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## **Report 02.293**

30 May 2002

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Report to the Policy, Finance & Strategy Committee  
from Cr Rick Long, Chairman, Rural Services & Wairarapa Committee

### **Predator Control – Mt Bruce National Wildlife Centre – Proposed Annual Plan 2002/03**

#### **1. Purpose**

To seek Council approval for funding a proposed new activity under the Land Management function of the Proposed Annual Plan 2002-2003

#### **2. Background**

Report 02.273 – Predator Control: Mount Bruce Wildlife Centre – was presented to the Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee at the 28 May 2002 meeting. The report proposed that the Council support a predator control (mustelids, feral cats, rats and possums) programme adjacent to the National Wildlife Centre at Mount Bruce, north of Masterton. The programme would incorporate approximately 1,800 hectares of private land surrounding the Department of Conservation Scenic Reserve.

Funding requirements amount to \$68,000 in 2002/03, reducing to \$25,000 per annum in subsequent years.

#### **3. The Project**

The Mount Bruce Scenic Reserve is a 942 hectare remnant of a native rainforest that originally covered a 70 kilometre area between Masterton and Norsewood. The Reserve has the designation of Wildlife Centre, and is administered by a Trust. The Trust represents the wider community interest, owns the buildings at Mount Bruce, and has a mission to promote conservation education.

The Wildlife Centre is renowned as a primary breeding facility for rare and endangered native species. It is the second most popular ecological tourism

destination in New Zealand, receiving between 30,000 to 40,000 visitors annually.

The long-term vision for Mount Bruce is a restored and thriving forest ecosystem supporting a full complement of native wildlife. This vision includes the release of kokako and kiwi. Kaka are already resident. This vision has recently led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Trust, DoC and Rangitaane O Wairarapa where each organisation will assist to meet the conservation objectives.

The first step in this rehabilitation process is to implement an intensive pest control programme within the Reserve. To partly fund this activity, DoC has divided the Reserve into hectare blocks which the community can 'purchase' for \$25 per year. Local Iwi have nearly completed cutting 130 kilometres of tracks in the Reserve to allow the distribution of bait stations and traps. A predator free buffer zone surrounding the Reserve is essential to maintain the viability of the project. Approximately 55% of the proposed buffer zone is located on private properties within the Wellington Region. The remainder is within the Manawatu-Wanganui Region.

#### **4. Community Support**

Meetings have been held with neighbouring property owners. The formation of a Landcare Group under the National Landcare Trust is being considered. There is considerable interest to participate in this unique project. Many of the property owners have already 'purchased' blocks within the Reserve to assist the pest control programme.

However, many of the adjacent properties have absentee owners. Furthermore, there is recognition that a predator buffer would not be successfully achieved if it were left solely to the landowners. There has been unanimous support for the Regional Councils to undertake the work, assisted by landowners where possible.

#### **5. Potential Benefits**

Based on experience at DoC Mainland Islands throughout New Zealand, we could expect a 50 percent growth in native bird populations in the first year after the area is predator free. This growth could be expected to compound every year for at least five years. This would create a major spillover effect onto surrounding land in the Region. The health of the Reserve and surrounding ecosystems would significantly improve.

Whilst the Reserve is managed by DoC, the potential benefits fulfil many of the Council's own biodiversity objectives. Aligning the Council with a national wildlife icon would greatly enhance our relationships with the National Wildlife Trust, DoC, Rangitaane O Wairarapa, and the local community. There would be ample opportunities for supportive media coverage.

## 6. Funding

This proposal falls outside the existing Key Native Ecosystem (KNE) budget provision. The KNE selection process specifically excludes DoC land. Available funds within the 2002/03 budget are likely to be fully committed to projects with Territorial Local Authorities, where they attract an equal share of funds from the respective authorities. Deferral of these works will not be favourably received by the affected Councils.

## 7. Recommendation

*That the Policy, Finance and Strategy Committee support the provision of \$68,000 in 2002/03 and \$25,000 per annum thereafter to fund a predator control programme on private land adjacent to the Mount Bruce Scenic Reserve.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C R F Long', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the bottom right.

CR F R LONG  
Chairman  
Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee