

Report 99.455

10 August 1999

File: R/2/11/1

dh:Reports\LC99455.SEE

Report to the Landcare Committee
from Susan Edwards, Manager, Regional Parks (Strategy & Marketing)

New Zealand Native Forests Restoration Trust Application for a Grant to Purchase Land

1. Purpose

To:

- consider an application by the New Zealand Native Forests Restoration Trust for a grant from the Council towards the purchase of a block of land; and
- note that officers are working through the issues raised in the Annual Plan submission by the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust.

2. The Native Forests Restoration Trust's Request

The New Zealand Native Forests Restoration Trust wrote to the Council Chairman seeking a grant towards the purchase of land near Featherston (**Attachment 1**).

The Trust has agreed to purchase for \$165,000, a 350 hectare block of land (locally known as Pigeon Bush) to protect Princes Stream and its surrounding native flora and fauna. The block adjoins land already owned by the Trust on the Rimutaka Hill. The nearest WRC land is the Pakuratahi Forest on the western side of the Rimutaka Hill. The Forest and Pigeon Bush are separated by the Rimutaka Park (DoC) and Rimutaka Restoration Reserve (NZNFRT).

The Trust intends to develop walking tracks in the forest and hopes that regeneration will allow re-establishment of rare and uncommon species. WRC officers have not undertaken any formal assessment of the values of Pigeon Bush. Like many bush remnants, it was selectively logged in the past but is now regenerating.

Both the new block and the original block owned by the Trust come within the Featherston Crown bovine Tb operational area. As a result the Council has been undertaking possum control activities on both of these blocks since 1996. A further aerial 1080 operation is currently planned for next financial year.

3. **The Council's Ability to Make Grants**

The Council has received several requests for grants in the past and has declined them because of the legal restrictions on this Council making grants of this nature.

The Local Government Act 1974 does not give the Regional Council power to make grants. Therefore, the Council does not have a fund for making grants for the purchase of land for conservation purposes or to assist private landowners protecting areas with environmental values.

Until 1997, the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust and the Soil Conservation Section of the Council were actively involved in cost sharing partnerships with landowners to protect bush on erosion prone land. This activity was undertaken under the auspices of the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Act 1941. The Council's cost sharing did not extend to making grants towards the purchase of land by individuals or other organisations for soil conservation reasons. The Council's cost sharing was curtailed in 1997 because of reductions in allocations for soil conservation work. Soil Conservation staff maintained their advocacy role, but were unable to provide any funds to assist the protection of remnant bush areas.

4. **Decision on the Request**

The Regional Council currently does not have the mandate or the funding to contribute, as requested by the New Zealand Native Forests Restoration Trust. In the past similar requests have been declined, as have requests for the Council to purchase land in this area for reserve purposes (e.g., Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society's request in November 1998 to purchase land owned by Michael Jones on the Rimutaka Hill road).

Therefore, it is recommended that the request of the New Zealand Native Forests Restoration Trust be declined, in this instance.

5. **Annual Plan Submission by Queen Elizabeth II National Trust**

An Annual Plan submission by the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust (**Attachment 2**) raised the issue of the Council contributing to the protection of areas of bush covered by open space covenants. There appeared to be some "will" among Councillors at the hearing to reconsider its policy on contributing to the protection of areas with environmental values covered by open space covenants through the up-coming review of the Long-term Financial Strategy. Approximately 40 percent of Key Native Ecosystems (KNE's) in the Wellington Region are on private land and these areas will play an important role in "halting the decline" of New Zealand's biodiversity; the goal in the Department of Conservation's Biodiversity Strategy.

Officers from the Environment Division are considering the issue of Council funding for ecological enhancements on private land as a way of implementing the ecosystem policies of the Regional Policy Statement. This is intended to be reported to the Council as part of the Long-term Financial Strategy deliberations. Landcare and Wairarapa staff are also involved with this.

In a similar vein, the Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee has recently asked for a report on the possible remission of all or part of the Regional Council rates on land protected by covenants. Officers are intending to report to the next Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee on this.

6. Communications

There are currently no communications/public relations opportunities resulting from this report.

7. Recommendations

That the Committee:

- (1) *Acknowledge the value of the work by the New Zealand Native Forests Restoration Trust to bring indigenous forest lands under public ownership.*
- (2) *Decline the request by the New Zealand Native Forests Restoration Trust seeking a contribution towards the purchase of the land known as Pigeon Bush.*
- (3) *Agree the Chairman advise the New Zealand Native Forests Restoration Trust of the decision not to contribute to the land purchase, and the reasons why.*

Report prepared by

Approved for Submission:

SUSAN EDWARDS
Manager, Regional Parks (Strategy & Marketing)

ANDREW ANNAKIN
Divisional Manager, Landcare

Supported by:

GEOFF SKENE
Manager Environment Co-ordinator



COLIN WRIGHT
Divisional Manager, Wairarapa

Attachment 1 : NZ Native Forests Restoration Trust Letter

Attachment 2 : QEII National Trust Letter