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Report to the Landcare Committee
from Anne Manley, Parks Planner- Policy, Regional Parks (Strategy and Marketing)

Regional Parks Visitor Satisfaction Survey

1. Purpose

To report on the 1999/2000 Regional Parks performance indicator for visitor satisfaction monitoring.

2. Performance Indicator

In respect of short-term (1999/2000) performance indicators for Regional Parks, *Facing the Future* states, inter alia, that:

Park satisfaction will be monitored through a visitor satisfaction recording programme.

To meet this requirement, Regional Parks (Strategy & Marketing) undertook to survey visitor satisfaction within the parks and key recreation areas, and report back to the Landcare Committee by 30 June 2000.

3. About the Survey

The Visitor Satisfaction Survey was officially conducted from 26 February through to 5 March 2000 (inclusive). In most areas the survey was extended over the following week to obtain a bigger sample (refer Section 5).

The Survey, (the third using the current format), involved the placement of 18 survey installations at strategic points within four Regional Parks (Battle Hill, Belmont, Kaitoke and Queen Elizabeth) and two key recreation areas (Rimutaka Incline/Tunnel Gully). It was a self administering exit survey of visitors aged 15 and over, and addressed the following questions:

- (1) **How do visitors rate the quality of the Park's facilities and services?**
- (2) **How do visitors rate the quality of the Park environment?**
- (3) **What are visitors' levels of overall satisfaction with their visit?**

Respondents rated each of these factors on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 was very poor (or very unhappy) and 10 was excellent (or very happy). They were also invited to explain the reasons for answers to the three principal questions to elicit both the positive and negative influences on their experience. Comments were collated and a summary of key issues for each park is presented in Attachment 1.

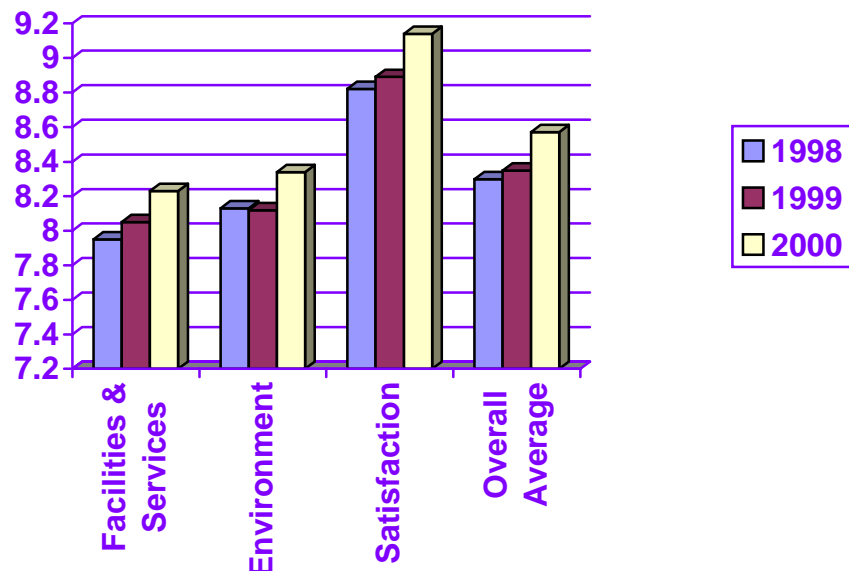
Visitors were asked to specify their main activity, gender and age. This year, people were also asked about their ethnicity and the area where they reside. We hope to get a clearer demographic profile of the people responding to the questionnaires from this information, and an indication of the make-up of Park users to compare with other surveys (refer Section 5).

4. Summary of Results

Table 1 : Key Results

	Battle Hill Farm Forest Park	Belmont Regional Park	Kaitoke Regional Park	Queen Elizabeth Park	Rimutaka Incline and Tunnel Gully	All parks average	1999 parks average	1998 parks average
Facilities & services	8.8	8.1	8.4	7.5	8.2	8.23	8.05	7.95
Environment	8.1	8.1	9.1	7.7	8.6	8.34	8.12	8.13
Satisfaction	9.3	8.9	9.3	8.8	9.2	9.14	8.89	8.82
Average score	8.7	8.4	8.9	8.0	8.7	8.57	8.35	8.30

The average ratings for the Park Network in 1998, 1999, 2000 are illustrated in the graph below:



5. What Do the Results Mean?

5.1 General Observations

The survey results reflect good general performance in all areas. The average rating for all three categories (facilities and services, environment and satisfaction) rose this year, reflecting improvements within the Parks.

