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## **Report 02.442**

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Report to the Utility Services Committee  
from the Anne Manley, Landcare Planner – Policy

### **Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area Access Plan Review**

#### **1. Purpose**

- To report back on Phase 2 of the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area Access Plan (“the Access Plan”); and
- To seek approval to progress Phase 3 of the Access Plan through to 30 June 2003.
- These matters are being reported to the Utility Services Committee in accordance with the approved Access Plan.

#### **2. Background**

In September 2000, the Council approved a programme for implementing managed public access to the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area. The Access Plan provides for implementing managed access in three annual phases through to July 2003. Progress on access is to be reviewed annually by the Landcare and Utility Services Divisions and reported to the Utility Services Committee (refer Reports 00.665 and 01.312).

Phase 1 provided for guided tours for organised groups by Landcare Rangers (maximum group size: 20, ratio of rangers to visitors 1:10; average of one day per month reserved for tours, limited to the Wainuiomata Catchment, provision for scientific, heritage and cultural research on application, provision for a ‘Roar Hunt’).

Phase 2 – The visitor numbers were increased from 20 to 40 per ‘trip-day’, including one day reserved for members of the public as opposed to groups from clubs and *bona fide* organisations, training of volunteer interpreters commenced, other aspects of the Plan remained unchanged.

Phase 3 provides for tours in the Orongorongo Catchment, as well as the Wainuiomata Catchment and full implementation of the Interpreters Programme (see details below). The review of Phase 2 is now due.

### 3. **Review of Phase 2**

#### 3.1 **Walking Tours and ‘Roar Hunt’**

Groups from 22 clubs/organisations took guided walks in the Wainuiomata Catchment during Phase 2. The guided walks took place over 11 days during the year. Following high public demand, the number of walkers on each tour was increased from 20 during Phase 1 to 40 in Phase 2. A total of 500 people have participated in walking tours at the Wainuiomata Catchment during Phase 2. Feedback has been very positive. Walkers were once again impressed with the rangers’ interpretation and commented on how they appreciated the opportunity to experience the unique environment in the Catchment and to learn more about Wellington’s water supply. A number of groups phoned or wrote to the Council to express their satisfaction and to thank staff for organising the tours. One group even sent in photos of their tour for our records.

One day was set aside for individual members of the public to participate in a tour rather than people from organised groups and clubs. Sixty visitors were allowed in the Catchment that day (additional staff were involved to maintain the 1:10 guide-to-visitor ratio). This was a very successful event and officers have proposed increasing the number of tours for individual members of the public to three during Phase 3 (see below).

A third ‘Roar Hunt’ (involving a public ballot) was held in March/April 2002. The 2002 Roar Hunt finished with a tally of 9 deer, 2 pigs and 11 goats, (a total of 22 animals). This is similar to the first two operations in 2000 and 2001, except that pig numbers were lower in 2002. Earlier this year, Prohunt killed 97 goats, 10 deer and 5 pigs. The four-week long Roar Hunt has once again been very successful as a public relations exercise, with many recreational hunters commenting on how they enjoyed the experience and appreciated the opportunity to enter the Area. The impressive podocarp bush appears to have been as much of a drawcard as the hunting itself.

Four study programmes were approved in accordance with the Access Plan. These were: a Victoria University study of the flora and fauna of the Orongorongo montane wetland, a botanical survey of the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area, research into moth species in Wainuiomata by a Victoria University post-graduate student and a Landcare Research trial into non-toxic bait techniques for determining possum numbers.

#### 3.2 **Interpreters<sup>1</sup> Programme**

During 2001/02, the Ranger team developed a training programme for volunteer interpreters to assist guiding groups through the Water Collection Area. The Interpreters Programme is based on the Otari and the Karori Sanctuary models with modifications relevant to water catchment management. The calibre of interpreters is very high. Many of the interpreters are very knowledgeable in botanical matters. They are required to have experience navigating and leading people in a wilderness environment. Seventeen people have attended the training nights, completed the programme and started working with groups on tours. We envisage that the Interpreters Programme will be fully implemented during Phase 3 of the Access Plan.

