



Report 05.122
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Committee Parks & Forests Hearing Committee
Author Trecia Smith Advisor - Planning and Policy

Draft Forest Lands Plan: Future Water Collection Areas Management Plan - Hearing

1. Purpose

To consider submissions on the draft Regional Forest Lands Plan: Future Water Collection Areas Management Plan.

2. Significance

The matters in this report do not trigger the Council's significance policy or section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

3. Background

The draft Regional Forest Lands Plan: Future Water Collection Areas Management Plan was released for public consultation last year (Report 04.372). The draft Management Plan governs the future water collection areas, namely the Akatarawa and Pakuratahi Forests. The plan does not cover the current water collection areas, nor does the plan govern plantation forestry operations with the exception of some recreational activities that occur within these areas.

The lands within the forests are held primarily for future water supply purposes. Maintaining and protecting the area's environmental values is the prime management objective in ensuring that the lands remain fit for this purpose. This does not preclude uses that are consistent with the area's values, such as recreation.

4. Submissions

Fifty one submissions were received on the draft plan. Committee members received copies of the submissions in mid February. Further copies can be obtained from Trecia Smith, if required. Eight submitters have indicated that they wish to be heard. A summary of the submissions can be found as Attachment 1 to this report. The submitters that wish to be heard have been bolded. An analysis of the key issues is provided in section 6 of this report.

5. Iwi

Contact with the Wellington Tenth Trust, Te Runanganui o Taranaki Whānui ki te Upoko o te Ika a Maui and Ngati Toa was maintained throughout the plan process. No submissions were received from these Iwi, who verbally indicated that they had no concerns with the draft plan. However, Ngati Tama did provide a submission. Officers subsequently met with representatives of Ngati Tama but Ngati Tama did not request any further relief nor wish to be heard in support of their submission.

6. Key issues

Generally submitters were supportive of the management plan's approach. Three broad groups of issues are evident in the submissions received; environmental, rail and recreation. Issues raised by submitters, officer's comments and recommended responses are summarised in a table at the end of this section.

6.1 Environmental

The Department of Conservation (DoC) (submission 49) and Fish and Game (F&G) (33) noted the regional importance of the forest's ecological values, as well as the values of the freshwater environment for indigenous fish and trout. Kapiti Environmental Action (22) and the Wellington Botanical Society (24) also submitted on the importance of the forest's ecological values, although raised some concerns about impacts on these values by recreational activities.

The future water collection areas are held for the purposes of water supply. Currently management focuses on ensuring the environmental values are maintained or enhanced and that uses, including recreation, are sustainable by managing the effects of activities. This approach ensures that the regional importance of the area's ecological and biodiversity values is retained now and into the future. DoC suggests an addition to policy 1.1 as follows (in italics):

“To manage the future water collection areas to protect their potential as a source of secure, sustainable, fresh, clean water for the Region in the long-term by protecting and enhancing the ecological values of these areas and by avoiding, remedying or mitigating any adverse effects of activities in the water collection areas”

This is consistent with current management, the draft plan's objectives and policies, and clearly outlines Greater Wellington's management philosophy. The concerns of submitters about the impacts of activities should also be addressed in part by this addition to the policy.

F&G would like to see policy changes reflecting the value of introduced species such as trout in the plan's environmental section. To achieve this they suggest replacing 'indigenous' with 'valued' ecosystems. They also suggest specifically adding trout and trout habitat into the freshwater policies. In contrast DoC would like the links strengthened between the indigenous forest values and its significance to indigenous fish species.

The regional importance of these land's ecological values is primarily due to the area's indigenous nature. The upper Pakuratahi valley is largely unmodified, while the Akatarawa Forest was modified by selective logging in

the 1930s. Ecosystem processes therefore reflect an indigenous, rather than an introduced character.

Indigenous forest cover provides ecosystem benefits to freshwater habitats for native and valued introduced species such as trout. It is appropriate that links between the land and freshwater ecosystems are recognised, including trout habitat. High quality trout habitat, and habitat for native fish, is provided by maintaining and protecting indigenous ecosystem processes. For this reason retaining 'indigenous' within the policies is recommended as being appropriate for protecting trout and native species. In addition, the draft plan acknowledges the Regional Freshwater Plan and the Resource Management Act 1991 and is subject to these legal frameworks.

6.2 Heritage Rail

In 2002, the Rimutaka Rail Trust approached the Landcare Committee with a proposal to reinstate the Rimutaka Railway, along the original alignment that is now the popular Rail Trail. Report 02.688 forms Attachment 2 to this report and outlines the proposal and response from Officers in 2002.

