

Community Feedback

This Appendix provides more in-depth information on community views gathered from the:

- Phone survey and focus groups with non-users.
- Submissions received on the review of the regional parks and forests management plans.
- Reference groups with key users / interest groups (focusing on recreation, environment, heritage and commercial activities).
- Visitor satisfaction survey carried out in February / March 2002.

We have also referred to previous surveys and studies, where relevant, to make comparisons and highlight any changes in results over time, including:

- A 1993 phone survey on outdoor recreation opportunities in the region
- Visitor satisfaction surveys from 1998, 1999 and 2000
- A study of winter and summer visitation carried out in 1995.

The feedback is reported on under the following headings:

1. General preferences for outdoor recreation.
2. Awareness of regional parks and forests.
3. Visitation and use.
4. Satisfaction with regional parks and forests.
5. Funding.
6. Priorities for management.

1. General preferences for outdoor recreation

The *telephone survey* provides us with information about the regional community's general preferences for outdoor recreation (not specifically related to regional parks and forests). The most popular activities were walking or running, followed by tramping or bush-walking and swimming. The 1993 survey also found walking to be the most popular activity. The seashore, followed by forest and bush were the preferred settings for outdoor recreation. Coastal areas were also the most popular in the 1993 survey.

Preferred activities and settings differed according to territorial local authority. For example, people in Lower Hutt were more likely to have been tramping than those in Porirua. Whilst Upper Hutt residents were less likely than those from Wellington City or Kapiti to rate the seashore as a preferred setting.

2. Awareness of Regional Parks and Forests

In the *telephone survey*, 46% of respondents claimed to know either a lot (5%) or a fair amount (41%) about regional parks and forests. Declared knowledge was highest in Lower Hutt (51% 'a lot' or 'a fair amount') and lowest Kapiti (37%) and Wairarapa (31%). Declared knowledge was also lower amongst younger residents, with 26% of 15-24 year olds saying they knew 'hardly anything' about the parks and forests compared with 9% of over 60 year olds. 50% of ratepayers knew 'a lot' or a fair amount compared to only 35% of non-ratepayers.

Both the *focus groups* held as part of the Quantitative and Qualitative Study and the *reference groups* of experts/users also suggested that awareness about the regional parks and forests is low amongst the regional community, and that the areas could be better promoted.

3. Visitation and Use

According to the *telephone survey*, 75% of respondents had visited one or more of the parks, forests or recreation areas² in the last 12 months. 33% said it was almost certain that they would visit a park or recreation area in the next month. The park most likely to have been visited was Queen Elizabeth Park. People chose parks and forests due to their natural setting, good views, quiet or isolation. Feedback from both *submissions and reference groups* supported this view, with people saying they visit or use parks due to the peaceful setting and natural environment.

Main activities undertaken by *telephone survey* respondents in the regional parks and forests were walking /running (39%) and bush-walking/tramping (24%) well ahead of swimming (7%) and mountain biking/cycling (5%). 82% of people said they usually visit parks with family or friends, 16% usually visit alone, while 11% stated they usually go with a group or club. This is broadly in line with the 1993 survey (71% friends and family, 21% alone), given that the earlier survey involved a broader range of recreation areas, including many closer to urban areas. 91% of people travelled by car, with 6% walking. In the 1993 study, only 64% travelled by car, while a quarter walked, probably influenced by the greater proximity of areas covered in that survey.

According to the 2002 *visitor satisfaction survey*³, walking was the most popular activity in every park, with walking the dog also popular in many areas. In general the 2002 results affirm the broad patterns of previous surveys. With minor shuffling, the four or five most common activities tended to be the same for each park across the four years covered by the survey, and in the more comprehensive 1995 survey, namely walking, walking the dog, mountain biking, picnicking. Other popular activities tend to reflect the opportunities available in each park (e.g. horse riding in Battle Hill).

The *visitor satisfaction survey* also collects information on demographics, although there are limitations on the validity and accuracy of this data. It indicates that the 20-29 age group is under represented in respondents in relation to the regional average for that group (10.6% versus 21%) while the 50-59 age group is over-represented (18% in the sample, versus 12% of the regional average).

² We will use the term 'parks' to refer to parks, forests and recreation areas in the remainder of the text.

³ This survey assesses general satisfaction and satisfaction with environment and facilities.

The gender balance was relatively even across the parks, although it differs within different areas. Males dominated in Belmont (64%), Akatarawa (74%) and Wainuiomata (62%), while females dominated at Battle Hill (61%), Kaitoke (58%), Queen Elizabeth Park (58%) and Pakuratahi (56%).

Data on ethnicity indicates that Pakeha were over-represented among respondents in relation to the regional average (83% compared with 72%) while Maori tended to be under-represented (6% compared with 12%).

The highest proportion of respondents came from the district within which each park is located (except for Battle Hill which has an even split between Wellington and Porirua cities). As in previous years, the vast majority of respondents are from Hutt City, then Wellington (just ahead of Upper Hutt). Wairarapa residents were the least numerous, equal in number to South Island residents. An interesting trend across the last three visitor surveys has been a decline in the proportion of respondents from Porirua, and a progressive increase in the proportion of respondents from Kapiti.

The *qualitative and quantitative study* also provided information on people who do not visit the parks. 25% of *telephone survey* respondents had not visited a park in the last year. Most reported that they did not participate as much as they would like in outdoor activities, with the key barriers being a lack of free time, family or work commitments, and personal or physical limitations. Similar themes came out of the two *focus groups* held with non-users, as well as other factors such as stage of life and cost (of activities, equipment). As noted above, the *reference groups* suggested that there may be a lack of awareness in the community about the existence of, and opportunities in, regional parks and forests that may be limiting use.

4 Satisfaction with Regional Parks and Forests

4.1 General Satisfaction

Submitters were generally satisfied with regional parks and forests as they currently are. The parks and forest areas themselves, the facilities, recreational opportunities and staff were highlighted as positive features by many. Common suggestions for improvements included more environmental enhancement work, greater weed and pest control, and restoration of areas to their indigenous ecology. We also received a large number of pro forma submissions advocating for motorised recreation – specifically a motor sport facility at Queen Elizabeth Park and the on-going maintenance of the Akatarawa Forest as an area for motorised recreation.

The *reference groups* were also generally happy with the way the parks are managed, although each group had suggestions about their areas of interest, which are detailed in the following sections.

The *visitor survey* indicates high levels of general satisfaction. On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being lowest and 10 highest), the average overall rating was 8.27. This is slightly down on 2000 and similar to 1999. ‘Overall satisfaction’ was ranked higher than either ‘facilities and services’ or ‘environment’. This is to be expected since recreationists tend to visit the places where the likelihood of their expectations being met (and hence their achieving satisfaction) is greatest.

Respondents were also invited to make general comments. In this report, these comments have been categorised into “positive”, “negative” and “suggestions for change”. The most frequently mentioned negative comments or concerns (across all parks) are detailed under the relevant sections that follow. A common concern that does not fit specifically into any of the categories is a concern about dogs and dog faeces in the park.

4.2 *Facilities and services*

While suggestions for improving the parks varied considerably in the *telephone survey*, the most common ideas involved:

- Improving facilities such as toilets, rubbish bins and seating.
- Improving the availability of information, both at the parks and in the local communities.

Comments from the *visitor satisfaction survey* also suggested:

- The provision of more facilities, particularly rubbish bins, toilets, picnic tables, seating (suggesting the need for greater education of visitors about the Council’s take-home rubbish policy) and the improvement of some existing facilities.
- The provision of more tracks in some parks and improvements to existing tracks and/or track signage in certain areas.

Many *submitters* supported the existing nature and level of facilities, and felt that the regional parks and forests shouldn’t have ‘flashy’ facilities. Specific comments from some individuals echoed the calls for:

- Improved facilities at Queen Elizabeth Park and East Harbour Regional Park
- Re-introduce rubbish bins
- Improved signage and interpretation

Other comments included:

- Suggestions that the Council maintain existing facilities before developing more and focus on structured and planned development at key nodes, centring around visitor information centres.
- Suggestions for more tracks in the Kapiti Coast.
- Provision for hunting lodges.
- Better security (car parks).

The *reference groups* feedback tended to suggest that the parks should not be over-developed and that the level of facilities should be kept to a minimum. A few participants commented that there are gaps in the provision of facilities for events such as outdoor concerts, multi-sport and commercial activities (such as assembly points, toilets etc.)

4.3 *Environment*

Aside from the numerous pro forma submissions advocating motorised recreation, *submissions* generally suggested that environmental values should be paramount. They called for greater weed and pest control in order to preserve natural indigenous values, although there was debate about the level and nature of control. Many advocated using all mechanisms available to eradicate pests, while others opposed the use of poisons, and others advocated for the retention of opportunities for game hunting. A few suggested that protection of environmental values had to be balanced with providing for use. Submissions also suggested a focus on providing ecological linkages between council lands and other areas.

They also supported community involvement in environmental restoration projects, and queried whether there was sufficient resource directed to this area.

The *visitor satisfaction survey* comments also suggested paying greater attention to controlling pest animals and plants.

Asked in the *telephone survey* to rate their level of concern about specific environmental issues, respondents were most likely to say that they were very concerned about 'the restoration of the natural environment' (56% very concerned), and 'the impact of pests and noxious plants on native bush (56% very concerned). Regarding management issues, 71% of respondents considered 'the protection of native bush and preserving natural settings' as being very important (higher than both the protection of historic sites and heritage areas (55%), and the provision of recreation opportunities (44%)). 82% believed that there needed to be 'some restrictions on recreational activities to protect areas of high environmental importance'

All of the four reference groups generally agreed that the setting and environment are the most important factors for the parks, although there was debate about what 'environment' encompassed (ecology, society etc.) and the extent to which the park environments should be indigenous versus exotic/modified. All members tended to agree that work should be done to enhance the environmental values of the parks. Some members suggested that you could not promote one value (environment) above the others outright, as this would mean that you could restrict activities unnecessarily in areas of low environmental activities. There was significant debate about the extent to which pest control should be balanced with the preservation of game for hunting.

4.4 *Heritage*

55% of *telephone survey* respondents thought that it was very important to protect 'historic sites and heritage areas'.

The majority of *submissions* highlighted:

- a lack of, or inconsistent, interpretation of heritage values across the regional parks and forests.
- a need for more interpretation (including the use of volunteer interpreters).
- the need to identify, protect and restore heritage sites.
- the need to research and document information relating to heritage sites.

Some submitters noted their appreciation of the current level of interpretation and signage relating to heritage values, and the Regional Outdoors Programme.

These themes were echoed by the reference groups, (particularly the heritage reference group), who felt that there needs to be more effort into identifying, researching, protecting and interpreting/promoting heritage values in the parks.

4.5 **Recreation**

According to the *telephone survey*, visitors generally thought that the parks met their recreation needs well (75% '1' or '2' on a 5 point scale where '1' means the parks met their needs well, and '5' meant not at all). 30% felt that the parks met their needs very well, while only 1% believed that they did not meet their needs at all.

Wairarapa residents were the least likely to say that the parks and recreation areas met their needs, although a majority still gave a positive rating (59%). While only 10% said that their parks met their needs very well, more said that they were neutral on the issue (31%) rather than that the parks did not meet their recreation needs at all (5%).

Older visitors were more likely than younger visitors to say that their needs were met very well with 6% of 15-24 year old visitors stating that the parks met their needs very well, compared with 43% of visitors aged over 60 years.

44% of phone survey respondents believed that 'providing opportunities for recreation in the parks, forests and recreation areas' was very important.

Submissions were generally very positive. Walkers were especially happy and liked the current opportunities available to them. Many submissions supported the provision of a range of activities and opportunities. There was a reasonably high level of concern about conflicts between different recreational uses. Suggestions about how to deal with these conflicts were as follows:

- Some submitters supported the development of separate tracks (especially to separate mountain bikers and horse riders from walkers).
- Some wanted less mountain biking in the parks, others supported more.
- Several opposed motorised recreation or wanted limits on it (specified events and areas only), others wanted to maintain the status quo (Akatarawa Forest) or wanted more.
- One suggested that where conflict occurred, activities having greater empathy with the core values of the park should take precedence.

Common concerns from the *visitor satisfaction survey* related to conflicts between users on shared tracks (particularly between mountain bikers and walkers, and between motorised recreational users and walkers/mountain bikers), and driver behaviour on some internal access roads and vehicles accessing off-road areas.

Reference groups had wide ranging discussions on recreational issues. In considering the range of opportunities available (and possible) in the parks, the groups felt that all parks don't have to be all things to all people, but within the network a range of opportunities should be provided for (including peace and solitude). When considering how to manage conflicts between users, some suggested providing both mixed and single use tracks, as some people are happy with mixed use and others aren't. Others suggested that, where a conflict exists, the activity that is more in line with the intrinsic values of the area and appreciation of the environment should take precedence.

While there was discussion about increasing promotion about the parks, there was a corresponding concern about preventing and managing overuse of areas, which can detract from people's experiences. There was also concern about conflicts between commercial and casual users, and the impact of events. It was suggested that events be managed through a quota system.

4.6 *Commercial uses and concessions*

When asked in the *telephone survey* whether or not the council should allow 'more tourism and commercial activities' in the parks and recreational areas, respondents were divided, with 31% agreeing, 38% neutral/ undecided and 29% opposed.

The vast majority of *submitters* supported or accepted the use of regional parks and forests for commercial and community purposes provided:

- The activity is environmentally sustainable and does not damage the environment.
- The activity does not adversely impact on other users.
- The public is informed of activities that affect their use.

A few people were concerned that existing commercial activities are impacting on park users. Some suggested that commercial use should come second to individual and community use and there should either be tighter controls on commercial use or no further liberalisation of access. Some were opposed in principle to commercial operators making money from public lands, or suggested that a higher fee should be charged for commercial use.

There were also mixed views amongst the *reference groups*. On the one hand there were concerns about commercial activities leading to over-use, exclusive or priority rights, and detrimental effects on public use/access and the environment. On the other hand, there was a suggestion that the focus should be on managing effects of any use, rather than whether an activity is commercial or not. The commercial reference group felt that the Council needs to be clear about whether it wants to promote commercial activities or not, and why it is doing so. This will then determine how effective its interactions with commercial operators will be. Commercial group members emphasised that protection of the environment is important to them also, as their business relies on it. They felt that the Council needs to explain to the public that core values will not be compromised – and may even be enhanced – through commercial activities.

4.7 *Community involvement*

Reference groups generally felt that it was important for the community to be involved with the parks. They argued that there should be more promotion of the parks to the community. They also supported the use of parks for educational purposes, and felt that more could be done to teach people about the important environmental and heritage values of the areas. Some members of the reference groups felt that the Tangata Whenua should have a special role in partnership with the Council, distinct from that of the wider community, while the majority felt that both Tangata Whenua and the community should have an 'equal' relationship with the Council.

5. **Funding**

In the *telephone survey*, people were asked whether or not they were prepared for council rates to contribute to the ongoing improvement and maintenance of the regional parks, forests and recreation areas. While there were differing opinions, a comfortable majority were still in favour (35% strongly agree, 70% total agree). Upper Hutt residents were the most likely to support this (36% strongly agree, 75% total agree), while Porirua residents were the least likely (28% strongly agree, 63% total agree). Wellington residents were the next most likely to support this (72% total agree, 34% strongly agree). 51% of those with personal incomes over \$70,000 strongly agreed with this proposition, compared with 33% of those earning less than \$15,000.

6. **Priorities for Management**

Reference groups and submissions raised some concerns about the legal status of the parks and forests, and the relationship of the Council to other agencies. They highlighted the importance of Council working together with other agencies to ensure the best provision of services.

Almost all respondents from the *telephone survey* said that they wanted 'the current regional parks, forests and recreation areas to be preserved for future generations' (81% strongly agree, 95% total agree⁴). More than nine out of ten respondents in all six regions agreed with this statement. The two focus groups of non-users also supported long-term protection of the parks.

Reference groups and submissions provided a range of ideas for future new parks, or areas/values to protect. There was support for the establishment of a Wellington South Coast park. Other suggestions included:

- additions to Belmont Regional Park and East Harbour Regional Park.
- improving access to Wairarapa Rivers and East Harbour Regional Park.
- a regional coastal trail.
- Whitireia.
- Mount Crawford (Miramar peninsula).

⁴ "'Total agree' = '1' or '2' on a 5 point scale, where '1' meant strongly agree and '5' meant strongly disagree.'"

- northern Kapiti Coast.
- links between Akatarawa and Tararua.
- a range of suggestions for parks in Wairarapa including a coastal park, and one encompassing the Wairarapa Taipos (rock formations).