

Report 13.93  
Date 6 March 2013  
File ENV/11/04/04

Committee Social and Cultural Wellbeing  
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Parks department

## Reinstatement of the pine block at Belmont Regional Park

### 1. Purpose

To provide background information and seek approval from the committee to reinvest the funds from the Belmont logging operation and allow the former Stratton Street pine plantation to revegetate indigenous species as outlined in this report.

### 2. The decision-making process and significance

Officers recognise that the matters referenced in this report may have a high degree of importance to affected or interested parties.

The matters requiring decision in this report have been considered by officers against the requirements of Part 6 of the Local Government Act 2002. Part 6 sets out the obligations of local authorities in relation to the making of decisions.

#### 2.1 Significance of the decision

Part 6 requires Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) to consider the significance of the decision. The term ‘significance’ has a statutory definition set out in the Act.

Officers have considered the significance of the matter, taking the Council's significance policy and decision-making guidelines into account. Officers recommend that the matter be considered to have low significance.

Officers do not consider that a formal record outlining consideration of the decision-making process is required in this instance.

### 3. Background

In August 2011 a proposal to log the 24 hectare block of pines at Stratton Street, Belmont Regional Park was presented to the Parks department by Forest Owner Marketing Services Ltd.

At the time, two neighbouring forest owners were also planning to log pine plantations on their properties. Including GWRC's block in this operation made sense in terms of potential efficiencies with logging machinery and resources.

This project was first brought to the attention of senior managers and councillors in October 2011. It was discussed in some detail as part of the 8 August 2012 presentation to a councillor workshop, and on the 28 November site visit. During these sessions, we discussed and agreed in principle that the logging revenue would be re-invested in the park. Major items would include reinstatement of the Danzig track and construction of a fence to retire part of the upper Cannons Creek catchment.

When the prospect of logging was raised with the community, the scale, timing and potential effects of this work on the regional park generated significant public concern beyond what might be expected with logging on private land.

To understand these issues more fully, the Parks department set up a consultation process, starting with a meeting with stakeholder groups, neighbours and members of the public in October 2011. Here people were able to voice their concerns, views and expectations regarding the proposed logging operation. Key concerns included effects on the Korokoro stream catchment, the impact on recreation activities and what was planned for the site post-logging.

In addition, the public were asked to submit their views via the Belmont Regional Park section on the GWRC website. When the survey closed on 31 December 2011 19 submitters had responded.

Submitters were asked how the site should be reinstated once logging had finished. Thirteen of the submitters wanted natives to re-grow in the area in keeping with the biodiversity values of the Hutt Valley. Two submitters wanted pines to be replanted while the remainder did not mind what was reinstated as long as it was a natural environment and the mountain bike routes were rebuilt.

Submitters commented that regeneration of native bush should match the other indigenous growth in Belmont Regional Park which grows more densely than pine forest. It also encourages wildlife, is longer lasting and adds to the recreational value.

In general all submitters felt that the area has superb recreation values and that walking tracks and mountain bike trails were important for the area. Many of the submitters specifically asked for reinstatement of the trails destroyed by harvesting with one submitter suggesting a partnership between GWRC and the local mountain bike interest group to reinstate the trails in some form on the logged site.

Due to the nature of the operation, resource consents were required from both Hutt City Council (for the logging operation on the regional park) and GWRC (covering a new culvert on the site, land use and earthworks). Applications for consents were prepared and submitted in early 2012 to both agencies. These were granted in late March along with approval of an erosion and sediment control plan which guides management of environmental issues associated with the project.

The logging operation got underway in November 2012 with water/sediment control measures put in place prior to construction of skid sites and road access.

Progress to date has been steady with 1935 tonnes of logs being extracted and sent for sale as at the end of February 2013. Most of these logs are exported to China.

The road and skid construction part of the operation will be complete in late April. The clear fell operation is scheduled to begin in late May as the machinery is freed up from its current commitment. During the period of no activity, it is hoped to open public access to tracks unaffected by logging operations to date.

#### **4. Comment**

Logging costs and revenue expectations were updated in October 2012 once conditions imposed through the resource consent approvals and prevailing market conditions were fully known.

Based on prevailing export log prices and the exchange rate against the US\$, the logging of the Belmont Regional Park pine block is expected to provide a net return of approximately \$200,000. In undertaking this review of costs and income a conservative approach has been taken given the variables that exist in the market.

Currently export log prices are firm with small increases recorded. The exchange rate remains high although has dropped back slightly in recent weeks. This remains the most variable factor in reaching projected revenue returns.

Taking into consideration consent conditions and public feedback for reinstatement a range of options has been developed for expenditure within in the operational logging area and the wider Belmont Regional Park.

These options for reinvestment of the revenue to a value of \$200,000 are outlined below and largely reflect views of community groups, stakeholders and members of the public.

## **5. Reinvestment options**

### **5.1 Easy access mountain bike/walking track and associated signage - \$75,000**

This new track would replace the “Danzig” track that provided access through the pine block to the Old Coach Road prior to the logging being undertaken. It would restore a major link for walkers and bike riders to other opportunities within the Park. Park users regard this track as an essential aspect of the rehabilitation.

Through following shallower grades than the former Danzig Track, this new track would provide easier access for a greater range of park users to the Old Coach Road from Stratton Street. It would thereby open up other opportunities further into the park.

### **5.2 Upper Cannons Creek catchment retirement - \$60,000**

It is proposed to bring forward the retirement from grazing of the Upper Cannons Creek catchment as detailed in the Sustainable Land Use Plan. This catchment drains into the Porirua Harbour and is seen as vital in enhancing this important area.

