



caring about you & your environment

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Report to the Landcare Committee
from Victoria Owen and Anne Manley, Landcare Planners – Policy, Parks and Forests

Regional Parks, Forests and Water Collection Areas : Contributing to a Sustainable Region and Quality for Life

1. Purpose

To respond to Councillors request for a paper looking at how regional parks, forests and water collection areas can:

- contribute to the Council's goal of a sustainable region and suggested quality for life outcomes.
- provide for a broader range of uses (including commercial use).

2. Background

In order to address the issues raised by Councillors at the last Parks and Forests Management Plan workshop, we have made an assessment of:

- How regional parks, forests and water collection areas currently and could potentially contribute to Council's suggested quality for life outcomes (as outlined in the recent re-branding exercise and in the Regional Policy Statement).
- How we can provide for sustainable management, quality for life outcomes, and a broader range of uses through the management plans.
- Possible roles for the Council in achieving a broader range of uses of the areas.

3. How Regional Parks, Forests and Water Collection Areas Currently Contribute to Quality for Life

We assessed the current management practices and activities within regional parks, forests and water collection area against sustainable management and some suggested quality for life outcomes. Those outcomes have been identified as:

- Bio-diversity
- Water

- Air
- Energy
- Land
- Access / Transport
- Waste
- Recreation
- Safety / Hazards
- Community.

Regional parks, forests and water collection areas *currently* contribute widely to quality for life outcomes. There are major contributions in the areas of *bio-diversity, land, water, and air* through our environmental work program and environmental management system¹. We also make a major contribution to *recreation* and *community* outcomes by providing outdoor recreation opportunities, involving the community through care groups, plantings and events etc., and facilitating commercial use of the parks.

We could contribute more to a sustainable region and the specified quality for life outcomes, by adjusting:

- what we do, allow, encourage, prohibit (e.g. doing more environmental work, encourage sustainable farming through grazing licences).
- how we do things – changing the way we carry out activities that impact adversely on the environment and quality for life (e.g. use of chemicals).

provided that they fall within the parameters the legislation, and conform to sustainable management and quality for life outcomes.

4. **How Management Plans can Facilitate Quality for Life**

If Council adopts these sustainable management and quality for life principles for the regional parks, forests and water collection areas, these principles will drive all policies within the plans, and the process for determining the appropriateness of activities. Subsequently, the draft Management Plans could be adjusted to make them consistent with these principles. This approach will:

- Extend the current focus of assessing effects from recreation, environment and heritage values (the Signature Values) to incorporate broader quality for life factors such as energy use and transport.
- Provide greater consistency across the parks and forests network.
- Make the basis for decision-making more explicit.
- Clarify the link between our assessment criteria and possible quality for life goals.

¹ This system aims to identify and minimise adverse impacts on the environment of activities undertaken by the Parks and Forests Department. (Each Department in Council has an environmental management system to address issues relating to their specific activities.)

We see the Management Plans as agreements between the Council, Tangata Whenua and the community that:

- Confirm the key values of the regional parks, forests and water collection areas that should be protected.
- Identify the future vision for the values and the areas.
- Provide a more explicit framework for decision-making by setting out the important factors to be taken into account.
- Identify key uses that are allowed, controlled, discretionary and prohibited – based on the values of the area, legislative requirements and the effects of the uses.

The new Management Plans will explicitly establish an ‘effects based’ approach to assessing activities which is based on the key values of the area. As with the current plans, the new plans will distinguish between activities as “provided for as of right”, “discretionary” or “prohibited”. However, the rationale will be made more explicit.

When assessing the effects of activities, the Council will consider positive and negative effects on the values (and potential values) of an area and suggested quality for life outcomes. The assessment could consider the effects outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 – Factors to take into account when assessing activities

<i>Environment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Bio-diversity ◆ Water ◆ Air ◆ Energy ◆ Land ◆ Waste
<i>Society</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Tangata Whenua ◆ Landscape ◆ Cultural heritage ◆ Recreational opportunities/benefits ◆ Other users ◆ Community ◆ Park neighbours ◆ Access/Transport ◆ Safety/Hazards (including to other users)
<i>Public Health</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Water quality ◆ Water supply facilities
<i>Park Management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Consistency with legislation ◆ Consistency with park plan ◆ Exclusivity of use ◆ Amount of land required/Duration of activity/Frequency of activity/Number of people involved ◆ Other consent/approval required ◆ Experience/Capability of applicant ◆ Compliance with bylaws
<i>Economy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Cost to Council ◆ Return to Council ◆ Contribution to the regional economy

5. Legislative Parameters

The legislation under which regional parks, forests and water collection areas are held provide constraints that must be considered in assessing how these areas can contribute to sustainability, and how use can be expanded.

