



*caring about you & your environment*

**Report 02.420**

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Report to the Landcare Committee  
from Victoria Owen, Landcare Planner – Policy

## **Community Feedback on Regional Parks and Forests**

### **1. Purpose**

To present to the Committee:

- community feedback on the regional parks and forests, and our conclusions on the implications of this for management.
- our biennial survey of visitor satisfaction for 2001/02.

### **2. Background**

Over the past year (primarily through the management plan review, and our standard visitor monitoring) we have gathered a large amount of information on community, stakeholder and Tangata Whenua views of the management of the parks and forests. Much of this has been presented to Councillors through workshops and oral presentations. This paper provides you with an overview of the information and our analysis of what it may mean for management.

Feedback from the community was gathered through:

- A telephone survey of 700 people in the Wellington region (carried out by UMR Research Ltd) and two focus groups with people who don't visit the parks (a copy of the report is available in the Councillors Lounge).
- Submissions received on the review of the regional parks and forests management plans (449 in total, including 309 pro forma submissions advocating for a motor sport facility at Queen Elizabeth Park and 59 pro forma submissions supported the on-going maintenance of the Akatarawa Forest as an area for motorised recreation).
- Reference groups with key users/interest groups (focusing on recreation, environment, heritage and commercial activities).

- Visitor satisfaction survey carried out in February / March 2002 at Battle Hill, Belmont, Kaitoke, Queen Elizabeth, Pakuratahi and two new areas: Wainuiomata Recreation Area and Akatarawa Forest. This was self-administering and involved completion of a short questionnaire. We received 835 responses in total. (A copy of the report is available in the Councillors Lounge.)

In addition we have spoken with Iwi groups individually and through Ara Tahī and an Iwi Technical Workshop.

Together, this information provides us with a picture of community views, including those of both users and non-users.

### 3. **What is the feedback from Tangata Whenua?**

Common matters raised by Tangata Whenua relate to:

- The expression of kaitiakitanga and manawhenua status of iwi generally and in parks through involvement of Tangata Whenua in management and operations (e.g. in relation to cultural heritage and sacred sites), signage and information reflecting iwi histories.
- Customary use of materials for cultural, health and food gathering purposes.
- Accessibility and relevancy of parks to Tangata Whenua and broader Maori community (i.e. opportunities and uses provided for in the regional parks and forests).
- Implications of Treaty claims.

### 4. **What is the feedback from the wider community?**

The key themes arising from the community feedback are:

- The main community preferences for outdoor recreation across the region<sup>1</sup> continue to be walking or running.
- The preferred environment for outdoor recreation continue to be the coast, followed by forest and bush.
- Awareness of the regional parks and forests amongst the community is relatively high, with 46% claiming to know either a lot or a fair amount about them.
- Three-quarters of regional residents have visited one or more regional parks and forests in the past year.
- People choose parks for their natural setting, good views and quiet or isolation.
- Maintaining the natural environment and setting, continuing environmental protection and restoration, and providing a diversity of environments is of great importance to the community.

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to outdoor recreation preferences in general, rather than in regional parks and forests specifically.

- The main activities undertaken in the parks are walking or running (including walking the dog), tramping, swimming, cycling and picnicking.
- Visitors generally feel that the parks met their recreation needs well (75% of those in the telephone survey).
- People are generally satisfied with the regional parks and forests.
- Common suggestions for improvement relate to:
  - ⇒ greater environmental work including pest control and ecological restoration.
  - ⇒ new/improved facilities, particularly toilets, rubbish bins, seating and tracks.
  - ⇒ greater protection and promotion of heritage values.
  - ⇒ Better management of conflict between users.
  - ⇒ greater promotion of the parks, but carefully managed to prevent over-use.
- The protection of heritage sites was also important to many people (e.g. 55% of telephone survey respondents stating it was very important)
- We received a large number of pro forma submissions advocating for greater motorised recreational opportunities, although some individual submissions were opposed to motorised recreation.
- Young people (under 24) appear to have a lower knowledge and use of the parks than other groups, and Pakeha continue to be over-represented in park use, while all other ethnic groups are under-represented.
- Views are divided on whether the Council should allow for greater commercial use of the parks and forests.
- There is support for continued/greater community involvement in the regional parks and forests.
- Most people (95% of respondents in the phone survey) support the future protection of the regional parks and forests, while 70% are happy to have their rates contribute to them.