Officers from the Catchment Management department will be involved in confirming the exact alignment of any fence drawing on their extensive experience in this field.

### **5.3 Car park development - \$20,000**

To construct and landscape a car park behind the Stratton Street woolshed classroom, in the area currently used as a skid site . This will provide an all weather surface and define the car parking space and the entry point to recreational opportunities within the former pine block and beyond. The sediment control pond constructed for the logging operation would become permanent as a water control measure for the car park

### **5.4 Completion of Korokoro catchment fencing - \$20,000**

Funding was approved through the LTP process for retirement fencing in the Korokoro catchment area in the 2011/12 financial year. While this work is underway a further amount will be required to complete the project to meet the desired outcomes.

The proposed amount will see the fencing project completed and planting of the remaining head water catchments as outlined in the Sustainable Land Use Plan prepared for Belmont Regional Park.

### **5.5 Skid/road rehabilitation - \$10,000**

Some cleanup around skid sites and access roads will be required to ensure water runoff is well controlled and any sediment movement contained.

One skid is ideally located to act as a heli pad for future park operations while the logging road will give direct all weather management access to the Old

Coach Road and the Park interior from Stratton Street. Both pieces of infrastructure will greatly support park management activities.

#### **5.6 Wilding pine/weed control - \$5000**

One of the requirements of the resource consent issued by Hutt City Council is to manage weeds and wilding pines within the logged area. It is proposed to undertake monitoring in conjunction with the Biodiversity Department to identify weed species. We would then develop monitoring and control programmes using the most cost efficient techniques.

The logging area falls within the Korokoro Biodiversity Management Area for which a Biodiversity Area Plan is currently being developed. During the first year of the 10-year plan, those weeds and wilding pines immediately visible would be controlled. Work in future years will need to be funded from Parks budgets.

As part of this programme we will explore ways to involve the community in removing wilding pine seedlings. This has worked well in other parts of New Zealand, with recreational users removing seedlings while visiting the park.

#### **5.7 Speedys Catchment Planting - \$5000**

This would see implementation of the Sustainable Land Use Plan proposal to plant the head of this catchment with recommended poplar poles.

#### **5.8 Belmont Area Mountain Bike Association (BAMBA) - \$5000**

It is proposed to provide BAMBA with some funding to assist them with development of a downhill network of mountain bike tracks to be developed in consultation with officers and specified through a management agreement between the parties.

This acknowledges the work that had been undertaken on the unofficial network of downhill tracks in the pines that will be destroyed through the logging operation. Working with BAMBA in this way will ensure that required safety standards are met; the tracks are recorded in our management systems and can be promoted to the wider community. The management agreement would note that responsibility for maintaining these downhill tracks would sit with BAMBA.

It has also been suggested a "Pump" (bike loop track with humps and hollows) track be developed at the end of Stratton Street to allow younger riders to practice and develop skills. This would provide a one stop shop for families who are looking for a range of opportunities and experience levels.

Experience exists within the local mountain bike community to develop such a track. Should any surplus revenue be available, construction of a pump track would be seen as a priority.

## **6. Reinstatement/revegetation of logged area**

The Hutt City Council resource consent requires that we develop a plan for the revegetation of the logged area.

Through the public submission process, natural revegetation to native forest cover was strongly supported.

We believe that a strong native seed source exists in the under storey of the logged area that will germinate and provide a good crop of pioneer native cover. Numerous native saplings existed under the pine canopy and we expect these to shoot away again from the remaining root structures. Pine trees were removed from an area adjacent to the logged area five years ago and canopy closure has already been achieved.

Submitters supported “enrichment” planting of native forest tree species, eg. Totara as the protecting pioneer species become established.

Two submitters expressed an interest in seeing re-establishment of an exotic plantation crop. Most submitters rejected this as an option to avoid having to go through the logging process again and the loss of opportunity it presents. They also noted that it does not fit with the character of the park.

Noting all these comments, and the planned sale of cutting rights in GWRC plantation forests, the Parks department recommends that the site be encouraged to revegetate in indigenous forest cover, supported by occasional “enrichment” planting and control of exotic weed species.

To help remove the waste wood, minimise future fire risk, and build community relations, we also propose to run a permit system for the public to remove firewood from the skid sites. Members of the community have commented this gesture would help compensate for losing the use of the area through the logging operation.

## **7. Communication**

The community has been kept informed throughout the planning and operational phases of the operation. This has been achieved by way of drop in meetings, stakeholder group committee meetings, web page updates and community newsletters.

Officers have made themselves available to answer questions and provide information on an ongoing basis and will continue to do so until completion of the operation.

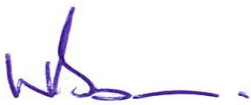
## **8. Recommendations**

*That the Committee:*

- 1. Receives the report.*
- 2. Notes the content of the report.*

3. *Notes the public support for the revegetation of the former Stratton Street pine plantation land and for the reinvestment proposals outlined in sections 5 and 6 of this report.*
4. *Agrees to the revegetation of the former Stratton Street pine plantation land in indigenous species.*
5. *Endorses the reinvestment proposals outlined in sections 5 and 6 of this report for approval by Council on 12 June 2013 as part of the process for the finalisation of the Annual Plan 2013/14.*

Report prepared by:



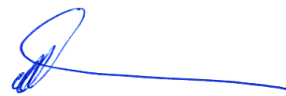
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