The Landcare Committee resolved:

- (1) *That while the Committee appreciates the ongoing efforts of Messrs McCracken and Porter to re-establish the Rimutaka Railway, it also notes that a feasibility study and business plans are yet to be completed.*
- (2) *That the Committee confirms that while it is unable to make a financial contribution to the proposal at this time the Council is prepared to assist where practicable in providing information and assistance that will help the proposal to be progressed.*
- (3) *That the implications of access for the Railway's proposal will be considered during the development of the Forest Lands Management Plan.*

A feasibility study and business plans have been provided with the Rimutaka Rail Trust's submission (16). Officers have provided assistance and information to the Trust on a regular basis over the last two years.

Under the draft management plan, the proposal is a 'restricted activity'. This means that an application is assessed on a 'case by case' basis by applying the policies in section 5. Briefly, this requires ensuring that an activity would not compromise the Greater Wellington's ability to supply water, assessing the effects of a proposal on the environment, recreation, and other land uses such as plantation forestry, as well as determining that the proposal is a sustainable use of the land.

The proposal would also be subject to Greater Wellington's *Policy on Recreation and Tourism for Concession Applications*. For an application of this scale, it is likely that public consultation would be required. Independent engineering, environmental and financial assessments are recommended, as in

house experience is unlikely to be sufficient to assess these technical areas to the required level of detail. In addition, the proposal would need to meet the provisions of the Resource Management Act 1991 and the Historic Places Act 1993.

The nature of the proposal means that the Department of Conservation, Iwi, The Historic Places Trust, the Upper Hutt City and South Wairarapa District Councils should also be approached to understand their views on the proposal. Officers consider that it is appropriate for the proposal to remain as a restricted activity.

6.3 Recreation

Motorised recreation was the most discussed recreational activity in the submissions. Thirty seven submissions were received in support of motorised recreation in the Akatarawa Forest, of which 29 were proforma submissions. Six submissions identified the need for further flexibility in managing tracks and wanted the designated tracks removed from the plan. Three submissions also wanted motorised recreation in the Pakuratahi Forest. Three submissions identified concern over the impact of motorised recreation on environmental and heritage values.

Motorised recreation in the Akatarawa Forest has been popular for many years. Zones were introduced in 1997 but to provide greater certainty and clarity it was decided to move towards designating tracks. In 2002, a process was agreed with ARAC¹ to identify suitable tracks. The tracks were assessed by examining effects on the area's environmental, recreational and heritage values to ensure that the use was sustainable. It was agreed that this would form the basis for public consultation on motorised recreation tracks in the forest. Report 02.42 is attached for your information and outlines the agreed process (Attachment 3).

Currently, there is a range of tracks for motorised use, including 4WDs, trail bikes, and quads as well as tracks for special events. Map 5 and Table 3 of the draft plan identify the tracks available for use (pages 38-39). Motorised recreation, as with other uses, is subject to the management framework that protects the area's values for water supply by managing the area's environmental values.

4WD tracks are maintained as primary routes and are well formed, limiting environmental impacts. Other tracks are managed as secondary routes with track standards determining usage. If damage means that the track standards are exceeded the tracks will be retired until they have sufficiently recovered. For instance, an increased width and/or rutting of the track surface may result in a track becoming unavailable. Much of the area's terrain and topography means that maintenance is difficult and would result in high environmental impacts, including sedimentation entering waterways. This system also ensures that further damage to the heritage values of tram lines is minimised. Secondary tracks are used by primarily by trail bikes and quads. Usage is

¹ An organisation representing motorised recreation groups using the Akatarawa Forest

restricted by the track width and track standards, and this limits impacts from greater recreational use from larger vehicles.

This management approach is consistent with managing the effects of use on the area's values. The Ranger monitors the condition of the tracks and liaises with forest users accordingly. Officers consider that current management and review provisions are sufficient and allow Greater Wellington to be responsive to all forest users based on the effects of activities. The inclusion of the maps adds certainty and clarity to managing motorised use and the plan is due to be reviewed in five years. One off events can still be allowed at the discretion of the Manager, Parks and Forests. If further tracks were to be considered for opening, it would be appropriate to seek comment from other forest users before a final decision is made.

The Pakuratahi Forest is managed as a passive recreation area and recreational use is dominated by walkers, mountain bikers, picnickers and swimmers. Motorised recreation has never been allowed in this area and is more suited to the Akatarawa Forest where passive pursuits are less popular. No change is recommended to the current policy.

