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Report to the Landcare Division
from Andrew Annakin, Divisional Manager, Landcare

Environmental Asset Management : Forest Lands and Water Collection Areas Interim Management Plan

1. Purpose

To ask the Landcare Committee to recommend to the Utility Services Committee that a joint review of the Forest Lands and Water Collection Areas Interim Management Plan take place, as part of a “Community Connections” exercise, through the 2000/01 financial year.

2. Asset Management Plans to a New Level

Volume 4 of the Regional Parks/Natural Forestry Asset Management Plan is the Environmental Asset Management Plan. This is the least developed of a suite of asset management documents, but potentially the most exciting. While the draft Asset Management Plan principally covers infrastructural assets, the Environmental Plan deals with the significant “green” community assets on Council lands – including the current and future water collection areas.

The Environmental Asset Management Plan is the “how and when” for environmental asset management on Council lands. There are several contributing elements under an emerging Landcare Long-term Financial Strategy (LTFS) theme of “environmental management excellence”: Regional Policy Statement implementation, Environmental Education, Pest Management, Key Native Ecosystems, and Biodiversity.

The Environmental Asset Management Plan will establish and/or confirm:

- asset types and condition;
- service levels (to the Regional Community and the Water Group); and
- required work programmes.

The Environmental Plan is part of the three year Landcare Asset Management Plan programme and will be further refined through this financial year, in consultation with the Water Group in particular. Geoff Cameron will present the draft Plan at the November Landcare Committee meeting.

3. **Council Policy for Environmental Asset Management**

The Forest Lands and Water Collection Areas Interim Management Plan is the overarching “what and why” policy document. Approved in 1996 (Report 96.48), the Plan set the policy and procedural framework for the management relationship between the newly created Landcare and Utility Services divisions. The Plan covers those Council lands known as the Future Catchments (including Plantation Forestry), and the Current Catchments - some 40,000 hectares.

These areas have a mix of regionally important environmental, water production, economic, heritage, and amenity values. The *Signature* tools developed by Susan Edwards' team are useful for comparing the respective environmental, heritage and amenity values across Council lands. The forest areas score particularly well using this process, especially the Pakuratahi forest and the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Catchments (see **Attachment 1**).

The “Interim” tag on the Management Plan recognised that the new Council management structure needed time to mature. In addition, there were a range of Regional Plans under development that could impact on the Council’s forest lands, particularly the Freshwater Plan and the proposed Landscape Plan. The Forest Lands Interim Management Plan was expected to be reviewed through 1999. However, precedence has been given to completing Asset Management Plans.

While Council policy, in reality the Interim Management Plan has not been rigorously followed. There is nothing fundamentally flawed with the existing policy. However, clearly the mix of environmental, economic and amenity values has shifted over time. With the increasing involvement of the Landcare Division in the environmental management of Council lands and the changes that have occurred since the Plan was approved in 1996, it is timely to review the document. The Water Group also wants clarity in terms of respective responsibilities and obligations.

Several interest groups contributed to the Interim Management Plan through public consultation. There is still a keen interest in the principles underlying the Plan - as evidenced by Paul Hughes’ recent submission to the Landcare Committee. The 1999 Akatarawa Forest visitor survey, consultation feedback on logging around the Rimutaka Incline Recreation Area, and the creation of the ARAC lobby group indicate the significant “Community Connection” opportunities in this proposed policy review.

4. **A Mix of Community Services**

Amenity services on Council lands were much improved with the establishment of a Forest Lands Ranger from the 1997 Landcare Divisional Review. Public access into the Hutt Catchment has since been opened up and policy developed for access to the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water collection areas. These activities are currently funded from Regional Rates and user charges. There is also a small contribution from Plantation Forestry to recognise cross-benefits from the Forest Lands Ranger.

Amenity management issues are relatively easy to identify. However, the subtleties of environmental management bring a new dimension. The Landcare Division takes a stewardship and protection approach to forest health; natural character, protection and biodiversity are important elements.

The Water Group's interests are principally in the Current Catchments and obviously relate to raw water quality: adequate ground cover, controlling disease and catchment security.

In the Future Catchments, the Landcare Division undertakes environmental asset management as a largely Regional Rate funded activity (including pest management, Ranger surveillance and fire suppression). Total environmental asset management expenditure within the Future Catchments is around \$370,000 per annum. The Water Group currently contributes \$50,000 per annum to the cost of this, due to end in 1999/00.

For the Current Catchments (Hutt and Wainuiomata/Orongorongo), the Landcare Division is currently a contracted service deliverer ("vegetation management") to the Water Group at \$158,000 per annum. There is no Regional Rate expenditure on forest health in the Current Catchments, though additional Ranger services are provided from Kaitoke Regional Park for Hutt, and the recent Wainuiomata/Orongorongo pest control operation was half funded from the Council Lands Pest Management budget (Regional Rates).

Following the August 1998 contamination incident, the Water Group further contracted the Landcare Division to provide a security Ranger service (30 percent remains Regional Rate funded, by Council approval). This service has done much to improve relations with neighbours, co-ordinate pest control, and to set the scene for future public access.

5. **An Appropriate Balance, Costs and Benefits?**

There is a natural tension in the environmental asset management relationship between the Landcare and Utility Services divisions. On the one hand, Landcare is a contracted service provider to the Water Group with specific requirements for forest health. On the other hand, Landcare manages the wider environmental and amenity values on Council lands.

Different funding streams - Regional Rates and the Water Levy, further complicate this. However, the Regional Council sets both of them, and therefore has a unique perspective as implementers of the Regional Policy Statement and as, de facto, the Wellington Regional Water Board.

Under each set of responsibilities, and through the respective Standing Committees, I seek a better basis to manage and fund the elements of sound intergenerational environmental and amenity management within the prime function of the catchments being the collection of raw water.

Considering the Regional Council's wider environmental management role, and the powers conferred under the Wellington Regional Water Board Act, these competing objectives are not mutually exclusive. There are excellent examples elsewhere of different interests working across multiple organisational objectives, e.g., the Auckland Regional Council's parkland management of the Waitakari Catchments.

The Forest Lands Interim Management Plan is the right vehicle for both areas of interest and expertise (core capabilities) to work under a broad banner of environmental management excellence. Landcare and Utility Services both have a part to play as contributors to community well-being through the responsible management of environmental assets. In a commercial setting the resulting synergies could be described as being "good community corporate citizens."

6. **Recommendations**

That the Landcare Committee:

- (1) *Note that in preparing draft infrastructural asset management plans, the Landcare Division is developing an Environmental Asset Management Plan for Council lands, including the natural forests within the current and future water collection areas.*
- (2) *Recommend to the Utility Services Committee that the Forest Lands and Water Collection Area Interim Management Plan be jointly reviewed through the 2000/01 financial year, as a Community Connections exercise, to confirm the respective areas of responsibility and funding for environmental, amenity, heritage, water collection, and catchment security activities within the Future Catchments (including Plantation Forestry) and in the Current Catchments.*

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Attachment 1 : *Signatures Map*