

Parks Manager's report for period ending Friday 9 June 2006

1. Manager's comments

1.1 Arbor Day

Several Arbor Day planting events happened this month, with the main celebrations at Battle Hill (7 June) and at Queen Elizabeth Park (9 June).

Parks have been holding events to celebrate Arbor Day since 1989. At that stage, the park network was being developed and hosting the events was seen as a means of making associations with local schools while implementing what was, at the time, a large planting programme.

Parks have always focused Arbor Day events on schools to encourage an awareness of the environment, while promoting the parks and Arbor Day to the next generation. Over the years there has been a growing awareness of environmental matters and it is now easier to get children to attend these events. Some groups have been coming for many years and have embedded Arbor Day as part of their annual school events programme.

The focus this year was *Conservation and Recreation*. The message we were promoting this year was how conservation and recreation can work well together to give dual benefits to our quality of life in the region. Guest speaker at Queen Elizabeth Park, sportsman and conservationist Simon Kennett was able to address this. Seven schools along with Iwi, parents, teachers and volunteers showed their support this year for the wetland plantings which were followed by refreshments.

Other Arbor Day events in the parks included two planting days with Plateau School – one each at Te Marua and Rivendell. The Friends of Maara Roa also had an event on 10 June in their revegetation area. Ross Jackson also helped GWRC Wairarapa staff to set one up in Mauriceville involving Honda-donated trees.

1.2 Land Acquisition update

1.2.1 Waitangirua Farm

Porirua City Council (PCC) is obliged by the contract to purchase the farm to provide physical and legal frontage to the two areas of land which were not purchased for the Park and which Landcorp Farming Limited (LFL) retain ownership of. PCC has approved the offer of two options for access to LFL and it is now for LFL to accept one or both of those access solutions. It does look likely that there will not be any requirement to revert to the fall back solution of Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) providing access to the LFL land through the Park. Unfortunately this has delayed the completion of the surveying and subdivision of the farm so that it will not be completed by 30 June as anticipated. The arrangement with LFL was that payment for the farm will occur by 30 June regardless of

the status of the subdivision. As a result, GWRC, the Crown and PCC will be paying for the farm and protecting its interest in it by registering a caveat over the title until title can be issued in Council's name.

1.2.2 Whareroa Farm

The Crown (under the Department of Conservation) is now the registered owner of Whareroa Farm. As part of the purchase negotiations, an adjustment to the purchase price was made, sufficient to address some of the infrastructure that was removed as part of the State Highway One (SH1) realignment, and deferred maintenance built up over the last few years. DOC will repair boundary fences, maintain the house and do some weed control but will discuss with Council staff and the *Guardians of Whareroa* how best to use the small fund. Transit NZ needs to complete the SH1 realignment (expected early 2007) before a survey for title of the adjusted boundary will be available. This title is needed for the reservation and transfer of control and management to Council. Should that be the case officers from DOC and GWRC have also met with the *Guardians of Whareroa* regarding their expectations about how the farm will be managed in the future.

I will bring a formal update of this project to the Committee at the August meeting.

1.2.3 Whitireia

Ngati Toa, on behalf of the Otaki/Porirua Maori Trust Board, have been empowered to give effect to alterations to the Whitireia Trust deed enabling GWRC to manage the park on behalf of the Crown and Tangata Whenua. Ngati Toa are currently discussing the transfer with DOC, and we anticipate the transfer will be ratified relatively soon.

1.2.4 Wairarapa Wetlands

Officers from DOC and GWRC have been working on evaluating how the land might be held, potential management and government structures, and developing an operating agreement to enable management and control to be shared over the lake and its surrounding public land. I expect to be able to provide the Council with a governance and management framework, as well as a concept design for the park for its consideration at the end of this calendar year.

2. Planning and policy

2.1 Capital works

2.1.1 Rail Trail Summit toilets progressing

Officers have completed the replacement toilet building at the Summit Yards on the Rimutaka Rail Trail. The plumbing contractor has started installing the water supply and septic tank disposal system. The toilet will be completed this month.

2.1.2 QEP Paekakariki toilets tenders received

We are currently evaluating the tenders for the replacement toilets at Paekakariki picnic area, Queen Elizabeth Park. The tenders have come in within budget so we expect construction to start in early July.

2.2 Asset Management

2.2.1 Yardstick 2006 survey completed

In 2004 we joined the “Yardstick” project, which is a system for comparing parks management data. Members include 55% of all territorial local authorities plus regional councils and Department of Conservation. We completed the 2006 annual survey questionnaire and submitted data to the project. We should have the results from the survey late November/early December.

2.3 Management Planning

Submissions for Battle Hill Farm Forest Park Management Plan closed on 28 April. Twenty-nine submissions were received and feedback from Councillors was gathered at a workshop on 31 May. The analysis of submissions has been submitted to the Landcare Committee meeting (report 06.248). The draft of East Harbour Regional Park Management Plan will also be considered at the meeting (report 06.247).

2.4 Pest Control Operations

Bait stations were recently refilled in Speedy’s Reserve in Belmont Regional Park, as part of an ongoing possum control operation. A professional hunter was contracted to cull deer and to assess their numbers in East Harbour Regional Park. One deer and one pig were culled and deer numbers were reported to be low, though those animals present were still having impacts on the palatable species.

2.5 Pest Plant Control Operations

Wilding pine control has been a focus of work for the pest plant team in the past month. Pines have been removed from the indigenous forest areas near the Summit in Pakuratahi Forest and between the MacKenzie Track and Muritai Park Track in East Harbour Regional Park. In Queen Elizabeth Park, contract workers have been focussing on pampas and blackberry.

2.6 Monitoring

A special rodent tracking monitor was completed with the help of volunteers in East Harbour Regional Park to assess the effectiveness of the new ‘non-toxic’ bait being trialled in the area. Over 80% of the tracking tunnels recorded rodents which is a new high for the park. There does appear to be a rat plague at present because of an abundant beech seeding year, so we will continue to trial the bait for a while longer.

3. Marketing and design

3.1 Regional Outdoors Programme

Late in April we held the Regional Outdoors Programme 2006 wrap-up barbeque for volunteers and staff at Battle Hill Farm Forest Park. Officers are meeting with key contributors and staff to debrief the programmed in order to create the basis of the Regional Outdoors Programme 2007.

Officers are also investigating options for a naming rights sponsor for the 2007 programme.

3.2 Signage

3.2.1 Akatarawa Forest Information panels

Eight new information boards at entrances to Akatarawa forest are being designed and will be completed by the end of June.

3.2.2 Loop track Interpretation - Kaitoke Regional Park

A new interpretation walkway will be developed for the Loop Track aimed at families and children. The trail will tell the story of the rain forest in Kaitoke Regional Park through a series of interpretation panels. The panels will describe the layers of the forest and then break the layers down into individual components of the forest such as the emergent trees, canopy and ground covers.

3.3 Communications

Councillors will have recently received the latest edition of our community newsletter "Green Shoots". This was mailed to over 1300 people on our database, including most members of our Parks' "Friends" groups and others who have come along to our events and expressed interest in learning more about the parks. They also received a copy of the new Belmont Regional Park brochure.

Following successful experiences with corporate groups carrying out environmental work over the last year, including a half day with Lucent Technology at the end of April, we have worked with the Environment Division on a joint article in the June issue of *Elements*. Depending on the response, we may issue a press release and develop other communication material focussing on this area. The Environment Division has already produced a leaflet promoting corporate volunteering that includes options on the parks. All the corporate groups hosted over the summer have been referred to us by the Environment Division, which has worked well for all concerned.

3.3.1 Presentations

Ross Jackson and Nikki La Monica recently addressed a meeting of *Kapiti Grey Power*, a group with 5800 members. They were given a warm reception with several members indicating they would like to be involved in volunteer activities at Queen Elizabeth Park.

Ross also did a presentation to the WelTec Recreation and Sport students on Regional Parks and the activities that take place on Council land.

Recently Ross participated in a Tourism Resource Consultants strategy session looking at recreation and visitor opportunities on the proposed Meridian West Wind site at Makara.

3.4 Wellington Region Recreation Initiatives Group

The WRRIG group met late in May to evaluate four proposals to develop the Regional Physical Activity Plan. The group selected a consultant to be recommended to Sport and Recreation NZ and, upon their approval, to commence work.

3.5 GW Awards programme

Officers have been working with several colleagues from the Environment Division since late in 2005 to research and develop a proposal for GW Environmental Awards. Recognising the efforts of schools, individuals, volunteer groups and businesses and their relationships with GWRC, the programme will, if accepted by Council, involve four categories with a ceremony to be held each November.