ARAC also requested that Orange Hut be designated as an area for overnight stays. Officers do not believe that the original building consent allowed for the building to be used as a dwelling and it is unlikely to meet the building standards required for habitation. This could be further investigated with the Upper Hutt City Council. Council policy in current water collection areas is for no overnight stays. The Committee may wish to consider whether allowing overnight stays in the hut may set up unrealistic expectations in the future, should the catchment be required.

F&G requested upland game hunting be allowed as a permitted activity in Plantation Forestry areas. This is the first time that a request for upland game hunting has been received. Currently no hunting is allowed in Plantation Forestry areas for safety reasons. Plantation Forestry is generally located on the perimeter of the forests and as such these areas are also popular for mountain biking, horse riding and walking. The Manager, Plantation Forestry, has indicated that he wishes the current policy of no hunting to remain in these areas. Hunting in these more accessible areas sits uncomfortably with passive recreation.

F&G indicated that they wished for further recognition of trout fishing within the plan. This is appropriate and an oversight in the draft plan, given the value of the fishery and its recreational status. Officers recommend including further information about the sport and the opportunities present within the forests.

6.4 Other

Many submitters identified editing and style improvements that could be made. Officers agree, these could be made with little or no substantive changes to the plan's intent. Tables will be revised according and maps labelled to provide greater clarity. Text boxes could be used to illustrate the plan and inform readers about the land's values and/or particular management issues.

Issue	Officer's Comments	Recommendation
<p>Environmental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add 'protect & enhance' 'avoid, remedy, mitigate' clause to policy 1.1 • Change 'indigenous' to 'valued' ecosystems in policies, greater acknowledgement for trout species and habitat • Add to the descriptions of forest types, threatened and native fish species (DoC) • Natural materials policy 5.24 - add 'regionally significant biodiversity' criteria • Impacts of recreation on forest values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is in keeping with plan's approach, supporting text & environmental objectives • Values are primarily indigenous. Policies are not particular to freshwater species. Draft Plan clearly acknowledges other planning frameworks, including Regional Freshwater Plan, RMA and other agencies. • Useful information for educating people about managing ecosystem processes • Assessing activities policies already includes biodiversity and assessing ecological effect as assessment factors. • Effects of recreation and forest health are monitored. Section 10 is relevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add to policy 1.1, as suggested • Acknowledge importance of F&G & trout habitat. Provide further information on trout fisheries in the forests. Makes changes to text rather than policies • Add to text, as suggested • No change • Noted but no change is recommended
<p>Rail</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinstating the Rimutaka Rail as a tourism heritage venture and allowing it as a permitted activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Rail Trail is one of the more popular areas for walking and mountain biking. The Trail would be difficult to replace to the same standard. Any development of this scale requires careful assessment that would be inappropriate to allow as of right without further analysis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No change, activity should remain as 'restricted'
<p>Recreation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removing table and maps identifying designated tracks • Allow motorised recreation in Pakuratahi Forest • Allow upland game hunting • Include trout fishing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process was agreed to enable more certainty and transparency in use • Pakuratahi currently managed for a passive recreational experience • No hunting permitted in plantation areas • Fishing was omitted as GW does not have authority to regulate the activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No change recommended • No change recommended • No change recommended • Acknowledge and include information on the sport
<p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion between activity types and 'permit' and 'allow' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This needs addressing and a table could be developed to aid readers for types of activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop table and ensure consistency when using terms in document

7. Next steps

After the committee has considered the submissions, officers will begin drafting the final plan in line with the policy direction given by the Committee. A workshop may be held with Councillors to discuss any outstanding issues, before the final plan is considered by the Landcare Committee later this year.

8. Communication

A letter will be sent to all submitters, outlining the results of the Committee's deliberations. Once the Committee is satisfied with the final plan, copies will be made available to stakeholders, submitters, Council offices and libraries. The management plan's adoption will be announced with a media release and will be included in the next Green Shoots community newsletter.

9. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. *receive the report and **note** the contents of the report.*
2. *consider the attached submissions on the draft Regional Forests Land Plan: future Water Collection Areas Management Plan*
3. *instruct Officers on how the Committee wish to proceed with finalising the Regional Forests Land Plan: future Water Collection Areas Management Plan*

Report prepared by:

Report approved by:

Report approved by:

Trecia Smith

Advisor - Planning and Policy

Murray Waititi

Manager, Parks and Forests

Rob Forlong

Divisional Manager, Landcare

Attachment 1: Summary of Submissions

Attachment 2: Report 02.688 Proposal to Reinstate the Rimutaka Railway

Attachment 3: Report 02.42 Akatarawa Forest Motorised Recreational User Guidelines and Track Map