

Parks and Forests Managers report for period ending Friday 17 March 2006

1. Manager's comments (Murray Waititi)

As summer turns to autumn, our focus changes from intensive visitor management to getting on with those jobs we haven't had a chance to do over the summer months, and preparing for the winter planting season.

It has been an excellent summer in the parks. The weather has been kind meaning lots of people have been able to get out and use them. The Regional Outdoors Programme has also been running trying to lure new people into the parks with excellent results.

1.1 Regional Outdoors Programme over for another summer

At the time of writing we still have another twelve events to go. However the programme will be all but over by the time the Committee meets. The final event will be *Run2Heal* with Allison Roe at Trentham Memorial Park and on the Hutt River Trail on Saturday 2 April.

Parks & Forests has had an overwhelmingly enthusiastic response from the public to this summer's programme. Participants have thoroughly enjoyed the new events and returned in force for the perennial favourites, to the extent that we now have a very loyal following.

We have created a very distinct niche for ourselves in outdoors "participatory" events and now that people appreciate the quality of experience provided, they are turning up in their droves. Many events have been booked out since early in the summer, while others with no attendance limits drew excellent numbers e.g. 86 people for the *World Wetland Day Walk* at Queen Elizabeth Park; 49 for the final *Kev the Wandering Kiwi walk* in the Wainuiomata Recreation Area. New events such as *Go Bush! Mountain Safety Bushcraft Course* and *Poetry in the Park* successfully attracted different audiences, and show real potential for further development.

It is also very pleasing that Dwrights Canvas, who contributed spot prizes for 15 of our events, have received independent and very positive feedback from participants.

Penelope Evison will present a complete report on the results of the Regional Outdoors Programme at the next Committee meeting. The programme will also be included in the corporate review of community engagement activities taking place in the next few months.

1.2 Akatarawa Recreational Access Committee (ARAC) – Orange Hut rebuilding project

Fraser Oliver, Dean Hearfield and Ross Jackson continue to liaise with the ARAC committee on the rebuilding of the Orange Hut. All consents have now been approved and design plans for the new hut drawn up. At present we are waiting for the committee to outline what voluntary abilities they

will be able to provide in the rebuilding process. This will then allow us to price and plan the other aspects of the job. Although at first we put forward the idea of the hut being totally rebuilt by contractors using insurance money, it soon became evident that the committee felt there would not be enough involvement by its members and this could lessen the feeling of “ownership” that the original building project created.

There is definite value in ensuring the clubs are involved as much as possible in this type of project, as this gives them a feeling of achievement and a sense of pride that they have contributed. This, in turn, encourages club members to be self-policing, not only within their own club but also with regard to other clubs. In an area of this size, we need all the assistance we can get.

1.3 Belmont Regional Park research project

Over the 6 weeks up to the beginning of March a team of students together with a supervisor have been busy counting visitors to Belmont Regional Park. Part of the implementation of our Visitor Monitoring Framework, this work will enable us to identify which of the park entrances attract 75% of visits. Once these entrances are determined we will install permanent counters there, and be able to apply more accurate multiplication factors to them, giving us a more robust indication of park visitation levels.

Over the course of this work our supervisor has also interviewed 100 visitors to the park, to test our visitor satisfaction survey and secure some usable information about those visitors. While this includes questions on attitudes to and behaviour in the park and demographics, it will also be interesting to see the comments on benefits to users from visiting the park. This type of information relating directly to parks (as opposed to the general outdoors) is in relatively short supply and will add to the body of knowledge associated with the value of parks to society.

2. Planning and policy (Dr Philippa Crisp)

2.1 Capital works

2.1.1 QEP Ranger’s office occupied

The Ranger’s office was completed in December 2005. The phone, fax and security systems were transferred to the new building in January and Nikki La Monica is now using the new office.

2.1.2 Rail Trail Summit toilets started

In early February, Bryan Leeney started building the replacement toilets at the Summit Yards, Rimutaka Rail Trail. Good progress is being made.

2.1.3 QEP Paekakariki toilet consents sought

The consultants have finished the working drawings for the replacement toilets at Paekakariki picnic area, Queen Elizabeth Park. We are now seeking building consents and tenders from contractors.

2.2 Asset Management

2.2.1 Historic dam safety inspections underway

With regard to previous reports, DamWatch consultants have been engaged to inspect the Birchville (Upper Hutt) and Korokoro Dams (Belmont) and assess the risk of failure and hazard potential of the structures.

2.3 Planning and policy

The Battle Hill Farm Forest Management Plan review has commenced and an advertisement calling for submissions on the current plan was placed in newspapers on 26 February. A press release has also been sent out.

