

Report to the Landcare Committee
from Anne Manley, Parks Planner - Policy, Regional Parks (Strategy & Marketing)

Future Direction for East Harbour Regional Park

1. Purpose

To report on a key Regional Parks management task for 1998/99 on the future direction for East Harbour Regional Park (EHRP), and to report back on issues arising at the EHRP Workshop held in April 1999.

2. Key Management Task

Regional Parks (Strategy & Marketing) is required to comprehensively review and make recommendations to the Landcare Committee on the values, future direction, and management of EHRP (including the Regional Council's interests at Baring Head and the Lakes Block), by 30 June 1999.

3. East Harbour Regional Park Workshop Debrief

On 7 April 1999, Councillors joined officers for a tour and workshop at EHRP to consider the future of the Park. The aim of the Workshop was to obtain feedback from Councillors on the suggested direction for EHRP. Key outcomes from discussions included support for:

- protecting the unique, undeveloped and rugged coastal environment (incorporating escarpments, bush, wetlands, and lakes), and the sea and city views that make the Park so distinctive;
- enabling more people to experience the Park's outstanding natural environment;
- developing a long term *vision* for the Park to safeguard it for future generations;
- Wellington Regional Council (WRC) taking the lead¹ in the Park.

¹ Land rationalisation (WRC becoming the lead agency) and access issues to be resolved as "building blocks" for future planning.

The Officers' summary of key issues (Park values and possible future action) is included in **Attachment 1**. Officers were asked to report back on a strategy for dealing with land rationalisation and access issues; addressed below.

4. Core Values at East Harbour Regional Park

At the Workshop, Officers reported on the EHRP *Signature Values* assessment. The Park rates highly in all three (recreation, environment and heritage) categories, and overall EHRP has the highest existing values across the Park Network. The *Signature Values* are summarised in Table 1. The EHRP *Signature Map*, illustrating the zones and their comparative values, is shown on the next page.

Table 1 : EHRP *Signature Values*

	Recreation Values	Environment Values	Heritage Values
East Harbour	<p>Exceptional: The bush tracks from Wainuiomata Hill to Days Bay and to Butterfly Creek are well used by walkers, trampers and runners. The Pencarrow Coast Road is used by walkers, trampers, cyclists and runners to visit the lighthouse. A few trampers, naturalists and hunters access the Lakes Block. Baring Head is regionally significant for rock climbing.</p> <p>Park visitors estimated at over 100,000 per year. (The highest use area is the Pencarrow Coast Road. Numbers are much lower beyond Pencarrow Head i.e. at the Lakes Block & Baring Head.)</p>	<p>High: A large area of regenerating indigenous forest behind Eastbourne. Some regionally significant species in gullies and on hill tops. Lakes Kohangatera and Kohangapiripiri are surrounded by reverting pasture and regenerating indigenous forest. Breeding area for black shag, Australasian bittern, pukeko, black swan, and spotless crane. Rare plants on the beach ridges and swamps.</p> <p>Indigenous fish species are present in the Lakes and Gollans Stream.</p>	<p>Exceptional: Many remains of Maori occupation around the Lakes - stone walls, midden sites, dendroglyphs, cultivation sites. Pencarrow Lighthouse was the first lighthouse built in NZ. Child's grave. Several shipwrecks. Pioneer route to Wairarapa. Kiosk site at Butterfly Creek c.1930. Maori route Lowry Bay to Wainuiomata c.1840.</p>

5. Key Elements in East Harbour Regional Park

At the Workshop, the key elements in the Park were identified as the Lakes Block, Baring Head and the coastal margins (refer **Attachment 2**).

It is evident from the *Signature Values* process, that Zone 1 (the Lakes Block and the coastal margins between Burdan's Gate and Pencarrow Head) clearly has the highest recreation, environmental and heritage values in the Park (refer Table 1 and the *Signature Map*). The values at Baring Head and the Northern Block are addressed separately below.

5.1 Baring Head

The *Signature* for Baring Head² shows moderate recreation values and low environmental and heritage values. However, at the Workshop Councillors considered that the flat land at the top of Baring Head (although only a small part of the peninsula) was still of strategic importance and sought to retain the area for its high landscape values; to protect views to and from the Wellington Harbour and City for future generations. Mention was also made of the need to improve access (refer section 6.2) and of utilising the buildings on-site (e.g. environmental education opportunities for school groups). These are matters for further investigation in the long term, once the access issue is resolved.

Retaining control and management of this piece of land adds weight to the argument for land rationalisation in other areas of the Park (refer section 6.1 below), to enhance overall co-ordination. However, Officers note that it may also result in short-term management problems e.g. security for the buildings on-site.