The proposal is to be presented to the Environment Committee on 11 July.

3.6 Community Engagement Review

Evaluations of the Regional Outdoors Programme and the Parks Volunteer Framework were developed for the Community Engagement Review Councillor workshop on 11 May.

3.7 Friends Meetings

Officers attended the regular monthly meetings of the Friends groups at Queen Elizabeth Park (QEP) and Belmont Regional Park (BRP).

At QEP, the Friends are working on a long term vision for the park, thinking how it could develop for future generations. At the same time they are keeping on with more immediate projects such as the Whareroa Stream restoration, in conjunction with officers. Meetings are now held in the ranger's new office at MacKays Crossing, a much more appropriate venue for the Friends.

At the Belmont meeting, which is held in the Stratton Street woolshed, the main discussions centred on:

- A proposal to convert the former laboratory/shearers quarters into a toilet /stopping point for visitors;
- Planning for the 12 June AGM which was addressed by Trevor Wadham, Auckland Regional Council's Farm Manager.
- Future revegetation projects

3.8 Visit to Whareroa Farm

Three Parks staff recently inspected the property with some of the Guardians of Whareroa members as part of gathering background information to report back to Council.

3.9 MacKays Crossing development

A draft plan has been completed for around the rangers office and this will extend to include the area around the barn area.

4. Western Sector

4.1 Belmont Regional Park

4.1.1 Maintenance

It has been a busy period with many different work tasks underway in the park.

We are installing the new park visitor information panels at all entrances and are preparing to relocate an office from Queen Elizabeth Park to Belmont Regional Park, Stratton Street to provide a more accessible Ranger officer for park visitors.

Consultants have been engaged to look at a conservation plan for the Belmont Magazines, also an assessment of the condition of the historic Korokoro Dam and the storm damaged trees in the Korokoro Valley.

We are preparing to replace a footbridge in the Korokoro Valley upstream of the dam. This will involve pre fabricating the structure before flying it to the site.

4.1.2 Ranging

The ranger has been dealing with various requests from neighbours including shared fencing and gorse control costs on the park boundary.

The ranger has also been having preliminary discussions with the *Friends of Belmont* about their idea to utilise a building on Waitangirua Farm for development as a public toilet and "base" for Friends activities. The idea has arisen from discussions about the need to provide park visitors with toilet facilities in the farmland at the centre of the park, especially since the *Puke Ariki* track is proving popular.

Staff have assisted *Friends of Maara Roa* with the shifting of trees for planting behind Cannons Creek. 4WD access through farmland is the only way to get the large numbers of trees near the isolated site.

We have also been providing assistance with the completed park visitor survey by retrieving infra red track counters from various locations throughout the park.

4.1.3 Events Held:

The *Hutt Valley Orienteering Club* held a successful mountain bike orienteering event through areas of Waitangirua Farm. The event involved riders negotiating a typical orienteering course through varied terrain throughout the park.

Wellington Search and Rescue held a night time training session for volunteers based at the Stratton St. woolshed education facility. The event was used to help volunteers become familiar with night time operations as well as the field use of GPS units.

A duathlon was held at the Dry Creek entrance and the *Wellington Jeep Club* used part of the Dry Creek block to complete a charity 4WD event benefiting the *Westpac Rescue Helicopter* service.

4.2 Battle Hill Farm Forest Park

4.2.1 Maintenance

Preparation the upcoming planting season is well underway with areas being spot sprayed and cleared. It has been a good autumn and ground conditions are already ideal for planting.

The last of the fertiliser was applied to the hill country on the farm and was followed immediately by good steady rain. Coupled with the warm soil temperatures it has meant that the grass has already received a boost before going into winter. The lessee farmer thinks it is the best autumn growth he has seen in his ten years on the property.

The gorse has been getting a hit around the farm to keep on top of things while new fence lines are being planned to enable the farming operation to make better use of the available pasture.

4.2.2 Ranging and Events Held

Recent publicity regarding pest eradication has seen the phone running hot for the ranger with people wanting to get involved with the programme on the park. A meeting and training session will be held soon to get people up to speed and more traps are being put out now that the work force is in place to monitor them. The programme is proving very successful at achieving environmental goals while involving the community in the park. With intensive pest control on the park, there is also the potential to introduce rare bird species to the park such as the Brown Teal.