More detailed information is provided in Appendix 1.

## 5. Conclusion

This section outlines officers' views about what the feedback might mean for our management.

### 5.1 Management on the right track

The feedback suggests that the community considers that our management is on the right track. No one called for major changes to the way we manage the parks or the services provided (with the possible exception of calls for motorised recreation in Queen Elizabeth Park). People generally suggested we do more of what we are currently doing, or do it slightly differently. The community wants to see our parks and forests protected for future generations.

## 5.2 **Environmental values are a priority**

People emphasised the importance of environmental values – particularly indigenous ecology – and encouraged the Council to do more to protect and restore these values for current and future generations. The feedback supports our current work on environmental management programme such as pest control and environmental restoration work.

## 5.3 **Maintain diversity in the network**

People appreciate the diversity of environments and experiences provided by the network of regional parks, forests and recreation areas – this should continue to be an objective of the network.

## 5.4 **Support for community involvement**

People appreciate involvement in the parks, through care groups, organised events and educational activities and would like to see this continue.

## 5.5 **More work on heritage required**

Community and Iwi views suggest improved identification, protection and promotion of heritage values in the parks. The management plans will address these suggestions.

## 5.6 **Conflict between users continues**

Managing user conflicts is an ongoing issue. Options to address it include zoning activities, providing separate tracks, and user education. Currently we provide both single and multiple use tracks and attempt to educate users where possible. While we could provide more single use tracks to reduce conflicts, this would have to be balanced with the possible reduction in recreational opportunities overall. The creation of new tracks would also have to take into account additional impacts on environmental and heritage values. Options can be further considered in the review of the management plans.

## 5.7 **Differing views about commercial use**

The different views on the appropriate levels of commercial use of parks may indicate that we have the right balance at present. Continuing with careful management of concessions should minimise impacts on public access and public concern.

## 5.8 **Improvements to facilities suggested**

Many people suggested improved and expanded facilities. However, others wished to keep facilities at a minimum to retain the undeveloped nature of the areas. We need to balance the provision of adequate facilities with the preservation of ‘natural’ areas and the protection of environmental and heritage values. Development is generally concentrated in specific nodes (e.g. at entrances). Setting specific priorities for maintenance and improvement of facilities will occur through the LTFS process.

### 5.9 Differences over pest control exist

There were varying views and concerns around the level and type of pest control required, with some people concerned about the use of poisons and the impacts of pest control on hunting opportunities. Balancing ecological protection, recreational hunting, and public concerns about pest control methods are an ongoing challenge. We aim to control pests at an appropriate level based on the significance of the ecosystem and the nature of the threat, using the most effective mechanisms possible.

### 5.10 Calls for more motorised recreation a challenge

We received a large number of submissions supporting the existing levels of motorised recreation in the Akatarawa Forest, and a larger number requesting a motorised facility at Queen Elizabeth Park. This suggests an increased demand for this form of recreation. However, there is also some opposition to greater motorised recreation (as evidenced through submissions and reference groups). Our current policy provides for motorised recreation in the Akatarawa Forest only: it is prohibited in all other parks and forests.

### 5.11 Greater promotion required?

Greater promotion of the parks is a common theme in the feedback. However, given that 46% of telephone survey respondents felt they knew ‘a lot’ or ‘a fair amount’ about the parks, and 75% had visited one in the last year, this may not justify a strong focus. It may be better to target particular groups who currently are under-represented in park user statistics, or to focus on improved interpretation and information to enhance visitors experiences within the parks.

### 5.12 Continue developing our relationships with Tangata Whenua

The relationship with Tangata Whenua will continue to develop as we specify the nature and implications of the relationship means and how it can be made real in the parks and forests.

Feedback from reference groups suggest that it will be important to let the community know why the Tangata Whenua – Council relationships are important and what they might mean for the parks and forests.

## 6. Where to from here?

The Committee has requested that staff prepare a paper on how parks might best contribute to a sustainable region. This paper will be presented to the August meeting, and will take into account the feedback from Tangata Whenua and the public. Following on from this, draft management plans will be submitted to the relevant Committees.

## 7. **Recommendations**

*That the Committee:*

- (1) **Receive** the report.
- (2) **Note** the contents of the report.

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**Attachment 1** : Community Feedback