5.2 Northern Block

The inclusion of the Northern Block in EHRP was discussed at the Workshop; however, Officers seek clarification on this matter from the Committee. There are a number of issues to look at when considering the future of the Northern Block.

There are high environmental values in the Northern Block, moderate recreation values, and low heritage values (refer *Signature Map*). This area is a distinct environment, quite different from the rugged coastline experienced at the southern end of EHRP. Arguably the Northern Block could be classified as a separate park. It is sometimes said that the Northern Block (which straddles the hills between Eastbourne and Wainuiomata) is akin to a "town belt", used largely by locals rather than visitors from different parts of the Region. Alternatively, it can be argued that the values of the area warrant its inclusion in EHRP, and that there are advantages from having contrasting experiences within one park. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that visitors to areas like Butterfly Creek are not only local but also region-wide.

There are many aspects relating to the Northern Block that either require clarification, or about which very little is known. This suggests that in order to make an informed decision, more work (including public consultation) is needed.

As part of looking at the future direction for EHRP, the Park's Management Plan (which governs WRC operations within the Park) will need to be revised. (The EHRP Management Plan is current for WRC land in the Park until 2000.) This revision process will involve public consultation on the detail in the Plan (including proposed changes at EHRP). The future of the Northern Block could be addressed publicly as part of the Management Plan review, the consultation phase of which is scheduled to commence during the 2000/01 financial year (refer section 7 below). Prior to this, we could undertake work to better understand the values and recreational use of the area.

²

For the purposes of this exercise, Baring Head included the small area of land that the WRC controls and manages (owned by the Department of Conservation) and the associated coastal escarpment. When taking into account the Baring Head peninsula, it can be argued that the area has important landscape values, viewed from the entrance to Wellington Harbour and Wellington City. In fact the wider Baring Head peninsula was identified in the WRC Draft Landscape Plan as an *outstanding landscape*, the highest of three categories of landscape.

6. Resolving the Fundamental Issues

At the Workshop, Councillors discussed the need for a long term *vision* for the Park. There are two fundamental issues to be resolved if a long term *vision* (perhaps 20-40 years) for EHRP is to be developed: land rationalisation and access.

6.1 Land Rationalisation

There are a number of management issues/problems associated with EHRP:

- There is no lead agency to manage the Park; currently there are three agencies (Department of Conservation, Hutt City Council, WRC) with an interest in the Park but little co-ordination;
- There is very little funding for the Park provided by these agencies;
- The aim, objectives and policies in the EHRP Management Plan are in abeyance due to a lack of co-ordination and funding;
- The Management Plan has never been ratified by all three agencies³;
- The Local Government Act 1974 states that the WRC shall continue to have responsibility for EHRP. There is increasing public pressure to formalise the Park, yet the land within the Park is not defined;
- There are community expectations that the WRC will be the co-ordinating body.

One way of overcoming these problems would be to rationalise control and management of the Park under one agency, which would then assume management. That agency would be responsible for co-ordinating planning and maintenance operations, and would be the contact agency for the public. This arrangement has worked well at Belmont Regional Park where, for over ten years, the WRC has owned part of the Park and managed recreational access across private and public land on behalf of other agencies. Among Councillors at the Workshop, there appeared to be support for the WRC taking over a similar role as the lead agency at EHRP.

Before this can be done, officers will need to negotiate with both the Department of Conservation and Hutt City Council, to transfer control and management of their land to the WRC (including the esplanade reserves around Lake Kohangapiripiri and Lake Kohangatera (Hutt City); Lakes Kohangapiripiri and Kohangatera, and the Pencarrow Lighthouse Reserve (Department of Conservation)).

Public comments on this issue will be sought through the review of the EHRP Management Plan, although officers intend seeking preliminary comments from directly affected parties before formal consultation on the Plan commences.

³ The current EHRP management plan (1995) was prepared in association with the Department of Conservation and Hutt City Council and the public. Legal issues meant that it was never signed by the Department or Hutt City. In short, the Department of Conservation received legal advice that unless control and management of the Crown owned reserves were vested in the Regional Council, the reserves could not be deemed "regional park" and therefore could not legally be governed by the Management Plan. The Plan remains the operative policy for land owned by the Regional Council within the Park, and a guide for other agencies. The plan provided opportunities to rationalise management of the Park and encourage the three agencies to work together; however, no overall co-ordination occurred.