A workshop on the first round of submissions for East Harbour Regional Park Management Plan is to be held on 7 April. A paper detailing the issues that have arisen from those submissions is being presented at this Landcare Committee and permission will be requested to begin drafting the new plan.

2.4 Heritage Planning

Last year, an inventory of heritage sites was prepared and gaps in heritage planning identified. Arising from this work, a number of planning exercises are being completed this year as follows:

- Important archaeological sites in Queen Elizabeth Park are being mapped
- Advice is being sought on the future care of the dendroglyphs in the Lakes Block of East Harbour Regional Park
- The bunkers in Belmont Regional Park are being surveyed to assess which structures should be maintained in the future.
- Advice is being sought on the maintenance requirements of the Battle Hill graves and the stone walls at Benge Homestead in Kaitoke Regional Park.

2.5 Pest control operations

2.5.1 Pest animals

Bait stations have been installed in a 100m by 150m grid in a 300ha area in Butterfly Creek catchment in East Harbour Regional Park. These bait stations are to be filled with rat bait in the coming months in order to keep rat numbers down within that area. MIRO members are continuing to keep possum numbers low across the northern block of the park.

A possum monitor of the Whakatikei and Puketiro areas of Akatarawa Forest has recently been completed. The mean residual trap catch rate was found to be 10.4%. The area was last controlled using aerial 1080 in 2001, when possum numbers were lowered to 0.9%RTC. It is planned to control the whole Akatarawa block in one operation next financial year. This will minimise possum reinvasion and limit the number of operations required.

2.5.2 Pest plants

Pest plant infestations controlled in the parks and forests recently include:

- Banana passionfruit, wild ginger, brush wattle, bomarea and buddleia in East Harbour Regional Park.
- Tradescantia, old man's beard and Japanese honeysuckle in Belmont Regional Park.
- Japanese honeysuckle and German ivy in Queen Elizabeth Park.
- Selaginella, buddleia, holly, tradescantia, alder and roadside weed dumps in the Akatarawa Forest
- Tradescantia, buddleia, willow, holly and Japanese honeysuckle in the Wainuiomata Recreation Area.

2.5.3 Monitoring

Rodent/mustelid monitoring was completed in Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water collection area and in East Harbour Regional Park in February. The results of the rodent/mustelid monitor in the water collection area will be discussed in the mainland island section below. In East Harbour, the rat tracking rate was 42%, which is similar to the levels recorded previously. Once the bait stations within the intensive core zone in the Butterfly Creek catchment are filled with bait, it is expected that the rat numbers will fall significantly within that area.

2.5.4 Wainuiomata Mainland Island

The third bait fill for the mainland island took place during the last week of January. There was very little bait being taken. Rodent/mustelid monitoring completed in the water collection area in February showed rats at a 3% tracking rate within the intensive control core and at 6% outside it. However the weta tracking in those tunnels is the highest recorded so far, indicating an increase in the invertebrates in Wainuiomata. Hedgehogs, however, are also tracking at the highest rates recorded as yet.

3. Marketing and design (Amanda Cox)

3.1 Brochures

The new Belmont Regional Park brochure is now printed and has been distributed to key outlets. The response to date has been very favourable.

3.2 Signs

The Pakuratahi Forest now has three new information panels – one each for the Maymorn, Tunnel Gully and the Rimutaka Rail Trail entrances. The signs for Belmont Regional Park were delayed pending the purchase of Waitangirua Farm but are now in place and well worth the effort involved in developing them. Following further feedback we have also placed map boards at three strategic locations inside the park to help visitors reorient themselves in what can be quite a deceptive landscape.

Work is also progressing on a series of information panels at the five main entrances to the Akatarawa Forest. The graphic designers are due to complete artwork shortly, ready for installation by the end of May.

3.3 Community Liaison

The Friends of Queen Elizabeth Park held their first monthly meeting of the year in the new ranger's office at MacKay's Crossing. This was preceded by a walk along the Whareroa stream to inspect their planting carried out last winter and to discuss a programme for this year. In spite of very dry conditions in the spring and early summer, the plant failure rate is probably no more than 15%.

All the various Friends and community partnership groups in our parks are involved in running or assisting with various Regional Outdoors events over the summer as well as promoting or running other projects in the parks.

60 people from ERMA are going to Queen Elizabeth Park to carry out environmental work with guidance from Greater Wellington staff. Tasks carried out at this time of the year include plant releasing, potting in the nursery, mulching etc. Corporate groups such as these tend to be in the park for about 6 hours and we usually take them on an educational tour and finish the day with a barbecue. While it is valuable to get some tasks completed, we view their introduction and involvement in environmental restoration in the park as just as important.