Under the Local Government Act 1974, (the legislation that provides the mandate for creating regional parks in the Wellington Region) we must provide for public use and enjoyment, as long as this is not inconsistent with the conservation and protection of the intrinsic worth of the parks. The Council may provide for recreation or develop facilities where they are necessary for public's recreation and enjoyment. The Council may also charge to cover the costs of facilities and services. These provisions leave considerable discretion, to be negotiated through management plans.

The Wellington Regional Water Board Act 1972 provides for the Council to hold land for water supply purposes. It also provides for scenic and recreational areas and activities, and plantation forestry activities where they do not compromise the primary purpose of water supply. The Council again has some discretion to activities which do not compromise the water supply (subject to public health requirements). Although the Water Board Act does not require the preparation of a comprehensive management plan, in 1996 the Regional Council chose to prepare the Forest Lands Management Plan in the interests of good land management, an approach supported by the Regional Policy Statement. This approach also provides for consultation on appropriate uses of the areas.

The Reserves Act 1977 is rather more specific. It provides for the protection of land with special characteristics through different types of reserves. The Reserves Act specifies allowed uses of areas, and the conditions on these uses, both of which are linked closely to the purpose of the reserve. The Council may grant leases or licences for trade, business or occupation on any specified site:

- subject to specific lease / licence provisions
- provided that the trade, business, or occupation must be necessary for the public's enjoyment or convenience.

Recreation reserves may be leased for farming, grazing, afforestation and other purposes where the land is not required for the time-being, it is desirable as part of the management program, or it is in the public interest. The Council may also exclude the public, or develop 'agreements' with groups to use areas, for up to six consecutive days.

6. Council's Role in Achieving Wider Use of the Parks and Forests

Subject to the constraints above, the Council can be as broad as it wishes regarding issues within the parks and recreation areas² so long as those uses provide a positive assessment against the sustainability assessment criteria.

The Council could take two key roles in attempting to "free up" the parks and recreation areas for a wider range of uses. Within the appropriate legislative parameters, the Council could either:

² Recreation areas include the Rimutaka Incline Recreation Area, Tunnel Gully Recreation Area, Wainuiomata Waterworks Recreation Area (adjacent to the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area).

- i) facilitate and encourage a wider range of uses. That is, provide the appropriate environment and support for the public and entrepreneurs to undertake activities (e.g. through management planning, marketing, and liaison etc); or
- ii) implement a wider range of uses. That would mean investigating, investing in, and implementing activities ourselves.

Both options could require increased resources as they would mean an increase in our marketing and development activities.

Option 1 – Facilitate and Encourage

There are opportunities for the Council to expand its role in facilitating and encouraging broader use (including commercial use) of the parks and recreation areas through marketing and promotion of opportunities in the parks, networking with the local community and economic development agencies, and organising workshops and events with relevant groups. This option could also involve the Council requesting tenders to carry out an activity where the Council considers the activity to be desirable, but does not wish to undertake it itself.

Through this approach, the Council would let people know about opportunities, promote the parks and recreation areas, and respond to requests or ideas for activities. This is similar to the way we do things now, but could be more pro-active, particularly in our marketing and promotion. Specifically extending the current focus from recreation, environment and heritage values to incorporate broader quality of life factors as proposed, could also potentially contribute to wider use of the areas in future.

Option 2 – Implement

This Council could actively seek out, undertake and, as required, finance new uses or ventures in the regional parks and recreation areas. This option would go further than providing an environment in which the community and business come to us with ideas, but would require the Council to be actively involved by running activities or enterprises or contributing to them in some way (e.g. subsidisation). This option would potentially have greater resource implications and would need to be implemented through Annual Plans and Long Term Community Council Plans.

Recommended option – Option 1

We recommend that the Council pursue Option 1 and encourage wider use and activities in its regional parks and recreation areas where appropriate, by:

- Greater promotion of the areas as providing opportunities for use.
- Continuing to work to improve our processes for handling applications and working with potential operators.
- Working more closely with relevant agencies to facilitate activities and use (e.g. relevant recreational, economic and tourism development agencies).

7. Communication

No particular communication initiatives are proposed.

8. Recommendations

That the Committee:

- (1) **Receive** the report.
- (2) **Note** the contents of the report.
- (3) **Agree** that assessments of the appropriateness of an activity, will consider its positive and negative effects on the values (and potential values) of an area and Council's suggested quality for life outcomes.
- (4) **Endorse** that the Council's role in developing activities in regional parks and recreation areas in order to widen use be through enhanced facilitation and encouragement (Option 1 above).

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