The senior management team from *Recreation Porirua* visited Battle Hill to have a look at the park and talk with Ranger about ways in which the two teams could work better together to better provide for the recreation needs of the Porirua community. The recently held Porirua Grand Traverse was a good example of the two councils working together.

Despite the cooler weather, school groups are continuing to use the park for education visits. There have been several instances where they have had to take shelter in the Ken Gray Education Centre but on the whole the mild weather has been kind to them.

Events continue to run regularly in the park. Due to the wetter ground conditions the events have been limited to foot events of which there have been four harriers and cross country running events. The park is getting used more and more by such groups. The most recent *Olympic Harriers* events reported numbers up 30% on last years.

4.3 Queen Elizabeth Park

4.3.1 Maintenance

There has also been a lot of preparation for the winter planting season. Staff have been busy bagging up plants with the nursery being full with 10,000 plants waiting to be transplanted. We had our first corporate planting day with *Lucent Technologies* planting about 500 plants into the Marine Wetland. Arbor Day was once again a huge success with 200 students from local schools planting cabbage trees and flaxes into the Arbor Day site. We hosted two good planting days on the Wainui Stream, the Paekakariki Playcentres were a big help in getting the stream planted up. The old toilet block and shelter building on the Paekakariki side of the park have been removed, and preparations are being made for the construction of the new toilet block. A set of steps to the Memorial Lookout has been installed. The coastal track at the Raumati South entrance has received a bit of an upgrade and the fencing off of the Whareroa Stream has been completed.

4.3.2 Ranging

Lots of people have been enjoying the autumn weather here at the park. Walking the dog, riding bikes and plenty of horse-back riding have been keeping the tracks busy. Also keeping the ranger busy is cleaning up graffiti and rubbish left by users and the occasional fire down at Driftwood Bay. The ranger has attended a number of community group meetings trying to encourage more “practical” involvement within the park.

4.3.3 Events Held

The *New Zealand Equestrian Federation* had another successful weekend event here at the park. The park hosted an orienteering event as well as the *University Harriers* annual event.

4.3.4 Barn

A meeting was held with representatives of the Kapiti Coast District Council (KCDC) to discuss a possible contribution to the rebuilding work. KCDC has a fund for this type of

work. Limited funding may be available. A conservation architect is being engaged to more accurately access the work needed.

5. Eastern sector

5.1 Kaitoke Regional Park

5.1.1 Maintenance

We have been undertaking a general tidy up of the campground area which has included bark mulching, weeding and pruning the garden, replacing rotting handrail supports on the Waterworks Road access bridge, and checking the barbecues. We have also installed new signs on the Weir Track and Pakuratahi River walk, and conducted a routine check of barbecues.

5.1.2 Ranging

The Ranger spent a day in court as a witness to a disorderly behaviour charge brought by the police stemming from an incident in the campground on New Years Eve.

Two weta hotels have been installed on the loop track. No new residents to report just yet!

5.1.3 Events Held

A talk was given on the Park to the Upper Hutt branch of the *Forest and Bird Society* at their AGM.

The strong relationship between Plateau School and GWRC was further reinforced with the now annual seedling potting up morning at the school and two planting events held in the park, the latter to celebrate Arbor Day.

5.2 East Harbour Regional Park

5.2.1 Maintenance – track projects

The last of this financial year's track projects was completed in June and involved using a helicopter to transport material to two sites in the northern forest block. Boardwalks were flown to the main ridge above Days Bay where the carpentry team were on hand to carry out installation. The helicopter was then used to transport metal into the Butterfly Creek valley over a 400m section of the Mackenzie track. The procedure involves reloading containers (hoppers) with metal then transporting and depositing it directly into power barrows where it is then dispersed onto the track. Projects of this type take a fair bit of organizing regarding logistics and safety issues and Parks staff overcame this with some very efficient teamwork.

Other work has included further upgrades to the Rata Ridge track at Wainuiomata which has included installing water tables drainage and metalling.

5.2.2 Ranging

There have again been some interesting issues in recent times regarding park management. The ranger accompanied Rob Stone from Department of Conservation and a Fish and Game representative to the Lakes Block on the opening day of duck shooting. The aim was to check all permits and see if conditions were being met.