6.2 Access

Pencarrow Coast Road

Hutt City Council owns the Pencarrow Coast Road for the purpose of maintaining its main sewer outfall. Public access is dependent upon Hutt City's policy for the Coast Road. The WRC currently has access for monitoring the sewer outfall and for management of its land and assets in the area. Members of the public can access the road for walking and cycling. It takes two hours to walk from Burdan's Gate to the Lakes Block (2½ to Lake Kohangatera; 3 hours to Baring Head). As a consequence, most recreational activity takes place on the Pencarrow Coast Road north of Pencarrow Head (Eastbourne side). Only a few people venture any further south.

At the Workshop, Councillors agreed that improving access to the southern end of the Pencarrow Coast Road, i.e. beyond Pencarrow Head (to the Lakes Block in particular) is imperative if more people are to experience the unique environment in the area. Resolving access would then be a catalyst to begin any recreation initiatives at the Lakes Block (the focus being on passive recreation - as in other parts of the Park).

When considering access, it will be important to remember the sensitive nature of the environment and the need to safeguard both environmental and heritage features at the Lakes Block, some of which are of national or regional significance. In any event, it may be advisable to limit most vehicle access to a point some distance away from the Block (e.g. a 30-minute walk) as a measure of ongoing protection, and to ensure that the area is not made more accessible at the expense of the remoteness, that current visitors to the Lakes Block, find so attractive.

Baring Head

The second access issue relates to the flat land at Baring Head. WRC has a right-of-way across private land for management purposes only. Public access is limited to the coastal margins (walking and cycling). Many people access Baring Head (a popular rock climbing area) by walking from the Wainuiomata Coast Road, along the coast, through the Wainuiomata River. If the Baring Head peninsula was to be promoted as a viewing site and/or an education centre, vehicle access would need to be improved.

Comment

Several options have been identified as *potential* access points which would make the southern end of the Park (the Lakes Block and Baring Head) more easily accessible. Discussions are needed with Hutt City, the Department of Conservation, and adjacent private landowners to investigate the access issue. This issue may take some time to resolve.

7. The First 10 Years

A timetable outlining proposed work at EHRP during the next ten years is included in **Attachment 3**. It is intended that during the first four years Officers will focus on access and land rationalisation issues, while maintaining *current* service levels. During this time a visitor survey and preliminary consultation with interest groups will be undertaken, and a review of the Management Plan commenced.

It is envisaged that during Year 1 (1999/2000) costs will be absorbed in the existing budget, as other than the survey and current operations, there will not be significant amounts of work required.

Indicative planning costs are offered for Years 2–4 (refer Table 2). Work during this phase will focus on resolving land rationalisation and access problems (likely to incur legal and property management costs), and formally commencing the Management Plan review. (During Year 1 views of interested/affected parties will be sought only on an informal basis.) Funding for Years 2–4 will be a matter for consideration during the *next* review of the Long-term Financial Strategy (LTFS), commencing later this year.

Table 2 : Timetable and Costings for Years 2–4

Year	Programme	Cost
Year 1 (99/00)	<p>Strategy & Marketing: Undertake visitor survey⁴ at EHRP and report to the Landcare Committee on findings Preliminary consultation with Hutt City and Department of Conservation re: land rationalisation; also with interested/affected parties re: EHRP access and on review of EHRP Management Plan Planning for review of EHRP Management Plan</p> <p>Operations: Maintain current programme (e.g. gorse control, limited ranger surveillance, signage)</p>	<p>WRC staff time (1/4 FTE)</p> <p>Operating: \$17,000 Ranging: \$10,000</p>
Year 2 (00/01)	<p>Strategy & Marketing: Continue negotiations re: EHRP access and land rationalisation issues (aim to resolve land rationalisation issues with Hutt City and Department of Conservation) Commence review of EHRP Management Plan (preliminary public consultation – focus groups)</p> <p>Operations: Maintain current programme</p>	<p>WRC staff time (1/3 FTE)</p> <p>\$50,000⁵ [Additional]: Property consultants & legal advisors Gazetting costs (HCC/DoC land) Management Plan input (e.g. workshop facilitators)</p> <p>Operating: \$17,000 Ranging: \$10,000</p>
Year 3 (01/02)	<p>Strategy & Marketing: Continue negotiations re: EHRP access issues Continue drafting EHRP Management Plan Preliminary consultation on draft</p> <p>Operations: Maintain current programme</p>	<p>WRC staff time (1/3 FTE)</p> <p>\$30,000 [Additional]: Property consultants & legal advisors \$10,000 [Additional]: planning issues (Management Plan input, landscape plans) \$10,000 [Additional]: heritage & ecology issues (e.g. consultant research costs)</p> <p>Operating: \$17,000 Ranging: \$10,000</p>

⁴ We envisage that this survey (encompassing both the Northern and Southern Blocks) will be designed to address issues specific to EHRP, in a similar way to the survey conducted this year, which focused on the Akatarawa Forest. EHRP is not currently included in the annual visitor satisfaction survey as the questions are not considered appropriate for obtaining the information needed for the Park.

