catchment. Scott took me around the Recreation Area - which runs along the river side of Reservoir Road up to the Treatment Plant. I had never been down to the Recreation Area before. It was a revelation. The attractive swimming holes are well used by locals. There are several walking tracks meandering through Eucalyptus groves, winding up to good stands of native forest close to the catchment border. We encountered several individuals and walking groups enjoying the crisp autumn air.

The Wainuiomata Recreation Area was downgraded in the savings package required for the 1997 LTFS. Funding has been restored from 2000/01 and Scott is keen to upgrade the area. There are also significant heritage features from the old waterworks, logging and other developments. Some of it may be under threat and we are keen to raise the profile of this aspect.

Queen Elizabeth Park, 24 May: The new Ranger, Nola Urquhart, continues the good work started by her predecessor, Gareth Cooper. A major pest-plant operation is underway. Nola also showed me some of the recent track work. Both aspects have been criticised from some quarters, though others support the work; as I do. Queen Elizabeth Park has high visitor numbers and significant land management and environmental issues. However, we do need to improve information to Park visitors on why changes are taking place. Some much improved signage and interpretation panels will go up shortly and others are planned. Nola has also distributed her first *Ranger News*, a Community Connections initiative aimed at local communities.

Hutt FMP, Advisory Committee, 25 May: A good spirited meeting. The Committee particularly liked the draft Environmental Strategy. Further development of the non-structural policy was also welcome - noteworthy for the changes made from the 10 April workshop and subsequent discussions with officers from the two cities

7. Recommendation

That the Divisional and Departmental reports be received and the contents noted.

ANDREW ANNAKIN
Divisional Manager, Landcare