3.4 Restoration Day

Planning is underway for this annual event to celebrate ecological restoration in the Wellington region to be held on Saturday 27 May in the Eastbourne Community Hall. With the chosen location, field trips to East Harbour Regional Park will take place in the afternoon. The theme this year is restoring fauna and in particular birds, invertebrates, lizards and fish.

Restoration Day is run jointly by DoC, GWRC and the NZ Ecological Restoration Network (NZERN), with DoC taking the lead organisational role this year.

3.5 Volunteer awards programme

Ross Jackson and Amanda Cox have been working with staff from the Environment Division to develop a proposal for a council-wide Awards programme. Involving some interesting research into the benefits and costs of other schemes around the country and consideration of our own objectives, this project has been a good opportunity to work together. We have made good progress with a proposal planned to go to the Environment Committee by the end of the financial year.

3.6 State of the environment report – heritage and landscape

During the past year, Ross Jackson has supported John Holmes of the Resource Policy team with the landscape component of this report. Following meetings with planning and landscape representatives from several territorial authorities and landscape practice, one of the big issues that came up was the lack of a consistent approach to landscape management in the region, reflected in both the Regional Policy Statement (RPS) and district plans. As a result, discussions have been held

and presentations made by Lars Brabyn (who has developed a GIS based landscape classification system for new Zealand) to see if this is a method that the various Territorial Authorities can adopt. This is being considered further as part of the Review of the RPS.

4. Western sector (Matt Ballantine)

4.1 Belmont Regional Park

4.1.1 Maintenance

Maintenance work has been completed on the track between Belmont Trig and Cannons Head. The work carried out has improved the track surface considerably, allowing a wider variety of use by the public. Bollards have also been installed in areas in the Stratton Street valley floor to discourage cars from driving onto grassed areas. We have continued with improvements to the Dry Creek entrance by installing picnic tables for people to use there.

4.1.2 Ranging

Ranging staff have assisted with the visitor survey being carried out in the park and have also attended a teacher training session for the Take Action programme. Schools are well booked for the upcoming school term for the Take Action programme based at Stratton Street.

A considerable amount of time has been spent trying to dissuade trail bike riders from using the park. An upswing in unauthorised access by trail bike riders has been noted over the past three months.

Greater Wellington staff attended a scrub fire that occurred at the Oakleigh Street entrance to the park in February. Fortunately the fire was well contained and had not spread through a very wide area, although it had potential to threaten neighbouring houses next to the park entrance. Another scrub fire earlier in the year occurred in Cornish Street, though this fire burnt only up to the boundary of the park. Both fires are suspicious and are being investigated by the police.

4.1.3 Events Held

Several summer event programmes were completed over the period. A highlight was the *Puke Ariki Track launch* which coincided with good weather and a good turn out of people. About 60 people participated in walks to Boulder Hill and return or the complete length of the Puke Ariki Track. Friends of Belmont and Friends of Maara Roa both assisted in running of events in the park.

4.2 Battle Hill Farm Forest Park

4.2.1 Maintenance

A new fence has been constructed in Transmission Gully taking out a corner of a paddock and creating another re-vegetation plot. This will be planted in the winter and will feature flax, toetoe and cabbage trees. A similar plot put in three years ago is thriving and creating habitat and food

supply for native birds flying between the Puketiro Forest and the Bush Reserve. Being a windy spot it will also provide shelter for stock on the “down wind” side.

120 DOC200 Predator Control Traps are now in operation throughout the park. Another 80 traps are soon to be added which will give complete coverage. This summer more Mallard ducklings have been observed on the park than ever before indicating that the predator control measures are making a difference. Once the predator control programme has been in place, and the trap catch rate and predator sightings go down to near zero and stay there, there will be an opportunity to introduce Brown Teal (Pateke) to Battle Hill.

4.2.2 Ranging and Events Held

There have been three Regional Outdoors Programme events at the park – *Buggies and Back Packs*, the *4WD Sunset Tour* and the *Transmission Gully evening walk*. All events were well patronised with all who participated thoroughly enjoying themselves.

Equestrian events continue to feature strongly at this time of the year with both the Pauatahanui Pony Club Gymkhana and the Battle Hill Committee Area Trials. Both are large events with over 100 riders participating in each event. On top of all of this there have been regular Pony Club Rallies and a lot of campers and picnicker due to our excellent weather.

