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

Cannons Creek Valley Bush Restoration

1. Purpose

- To present a Restoration and Development Plan for Cannons Creek Valley (also known as Maara Roa), Belmont Regional Park.
- To seek the agreement of the Committee to officers initiating negotiations with Landcorp Farming Ltd on the principle of purchasing and reserving the land in the Cannons Creek Valley restoration area for consideration through the next Annual Plan review.

2. How the Project Came About

The project to restore Cannons Creek Valley Bush arose from a submission on the Wellington Regional Council's 1999/00 Annual Plan from the Eastern Ward Residents and Ratepayers Association. The key person promoting the project is Cannons Creek resident Sylvia Jenkin. She is well supported by an enthusiastic group with a wide range of skills who have formed the Friends of Maara Roa (Inc.).

3. Funding in the Long-term Financial Strategy

As a result of the Annual Plan submission, \$51,000 has been allocated to the restoration project over the next nine years. Based on the Council's funding allocations, Friends of Maara Roa and Parks and Forests officers have put together a list of tasks and priorities (see **Attachment 1** for the work programme for the first two years).

4. **Project Scope**

The restoration project is about helping the naturally regenerating native bush in the valley to grow and spread. The enhancement of the native bush will assist to:

- increase the range of native species in the area;
- increase and improve native wildlife habitat; and
- provide the Cannons Creek community with an improved recreation area, and its own native forest.

The Friends of Maara Roa seek to realise the environmental and recreational potential of the Cannons Creek Valley. Their objectives are compatible with the Council's long-term plans for the Valley and aspirations for developing closer links with the community.

The first stage in the project is the preparation of a Restoration and Development Plan for the Cannons Creek Valley to guide the physical restoration work. Council officers and Friends of Maara Roa have been working together, in association with officers from Porirua City Council (PCC) to prepare the plan. (The Plan is enclosed as a separate document - **Attachment 2**).

The project area has two landowners - PCC and Landcorp Farming Ltd. PCC owns the eight-hectare Cannons Creek Lakes Reserve in the lower valley and Landcorp owns the remainder of the project area containing two conservation covenants. Both the PCC and Landcorp areas fall within the boundaries of Belmont Regional Park (see **Attachment 3**).

Friends of Maara Roa are currently restricting their work to the PCC owned Lakes Block and the conservation covenants as these are the only areas afforded formal protection. Friends of Maara Roa wrote in a submission on the Council's 2001/02 Annual Plan asking that the project area be reserved under the Reserves Act 1977. The submission was supported by the PCC.

5. **The Project Objectives (as agreed through preparation of the Restoration and Development Plan)**

The objectives of the project are:

- To work towards achieving the aims and objectives of the Friends of Maara Roa constitution and the Belmont Regional Park Management Plan including:
 - enable Friends of Maara Roa to initiate and carry out work in the Cannons Creek Valley, in consultation with the Council Ranger for Belmont Regional Park and PCC staff.
- To provide a document from which the Council can allocate resources to the project.

- To provide continuity, so that the project can continue even if membership of Friends of Maara Roa and staff at the Council and PCC change.
- To work with Transit New Zealand to secure pedestrian access links through Belmont Regional Park and to provide a buffer between the proposed Transmission Gully Motorway and existing housing.
- To set realistic and achievable goals for Friends of Maara Roa.
- To develop the plan co-operatively, using the research expertise, knowledge and experience of all those with an interest in the project; and
- To provide a plan with which Friends of Maara Roa can promote the project and attract sponsors and volunteers.

6. **Support for the Project by Landowners**

Porirua City Council owns the eight-hectare Lake Reserve, which is the main entry point into the Porirua side of the Park. PCC officers have been involved in, and are very supportive of, the project.

Landcorp Farming Ltd owns the substantial portion (approximately 100 hectares) of the project area. Approximately one third is remnant forest and has a conservation covenant over it while the remainder is mainly gorse and regenerating native bush which hasn't been grazed for several years. Landcorp has given support to the project and in initial discussions representatives have responded favourably to Maara Roa's request that the land be given reserve status. Landcorp requested that the Council write formally suggesting the area be reserved as far as the Transmission Gully Motorway designation. However, in order for the area to be reserved, it will need to be subdivided and ownership transfer to either the Council or PCC. Landcorp are likely to seek payment for the land.

7. **Why Cannons Creek Valley Should be Made into a Reserve**

Friends of Maara Roa want the area to be formally protected, as a reserve to ensure it remains accessible to the public. Cannons Creek Valley is important, as it is the only area of native bush on the Porirua side of the Park as well as a key strategic location and entry point. Council officers support this view.

While Landcorp have retired the area from farming, there is nothing to stop them from selling it to a private buyer who may then choose to clear the area and farm it. Clearly, the conservation covenants would remain, but they would be landlocked and not accessible to the general public. The registered Walkway giving access through the area is protected but it does not provide access to the covenants.

8. **Cost Implications for WRC in Gaining Reserve Status for the Landcorp Land**

The land has a rural designation in the District Plan but is of minimal value from a farming perspective as evidenced by the fact Landcorp stopped grazing it several years ago. No valuations have been carried out at this stage. Any valuation would be organised by the Council's Property Consultants as part of any negotiations with Landcorp.

The Department of Conservation supports the proposal to make the area reserve. Reservation will ensure it will remain in native bush in perpetuity and will give added impetus to the Friends of Maara Roa in their restoration work.

However, if the Council is to seek to make the land a reserve there will be costs associated with that. The costs will fall in the following areas:

- (1) survey of the land;
- (2) resource consents for subdivision of the land;
- (3) legal costs for establishing two new titles, transfer of ownership and any associated costs; and
- (4) purchase of the land.

The costs associated with creating a reserve and the possible purchase of the land could be funded out of the land purchase fund. If you accept the recommendations below, then a fully costed proposal can be considered through the 2002/03 Annual Plan process.

9. **Communications**

This project already has had some public exposure. The release of the Restoration and Development Plan will provide an excellent opportunity to promote this project. It is a good example of a restoration project with significant biodiversity value between the territorial authority, the community and the Council. Friends of Maara Roa have also produced an attractive brochure promoting the project and encouraging membership support.

10. **Recommendations**

That the Committee:

- (1) *approve the Cannons Creek Restoration and Development Plan.*
- (2) *request officers to initiate (on a without prejudice basis) negotiations with Landcorp Farming Limited on the principle of acquiring and reserving the land in the Restoration area.*

- (3) *request that officers report back to the Landcare Committee on the outcome of negotiations and with a view to the proposal being considered through the 2002/03 Annual Plan process.*

Report prepared by:

Approved for submission:

ROSS JACKSON
Landcare Planner - Volunteers Co-ordinator

SUSAN EDWARDS
Manager, Parks and Forests (Strategy & Marketing)

ROB FORLONG
Divisional Manager, Landcare

Attachment 1 : Work Programme

Attachment 2 : Cannons Creek Restoration and Development Report and Plans (enclosed as a separate document)

Attachment 3 : Cannons Creek Valley Restoration Area Map