The pattern of results generally fit with expectations and reflects the time and effort that has gone into many areas over the last twelve months. This is illustrated particularly well at Queen Elizabeth Park, where capital expenditure was increased significantly to improve facilities, (e.g., provide new toilets) and to begin work on environmental projects, (e.g., wetland fencing and planting). Ratings at this park rose by 1.5 - 2.5 percent in all three categories (refer Section 5.3).

Despite this change, Queen Elizabeth Park retains the lowest average rating overall. Kaitoke Regional Park retained the highest overall average. The greatest movement was at Rimutaka Incline/Tunnel Gully Recreation Areas, where the overall average increased by 5.2 percent on the 1999 average (refer Section 5.3).

Ratings for satisfaction are once again significantly higher than ratings for facilities and services, and the environment. (The Park Network average for facilities and services was 8.2; environment; 8.3; while the average rating for satisfaction was 9.1.) This is consistent with the view that a visitor's personal experience (and therefore satisfaction) is not solely dependent upon the quality of the environment and/or facilities provided. Mood, weather, and the actual activity undertaken (such as walking or cycling in the fresh air) may also influence this.

Comment

The samples for both Battle Hill Farm Forest Park and Kaitoke Regional Park were very low (49 at Battle Hill compared to 104 last year, and 51 compared to 152 in 1999 at Kaitoke) even after the survey was extended. Interestingly, the results generally reflect trends and/or levels at both Parks in previous surveys, which suggests that they do have some merit. However, the results for these two areas are not statistically significant.

During the survey period the weather was cloudy and windy which may have kept visitor numbers down at Battle Hill. Furthermore, an equestrian event was held during the first weekend of the survey. Many of the participants have responded to surveys before and may have been less interested in doing so this time. The Ranger has been working directly with the equestrian clubs to make improvements for both parties.

The small sample at Kaitoke is thought to be due to changeable weather and in particular, the presence of several large-scale filming operations at the Park. The sample was also down at the Te Marua end of the Park. This may be due to the collapse of the Benge Creek bridge, currently being rebuilt off site. (The bridge completed a loop walk from Benge Flat.)

The final sample size in all areas was down this year. At Belmont and at Queen Elizabeth Park, where you would generally expect to obtain the target 150 samples, only 145 and 136 were reached respectively. The Rimutaka Incline/Tunnel Gully Recreation Areas had the same sample size as other years (133). In this area, a sample size of between 130 and 135 appears to be the norm.

5.2 Key Issues

Key issues emerging across the Park Network include:

- The continuing conflict between mountain bike riders and other users on multi-purpose tracks;
- The desire for improved signage, (e.g., showing track times) and interpretation;
- The desire for more and/or improved tracks, (e.g., to accommodate baby buggies);
- The desire for more and/or improved facilities, (e.g., picnic tables and seats and upgraded toilets); and
- The need for better pest plant control.

Other trends include:

- More education is needed on the “take home rubbish” policy at Kaitoke and Queen Elizabeth Park;
- Respondents are keen to see more native plantings and bush left to regenerate;
- Better dog control is needed;
- The Council ranger service is popular;
- The undeveloped, uncluttered nature of the Parks remain popular, as do the well-maintained facilities.

Results relating to specific parks are addressed below.

5.2 Park by Park Breakdown

(1) *Battle Hill Farm Forest Park*

The ratings for facilities and services and satisfaction increased significantly again at Battle Hill this year (4 and 3.7 percent respectively). The focus of staff over the last few years has been on making the Park tidier and this may have contributed to this increase, (e.g., improving tree surrounds, providing pitching-posts for horses, and new seats). Several respondents commented on the enhancements since they visited several years ago and on the continued improvements taking place in the Park. Furthermore, all the bridges have been replaced or upgraded at Battle Hill over the last twelve months. Conservation Corps have been working to tidy up the Park and the Bush Reserve and some riparian planting has been undertaken. The rating for the environment at Battle Hill remained unchanged.

