

Summary consultation document for Map 20

Park Network Plan Proposed New Map 20 for Akatarawa Forest Park motorised recreation tracks

The Akatarawa Forest land is held under the Wellington Regional Water Board Act 1972 and under this Act management plans are not required. However the Parks Network Plan 2011 is the current policy that guides the use and development of the park; developed under the Reserves Act 1977. The Reserves Act requires the administering body (Council) to keep management plans under continuous review, adapting to changing circumstances and increased knowledge (sec41(4)). The change proposed for Map 20 will ensure that the plan remains current for Akatarawa Forest, and the public consultation process will ensure that a range of interested people can review and provide comment on the proposed change.

Background

The Akatarawa Forest is an important regional resource for motorised recreation. The Parks Network Plan (PNP) developed in 2011, provides for two categories of motorised recreation: Category A (Club/causal use in Akatarawa Forest managed only on specified tracks – refer Map 20) and Category B (Special one-off events on parks). Category A is a managed activity under the PNP and requires a permit; Category B is restricted and requires a concession approved on a case-by-case basis.

The current Map 20 of the PNP (page 106) identifies tracks available for motorised recreation, of which some may be opened or closed at any given time, and the areas closed for motorised recreation activities such as Cannon Point and Mt Wainui. However not all forest tracks used for motorised recreation were included on this map. At the time the Parks Network Plan was developed many of the tracks used by trail bikers and four wheel drivers were not known to GWRC. In almost all cases these tracks are in the forestry plantation blocks and are remnants of the forest's logging history following old tram lines and logging roads.

Revised Map 20

Over the last three years GWRC has worked closely with the Akatarawa Recreational Access Committee (ARAC) community group to better manage the Akatarawa Forest tracks for motorised recreation activities. This includes developing a Track Protocol and Memorandum of Understanding, and GPS locating and mapping all the motorised recreation tracks in the forest.

The Track Protocol and track review process

The PNP identified the working relationship between GWRC and ARAC for management of the forest tracks, and the work in progress to develop a MoU to provide a management framework for this relationship, and a protocol for managing the track network. The Protocol outlines the process of considering and implementing the policies of the PNP as they relate to tracks and the park. These policies and rules for use and development provide a baseline for the Protocol.

GWRC Parks officers have adopted a pragmatic approach to reviewing all the tracks in consultation with ARAC, other users and with the GWRC Biodiversity and Environment Science departments. As part of this process all the areas where motorised recreation access is considered inappropriate were identified. This includes areas which have high environmental values, especially water courses and wetlands such as Martin's Creek (north of the Devils Staircase) and Whaktikei Wetland. Unofficial park access entrances were also identified and measures to close these agreed. The review also included the closure and rehabilitation of some tracks and removal of them from the

map; such as 257B Loop and side tracks off Hukinga Road. The principles of the Track Protocol are outlined in Appendix 3.

As part of the forestry rights sale RMS, managed through PF Olsen, is now responsible for the metro forest (Akatarawa and Pakuratahi plantation forests) roads, which are also used by recreational users as a key component of the forest network. Major entry points through Puketiro and Valley View forests provide access to a number of well used recreational tracks and routes.

Akatarawa Forest concession licence holder PF Olsen on behalf of RMS (Resource Management Service) has also had an opportunity to review the track network within the Metro Forests. Much of the Akatarawa Forest (outside current harvesting areas) is available by permit for motorised recreation on weekends and outside operational hours.

ARAC & GWRC MoU

ARAC members have worked with GWRC to manage the forest and track network for many years. In 2014 ARAC committee members were made official honorary rangers and now provide an additional presence in the forest with the ability to issue permits on the spot to motorbike riders.

GWRC does not have the resources to maintain all the extensive network of tracks in Akatarawa Forest. As a result the GWRC focus is the main entry points into the northern native forest vegetation area, the Karapoti Classic MTB race loop, and main tracks such as the Rimu Road.

ARAC have worked closely with GWRC in a practical way to maintain the key routes through the forest. Their presence and work helps to minimise the unwanted park visitor behaviour of creating new routes and/or alternate track lines, which can lead to braiding of tracks and damage to the environment. The MoU defines the different aspects of this maintenance agreement.