The ranger also accompanied a team from NIWA and Landcare Research to the Lakes Block. They were looking to set up a wetland monitoring site which will be part of a national research project. After setting up the plot, Bev Clarkson from Landcare Research carried out a basic site survey and concluded it was one of the best wetland sites she had visited.

5.2.3 Events Held

(a) 6 June 2006 - Crazyman Multisport Event

The annual *Crazyman Multisport* event was one of the most successful to date with around 570 entries. East Harbour Regional Park was once again used for the hill run where over 300 competitors slogged it out for 18km from Eastbourne to Wainuiomata. Considering the adverse weather conditions the tracks held up pretty well and organizers reported no problems. The other disciplines of the race held outside the park included a 38km mountain bike ride and a 12km kayak.

(b) 27 June 2006 - Restoration Day 2006

This year's annual Restoration Day was held at the Community Hall, Eastbourne. The event celebrates the work of volunteers in ecological restoration around the Wellington region. The Mainland Island at East Harbour Regional Park was the focus of one of the afternoon field trips. This was a good opportunity for the local *MIRO* (Mainland Island Restoration Organization) group to showcase their vision for the park.

5.3 Wainuiomata/ Orongorongo Catchments

5.3.1 Maintenance

Officers have carried on with upgrades in the recreation area with a new track being built to a swimming hole previously unvisited due to access problems. We have extended the boardwalk across Nikau stream and removed the Moores Valley gate and installed barriers. The front fence has been painted forest green. Culverts have been cleaned out on all the walking tracks in the recreation area prior to winter. A contractor using a digger cleaned out the scour pipes at the lower dam that have had a build up of debris deposited in them.

During the week of 29 May all Possum Warrior Kill Traps and Rat Peli-feed Bait Stations in the Wainuiomata Mainland Island were checked and set/refilled by GWRC staff members. The next check and refill is programmed for the week of 24 July.

5.3.2 Ranging

The rangers have been helping the fencing contractor on the fourth and last stage of the fence line down Moores Valley Ridge. This is going well and it looks like the contract will finish on time.

5.3.3 Events Held

Seventeen school trips have taken place in the Wainuiomata Catchment recreation area. These trips were made up from three different schools with ages ranging from 6-13 years old. They looked at the water quality just below Morton Dam and then went for a walk around the Sledge Track to discuss the native bush and its part in water quality. The rangers mainly helped out with the Sledge Track walk, identifying trees and shrubs and explaining the role that the Wainuiomata Water Catchment Area forest plays in the quality of water it produces.

The *Kaumatuia tramping club* came to Wainuiomata Catchment recreation area on 3 May to walk around our tracks. While they were here the ranger took them up to the lower dam site to explain more about the water collection area and the projects going on in that area.

Walking tours were held on 7 and 28 May.

5.4 Akatarawa/ Pakuratahi Forests

5.4.1 Maintenance

A fair amount of time has been spent maintaining the access roads into the Tunnel Gully Reserve and the Rimutaka Incline walkway. As we are still not able to make use of the prison crews due to staff shortages within the prisons, we have to continually address the potholes ourselves. Improvements have been made to run-offs within several of the historic cuttings on the entrance to the Incline and these seem to be working well.

During this period we have also repaired an old “greasy back” slip that occurred approximately 20 years ago. Due to the reasonably dry weather this year, we have had the opportunity to reinstate this piece of formation as close as possible to its original form.

The ranger continues to maintain the approaches to the main Rimutaka Incline Summit tunnel. As we did some work there recently, these freshly turned sites are often vulnerable to heavy rain until such time as they “settle”.

In the Akatarawa Forest, as a large portion of the tracks have native/indigenous vegetation bordering their edges, the growth is not as much of a problem as in the areas where you have gorse or small scale secondary growth. Hydro-mowing of the tracks within the Akatarawa Forest is not therefore required as frequently as in other areas. We continue to monitor the growth to ensure good, safe vision for recreational users is possible at all times.

5.4.2 Events Held

Access requirements continue to be constant with club 4WD recreational trips occurring in the Akatarawa Forest every weekend combined with training needs of *Military Police, NZ Army, Police Dog Training School, Police Department* driver training exercises, our own staff driver training programmes and other access requirements of a minor nature. Things seem to be going well with little to no conflict between the various recreational users.

Murray Waititi
Manager, Parks