⁵ \$50,000pa *excludes* any land purchase or easement costs. Operations costs are based on maintaining current service levels and existing estimates.

Year 4 (02/03)	Strategy & Marketing: Continue negotiations re: EHRP access issues Continue drafting EHRP Management Plan and begin formal public notification/consultation process Operations: Maintain current programme	WRC staff time (1/3 FTE) \$50,000[Additional]: Property consultants & legal advisors Costs associated with public consultation (e.g. facilitators, advertising/notification) Consultant reports on heritage & ecological issues Landscape plans Operating: \$17,000 Ranging: \$10,000
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For Years 6–10 (2003/04–2008/09), components of expenditure (i.e. things that could be undertaken) have been listed (refer **Attachment 3**) rather than estimated costs. The components are based on implementing Development Concept 2 (refer section 7.1) and maintaining/enhancing service levels.

Decisions on exactly what, if any, of these tasks are to be undertaken, will be for consideration in *future* LTFS reviews (2003 onwards). Officers will be in a better position to give detailed reports on development costs once land rationalisation and access issues have been resolved, and public consultation has been undertaken.

7.1. **Long-term Issues : Lakes Block Development Concept 2**

At the Workshop, Councillors generally agreed that once land rationalisation and access issues have been addressed, the focus should turn to the Lakes Block.

The grazing licence at the Lakes Block expires in 2004. It would be helpful to have the planning and public consultation completed, and decisions made on future management of the Block before this date. Development Concept 2 for the Lakes Block (which would change the current concept in the Management Plan from open space and grazing to regeneration of bush, retention of open space on the ridge tops, and no grazing), was generally favoured at the Workshop (refer **Attachment 4**).

Development Concept 2 will require the Park to be funded to levels similar to the other regional parks, with a ranger employed to manage and co-ordinate development and maintenance. Funding would also be required for capital works projects in the Park.

With Councillors agreement, officers would like to present Concept 2 for public consultation, through the review of the Management Plan commencing in the 2000/01 financial year, as it is different to the concept in the current Management Plan.

8. Links with Wider Council Objectives

EHRP provides a number of opportunities to contribute to key Council objectives and outcomes. In particular, a strategy for maintaining and enhancing the values at EHRP would contribute to Regional Policy Statement (RPS) implementation, biodiversity, and provide opportunities associated with the Environmental Education and Communication Strategy.

8.1 Regional Policy Statement Implementation

The Council's Environment Division advises that Development Concept 2 for the Lakes Block would contribute to achieving the RPS ecosystems and biodiversity objectives.

In particular, such a concept would contribute to achieving RPS Ecosystems Objectives 4 and 5. The protection of the Lakes, the protection of rare vegetation, and in the longer term, the removal of grazing and a focus on revegetation, would contribute to the active protection of some of the Region's most rare and special ecosystems (Ecosystems Objective 5). This type of initiative would also contribute to the maintenance of regional biodiversity (Ecosystems Objective 4 – see section 8.2 below) as the wetland habitats found in and around the Lakes are unusual in the Region.

Furthermore, these actions would give effect to the commitment the Council has made in the RPS to "protect or enhance high priority degraded ecosystems *where it is within our power to do so*" (Ecosystems Method 11). It is envisaged that the Regional Parks and Natural Forestry Asset Management Plan will assist the identification and management of special ecosystems.

The protection of the heritage values of EHRP would give effect to Landscape and Heritage Objective 3, where those values are of *regional* significance.

8.2 Biodiversity

Wetlands, lowland forests, and coastal margins are amongst the most threatened ecosystems in the Region. EHRP is, therefore, potentially of importance to the Council in terms of managing biodiversity. The Lakes Block and coastal margins have high values as ecosystems.

There are a range of initiatives that could be undertaken at EHRP which would contribute to biodiversity⁶. These include:

- Key Native Ecosystem identification and treatment (identification underway);
- extending pest plant management;
- pest animal management (e.g. goat control on the coastal margins);
- planting of native and regionally appropriate species;
- riparian/wetland management;
- protecting indigenous vegetation, landscapes, geological features, and the coastal dune system.

⁶ The variability among living organisms from all sources including, *inter alia*, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems [WRC Regional Policy Statement, May 1995]

In addition to providing the opportunity to contribute to RPS implementation and biodiversity, a strategy to maintain and/or enhance the values at EHRP would also provide an opportunity to support the purpose and principles in the Resource Management Act 1991 (e.g. preservation of the natural character of the coastal environment, indigenous flora and fauna, and heritage sites).

8.3 **Environmental Education and Communication Strategy**

There is the potential to develop educational programmes e.g. field trips on coastal wetland and marine environments at EHRP, and to increase awareness of biodiversity issues. Lake Kohangatera and Lake Kohangapiripiri are the only freshwater lakes in the Wellington metropolitan area – these, and the associated wetlands would provide valuable educational opportunities for schools in the Region.

EHRP is a unique coastal environment and volunteer groups with an interest in botanical and ecological matters may also benefit from improved access and the introduction of educational and community programmes by the Council (e.g. caregroups to help with revegetation of the Lakes Block) - *Not selling by telling, but selling by doing.*

9. **Long-term Financial Strategy : Operation Wareham**

The EHRP strategy will need to be considered further through the LTFS process and in relation to other work proposed in the Regional Parks and across all other WRC functional areas.

The Council has already noted several strategic opportunities within Regional Parks (e.g. Whitireia Park, biodiversity work, environmental education, and RPS implementation). The next full review of the LTFS, later this year, will determine priorities and set service levels (i.e. “*bigger, better, different, the same or even less*”).

As the *Future Directions for Regional Parks* report (99.18) and the related “Porcupine Diagram” (**Attachment 5**) show, there are several opportunities for land rationalisation and revising service levels across the Parks Network, *including* EHRP. Focusing on EHRP would provide options for achieving a number of outcomes - RPS implementation, the Environmental Education and Communication Strategy, (e.g. through volunteer planting programmes), biodiversity, as well as the protection of heritage values, in an *existing* area.

Once land rationalisation and access issues have been resolved and a strategy for maintaining/enhancing the values is underway, there will also be opportunities to raise the profile of the EHRP through marketing and promotion, and potentially sponsorship.

10. Land Purchase Reserve

As discussed at the Workshop in April, the future direction of EHRP depends largely on resolving the access problem. If this issue is to be to the satisfaction of all parties, it may be necessary to find “inventive” solutions. In order to fund any land purchase to achieve access, it may be necessary to draw on the Regional Parks Land Purchase Reserve. Officers will report back to the Landcare and Policy and Finance Committees once further work has been done, if access to the Land Purchase Reserve is likely to be required.

11. Communications

Regional Parks staff will prepare a press release in conjunction with Corporate Communications to publicise the Council’s commitment to reviewing the direction of EHRP. Public consultation and communication will be undertaken through the planned survey of the Park in 1999/2000, preliminary consultation with interested parties on land rationalisation and access issues, and through the review of the EHRP Management Plan.

12. Recommendations

That the Landcare Committee:

- (1) *Receive the report and note the contents.*
- (2) *Note the recreation, environment, and heritage Signature Values of East Harbour Regional Park.*
- (3) *Agree that the Lakes Block, Baring Head and the coastal margins are the key elements of the Park.*
- (4) *Agree that the fundamental issues to be resolved for the future of East Harbour Regional Park are land rationalisation and access, and that these issues need to be addressed before progressing with plans for new recreation, environmental or heritage initiatives in the Park.*
- (5) *Agree to officers seeking agreement from the other Park landowners to the WRC becoming the lead agency in East Harbour Regional Park.*
- (6) *Note the proposed timetable for progressing work on East Harbour Regional Park during Years 1–4 (1999/2000–2002/2003).*
- (7) *Note that public consultation will be undertaken through a visitor survey (in 2000) and the review of the Management Plan (from 2001) incorporating discussion on the continued inclusion of the Northern Block in the Park, and Development Concept 2 for the Lakes Block.*
- (8) *Note the opportunities to contribute to key Council objectives and outcomes through maintaining and/or enhancing the values at East Harbour Regional Park (e.g. Regional Policy Statement implementation, biodiversity, and the Environmental Education and Communication Strategy).*

- (9) *Note that development of East Harbour Regional Park will be addressed as part of the next Long-term Financial Strategy.*
- (10) *Note that to fund any land purchase, it may be necessary to access the Land Purchase Reserve in the future.*

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- Attachment 1 : Tour and Workshop April 1999 : Summary of Key Issues
Attachment 2 : Map of East Harbour Regional Park
Attachment 3 : Proposed Work Programme
Attachment 4 : Concept Development Plan : Option 2
Attachment 5 : Porcupine Diagram : Opportunities Within Existing Regional Parks Network
For The Next Three Years