4.3 Queen Elizabeth Park

4.3.1 Maintenance

A great deal of plant releasing has been done this summer and all of the plantings have gone surprisingly well considering the dry conditions. The plantings at the Arbor Day site, Whareroa streamside, Remnant Bush, and the Wetland loop track have all been released. Our summer assistant ranger, Dave Hislop, has been doing a stellar job of removing weeds from the amenity areas. Our picnic sites are now free of gorse and we are attacking the blackberry. The fencer has been busy as well. We are hoping to have the remaining sections of the Whareroa Stream, (the Friends group restoration project), fenced by mid-winter, in preparation for this years planting season.

4.3.2 Ranging

The park has been busy. People have been enjoying the long dry days. With the increase in people and BBQ's we have had an increase in rubbish. The Paekakariki end of the park is getting the most abuse. People are continuing to use the Memorial Lookout as their own dump site. A steering wheel recently discovered in the bush had the ranger, querying how the vehicle itself had driven away!

As the school holidays started winding down we saw a dramatic increase in motorcycles on the tracks. There have been lots of “pocket bikes” and mini quads using the tracks. Christmas presents this year must have taken on a motorized theme. We have talked, yelled, and waved fists in the air at a number of the young offenders, but they are very difficult to stop. The local constable has been having similar issues with these young riders. We also had a 4x4 vehicle using the inland track. Unfortunately for them their vehicle was much easier to stop. Bollards were put in place to mitigate any future attempts and the offenders trespassed.

Ranger staff attended a fence building course along with the Western Sector team. This training was very informative with the skills learned already being used to make some repairs on fences here at the park. Staff also attended a conference on Wetlands. This symposium was focused on wetland restoration projects and really provided some valuable insight into some of the restoration projects we are working on at QEP.

4.3.3 Events Held

We have hosted huge corporate picnics and a number of weddings. Some of the busier weekends have seen 800 or more people booked on our picnic sites! The Regional Outdoor Programme has also brought a large number of people to the park. Even though the wind was too much for the model planes, the *Model Aircraft Day* did draw in some new people. There were a lot of demonstrations that kept the group entertained. Other events included *Poetry in the Park* and *Birds and Brunch*. We also hosted a very successful, although wet, equestrian event. There were over 100 horses running the cross country course. Approximately 300 spectators enjoyed the day.

5. Eastern Sector – Fraser Oliver

5.1 Kaitoke Regional Park

5.1.1 Maintenance

Officers have been cutting back gorse on the margins and fence lines of the Top Terrace, and this area will now be grassed or planted out as necessary. We have also cleared wind thrown trees off.

Wind throw clearance of both the Ridge Track and “Gut Buster” track in the Hutt Water Collection Area has been carried out.

5.1.2 Ranging

The summer camping season is coming to a close as the days shorten, the river cools and the temperatures drop. The majority of camping is now restricted to the weekends with several Girl Guide and Scout groups staying. There was also the biannual visit from the Wairarapa Caravan Club with over 20 caravans on site. A fire ban has been in place since early February and has been well respected by park visitors.

Several tours have been given to school groups as they return to the classroom.

5.1.3 Events Held

There have been three events held as part of the Regional Outdoors Programme.

Also, the Angus and Burrell Trolley Derby was also held at Te Marua. This annual event which is used as a fundraiser for the St Josephs Scout Group has become more popular every year and attracted over 30 entrants and several hundred spectators.

The Kiwi Conservation Club were given a night tour of the park. This is the fourth year in a row that these junior 'forest and birders' have visited and the trip has become a highlight of their calendar year.

5.2 East Harbour Regional Park

5.2.1 Maintenance

The tracks team are currently in the process of upgrading a section of the MacKenzie track at the head of Butterfly Creek. Years of neglect coupled with high use has resulted in considerable erosion problems. Because of the terrain, and lack of suitable access to the site for heavy equipment, a digger will be dismantled and flown to the main ridge along with power barrows and materials. As standard practice, water runoffs will be installed to limit further track surface erosion. This is an ecologically sensitive area so it's important to minimise any damage. In the long term both track users and the environment will benefit.

5.2.2 Ranging

Ranging work has been varied and busy. Events have taken up much of the weekend work and there has been plenty of community activity, and the ranger has attended a number of community based meetings.

5.2.3 Events Held

This has been a busy period regarding events based at East Harbour Regional Park. Two local community groups, MIRO and the Eastbourne Forest Rangers, ran events in conjunction with the Regional Council. These were well attended and participants gained a good insight into historical and conservation aspects of the park. The *Gollans Valley Off Track Adventure* held on 18 February consisted of a ranger-guided off track bush tramp and took around 7 hours to complete. This was a new kind of experience for most of the group and has become a popular type of event at the park.