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<sup>1</sup> Interpreters are members of the public (volunteers) trained to be guides in the Water Collection Area (similar to those at Otari and the Karori Sanctuary), in accordance with the Access Plan.

While the programme is being implemented, at least one ranger will continue to accompany the interpreters taking tours in the Wainuiomata Catchment. At least one Ranger will be required to accompany all groups through the Orongorongo Catchment (see comments below).

#### 4. **The Current Access Plan**

The Access Plan as drafted, provides for the following programme during Phase 3:

- Access into the Orongorongo Catchment as well as the Wainuiomata Catchment;
- Progress Volunteer Interpreters Programme (interpreters in both Catchments);
- A maximum number of 40 visitors per ‘trip-day’ (this number may be reviewed);
- No change to the number of tours (i.e. an average of one ‘trip-day’ per month);
- Tours will be for groups from *bona fide* clubs/organisations and one day will be reserved for individual members of the public;
- Guide-to-visitor ratio of 1:10 (provision for review in Orongorongo Catchment);
- Possible additional access for scientific, heritage and cultural research (on application);
- Provision for another ‘Roar Hunt’; and
- Provision for consideration of concession applications.

#### 5. **Phase 3**

Experience from Phase 2 suggests that Phase 3 can be implemented. However, we have learnt a lot from Phase 2 and thus propose to make several variations to the original Phase 3 Plan. Ranger staff are continuing to assess and familiarise themselves with the visitors’ needs and issues arising with groups visiting the Catchment (i.e. managing people with different levels of fitness and interests e.g. botany, history) but feel comfortable moving on to the next phase of access. Approval of Phase 3 will enable a further managed step of the Access Plan to be taken while continuing to minimise the risk to both the water supply and the environment.

We consider that the following aspects of Phase 3 occur as planned:

- Introduction of guided walking tours in the Orongorongo Catchment;
- Full implementation of the Volunteer Interpreters Programme;
- Maximum number of 40 people per ‘trip-day’ (both Catchments), with ability to review and increase during Phase 3. (We envisage that once the Interpreters are fully operational, we may be able to lift the number of people visiting the Water Collection Area to 60 per ‘trip-day’, when there are sufficient guides (interpreters and rangers) available. The terrain in the Orongorongo Catchment means that that area will always be limited to experienced groups with a good level of fitness);

- Possible additions to scientific, heritage and cultural research on application;
- Provision for another ‘Roar Hunt’; and
- Provision for consideration of concessions.

Several minor changes are proposed to Phase 3 of the Access Plan as currently set out:

- Given the success of the day reserved for individuals last year, we would like to see the number of days for individual members of the public lifted from one to three days. These ‘individual’ tours will only be held in the Wainuiomata Catchment during Phase 3. We do not propose to run any tours in the Orongorongo Catchment on these days;
- Given that tours will only commence in the Orongorongo Catchment during Phase 3 (they were deferred last year), we recommend that there be no alteration of the guide-to-visitor ratio of 1:10 in the Orongorongo Catchment. We propose that there be a minimum guide-to-visitor ratio of 1:10 in both Catchments;
- Given that the Orongorongo Catchment has not previously been open for access, or that the Interpreters Programme is not yet fully operational, and that the terrain will limit access to experienced groups with a good level of fitness, we propose that at least one Landcare Ranger accompany all groups through the Orongorongo Catchment during Phase 3. Interpreters must have taken groups through the Wainuiomata Catchment before they can assist with guiding groups through the Orongorongo Catchment. We envisage there will be 6 tours in the Orongorongo Catchment during Phase 3, held on days when club/group tours in the Wainuiomata Catchment are taking place.

## 6. Medical Officer of Health

The Regional Council has a policy of achieving an “A” grading for water treatment plants, where it is practical to do so (refer Report 00.412). Progressing access in Phase 3 as proposed, will not impact on this objective. The definition of a ‘protected catchment’ is outlined in the *Guidelines for Drinking Water Management in New Zealand*:

*‘A catchment which has major points of access fenced and is controlled so that there is only strictly controlled human access and limited feral animals.’*

The Medical Officer of Health<sup>2</sup> has specified a preference for the catchment to meet the definition of “protected” and for the area to be managed and controlled in such a way as to protect the native forest against adverse effects, which would impact on the overall water quality from the catchment.

## 7. Resourcing

Funding for the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area ranger service is currently split between the Water Levy (70 percent) and General Rates (30 percent).

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<sup>2</sup> Letter of 13 June 2000 from Dr Stephen Palmer, Medical Officer of Health to Murray Kennedy, WRC Water Group

It is proposed to fund access during Phase 3, within the existing rates budget. This budget is for the ranger hours spent on access issues in addition to administration and functions associated with the Wainuiomata Waterworks Recreation Area. The Recreation Area continues to be popular, particularly for swimming and picnics during the summer months. While we feel that the level of access proposed during Phase 3 is manageable with current resources, we note that providing access in the Water Collection Area does make significant demands on the ranger team's time and we do not feel there is scope for future development (beyond Phase 3) within current funding levels. If the programme is to be expanded in future, a review of the funding will be necessary. Phase 3 of the Access Plan will be comprehensively reviewed and incorporated in the draft Forest Lands Management Plan for public consultation later in the year.

## 8. **Charging**

This issue has been included for the sake of completeness. To date the guided walking tours have been provided free of charge by the Council. Officers recommend that the tours continue to be free of charge at this stage. We note that the requirement on members of the public to have a guide accompany them in the Catchment is to protect water quality and the environment, rather than adding benefit to visitor experience. Members of the public are not required to have a guide accompany them when they are walking on other Council land.

Interpretation is a valued part of the Landcare rangers' jobs. The *Policy for Recreation and Tourism in Wellington Regional Council Parks and Forests* provides for the first 2 hours of ranger time (for interpretation) to be free for educational and special interest groups visiting the parks and forests. Many of those who have visited the Wainuiomata Catchment and continue to show interest in visiting the Catchment, are educational or special interest groups (e.g. Forest and Bird branches, the Wellington Botanical Society, Karori Sanctuary Trust, East Harbour Environmental Association). In addition, visitors are often able to offer information to the Council (e.g. the botanical group from the Tararua Tramping Club was able to provide the Council with botanical information including two new plants discovered in the Catchment on one visit) and it may not be appropriate to charge in such cases. There would be administrative costs associated with introducing a fee structure, where the amount of revenue generated is not likely to be high. This issue can be considered again as part of the Forest Lands Management Plan review.

## 9. **The Next Step**

Should the Council approve the proposal to progress Phase 3, Landcare officers will begin implementation immediately. This will involve setting dates for the tours (in conjunction with the Water Group to ensure there are no conflicts with water supply activities) and advertising for visitors.

As we undertook to resubmit the applications from groups who missed out on tours last year, we will contact those groups with the new schedule of dates and ask them for their preferences. We will also notify the people who missed out on the individual walking tour to invite them to apply again. Advertisements will be placed. Ballots will be held to allocate the tours.

## 10. **Communication**

We will prepare advertising material to publicise the scheduled tours through to 30 June 2003 and how to apply to take a tour. We will also place information on the Council's web site.

## 11. **Recommendations**

*That the Utility Services Committee recommends to the Policy and Finance Committee that the Council:*

- (1) *Receives the report and notes its contents.*
- (2) *Agree to Phase 3 of the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area Access Plan progressing as drafted, with the following variations:*
  - (i) *Three' trip-days' will be reserved specifically for individual members of the public to tour the Wainuiomata Catchment. Individuals will be able to apply to enter a ballot for places on these tours. All conditions applying to groups from clubs and other bona fide organisations visiting the Catchment will apply;*
  - (ii) *The ratio of rangers/interpreters to visitors is to remain at a minimum of 1:10 during Phase 3, in both the Wainuiomata and the Orongorongo Catchments.*
  - (iii) *At least one Landcare Ranger will accompany all groups entering the Orongorongo Catchment during Phase 3;*
- (3) *Endorse that the policy to provide the guided walking tours free of charge remains unchanged.*
- (4) *Note that Phase 3 of the Access Plan will be comprehensively reviewed as part of the ongoing Forest Lands Management Plan review and that access to the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area will be incorporated in that Plan.*
- (5) *Note that implementation of Phase 3 will commence immediately following approval by Council.*

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