The Mount Lowry Challenge was held on 26 February and is fast becoming one of the regions foremost mountain runs (now many competitors).

5.3 Wainuiomata/ Orongorongo Catchments

5.3.1 Maintenance

During the week of 6 February all possum traps and rat bait stations were checked and set/refilled by Greater Wellington staff members. The next refill and check is programmed for the week of 13 March.

All the access tracks in the Wainuiomata and Orongorongo Catchment have been checked and cleared for the hunting ballot (25th March – 18th April).

A bollard in the recreational area was replaced after it had been removed by the Fire Service to put out and remove a burned out vehicle.

5.3.2 Ranging

The old O.K. Mainline track has been opened up and is now the vehicle access to Moores Valley Ridge Track (fence line). The access at the front gate is now closed and access is from opposite the ranger's house. Also the hand removal of the trees for Stage 4 of the fence line has been completed. Both tree and stumps were removed from the steep section between the O.K. Main and the Moores Valley Ridge Track.

On Sunday 19 February Scott Farrell caught two youths on trail bikes on the Moores Valley Ridge Track. The youths were spoken to and the property owner they accessed the track through has also been spoken to.

5.3.3 Events Held

There have been three guided tours in the Wainuiomata Catchment in this period. Two of these included people going on the 21km tramp over to the Orongorongo Catchment and back via the pack track. All the events were well attended.

On 1-3 March we had the Wainuiomata Intermediate School undertake the Take-Action event in the recreation area. Rangers gave guided tours around the Sledge Track and answered questions from the students.

5.4 Akatarawa/ Pakuratahi Forests

5.4.1 Maintenance

Maintenance during this period has been routine as the weather has been kind of late. It has mainly involved ensuring water ways remain open, culverts cleared and run-offs are operational. We have also spent a considerable amount of time with a digger doing maintenance to Perhams Road, Titi Road, Whakatiki Road and the Pram Track. To coincide with this we have also had the hydro mower cut back the vegetation on several of these roads.

We are liaising with an adjoining land owner in the Kaitoke Basin regarding replacing his boundary fence. This is the second land owner that has contacted us about boundary fences in the past 6 months. It would be fair to say that a lot of boundary fences surrounding both forests need replacing now, or in the near future. GWRC, as neighbour, is responsible for half of the cost.

We have recently installed a computer based key registration system. As we now have so many gates, both surrounding the forests and also internally, there is a need for a large range of keys. In the past it has taken a considerable amount of administrative time to not only issue and register the keys, but also to then (in a lot of cases) follow up the people to recover our keys. The new system will be a lot more streamlined as all the details will be kept on the computer, along with contact details for each person needing a key.

5.4.2 Ranging

This is a busy time of year for events. Not only are there recreational club events but also large scale events, (i.e. the *Karapoti Classic*, the Rimutaka Incline *Big Coast* event, the annual *Kapi-Mana Enduro*), and several smaller duathlon events. A lot of the ranger's time is taken up with coordinating between our own departments, adjoining land owners and territorial authorities to ensure that these events run smoothly.

5.4.3 Disabled access

Over the last 2-3 months we have had several applications for disabled access to the Rimutaka Incline walkway and Tunnel Gully Reserve. While our policy in the Pakuratahi Forest area is for no motorised activities, we have made allowance for motorised quad or motorised mobility scooters to carry disabled people into areas they would not otherwise be able to access.

The ranger has received direct feedback from people who have said that it has been excellent for disabled people to access these areas with the freedom to be able to spend as much time in the area as they so wish. GW can be proud of the fact that we are catering for all passive recreational users in these areas, not only with our facilities (i.e. toilets which are accessible for disabled people) but also with our management plans by ensuring they have the flexibility to allow people free and unrestricted access.

5.4.4 Events Held

Both the *Big Coast* (400 competitors) and the *Karapoti Classic* mountain bike ride (1,200 competitors) enjoyed a fantastic day with the weather being fine and the events proceeding smoothly. One unfortunate lady broke her collar bone on the first half kilometre of the *Karapoti Classic* (Karapoti Road – a sealed public road). Fortunately, as it was so close to the starting point, she received attention very quickly and even managed a smile as she was put into an ambulance to head for hospital. I have since spoken to both organisers of these events and their feedback on track conditions and assistance given for these events was excellent.

The 4WD clubs continue to be active throughout the Akatarawa Forest as do the motorcycle and quad clubs.