(2) ***Belmont Regional Park***

The ratings for facilities and services, environment and satisfaction remained virtually unchanged from 1999. The comments (positive and negative) were also largely unchanged, although this year a number of respondents thought more facilities, e.g., toilets, water, etc were needed in some parts of the Park, and more bush should be left to regenerate. Progress on pest plant control from the previous year was noted by some. Overall satisfaction with the rural nature of the Park and the stunning views, located so close to urban areas, was high.

(3) ***Kaitoke Regional Park***

The rating for facilities and services at Kaitoke remained virtually unchanged this year. The environment and satisfaction ratings increased significantly on the previous year.

The higher environmental rating was largely due to increased ratings for the Te Marua end of the Park. A number of improvements have been made in that area. The amphitheater has been sown and plantings have been done. In general the area is much tidier than during the survey period in 1999.

The satisfaction rating increased by around 3 percent at Kaitoke this year. Although some of this can be attributed to the higher environmental rating, satisfaction is dependent on a number of intangibles, (e.g., mood, weather, behaviour of other Park users) and is more difficult to explain. Visitor comments included the need for better plant pest control and dog control. Comments on the camping facilities and the ranger service were particularly favourable this year.

(4) ***Queen Elizabeth Park***

As noted, all ratings at Queen Elizabeth Park increased this year, reflecting the increase in capital expenditure over the last twelve months in the Park. Standards have gradually risen over the last few years since the WRC took over management and the 7-day ranger service was introduced. Comments indicate that the Park is cleaner and tidier than in the past. While many of the facilities are old, respondents have been impressed with the maintenance and cleanliness of them. New toilets were built at Whareroa Beach in 1999. Wetland fencing and planting was also undertaken which could account for part of the increased environmental rating.

Comments included the need for better dog control, and more speedbumps. The picnic areas and ranger service were regarded favourably.

This Park retains the lowest overall ranking in the Network. This is consistent with the Regional Parks Group's knowledge of this Park and the condition of its facilities, which are generally the oldest in the Network. While improvements to facilities and the environment have been made in the last few years and the ratings have increased correspondingly, there is still much to be done to lift the standard to those of other Parks in the Network. Toilet replacements, bridge replacements and updating of information signs and park furniture are on the work programme for the next five years. A number of priority environmental projects (which would support biodiversity) have been identified by the WRC in Queen Elizabeth Park, (e.g., stabilisation of the dune vegetation (said to be the best of its type in the Foxton Ecological District)). In time, these measures should further improve the overall rating of the Park.

(5) ***Rimutaka Incline and Tunnel Gully Recreation Areas***

All ratings for Rimutaka Incline/Tunnel Gully have increased significantly this year, the largest increase being for the environment. Although plantation forestry activities are still being undertaken at the Rimutaka Incline Recreation Area, they are being undertaken in areas that are not as visible to users as last year. Furthermore, parts of the area affected by logging last year, have started to heal. There were, however, still a few comments regarding the impacts of logging.

There was no pest control operation undertaken in either Recreation Area before the survey this year. Last year an extensive 1080 drop was made a few months before the survey, which was particularly unpopular with dog walkers, pulling the rating down.

Comments on the bush and the peaceful environment at Tunnel Gully were particularly favourable this year.

In terms of facilities and services, a number of respondents commented positively on the track maintenance at Tunnel Gully and bridges, (e.g., the new bridge on Tane's Track). Others commented on the lack of litter and the tidiness of that area. The survey responses reiterated the popularity of both Recreation Areas with families. Respondents continued to request better signage (particularly at Tunnel Gully). The signs showing where the track deviates for logging operations at the Rimutaka Incline were criticised by many. Visitors also requested improved interpretation. Overall, though, both areas were highly regarded.

(6) ***Activities, Gender, and Age***

Walking remains the most popular activity across the Park Network. As in previous years, the survey tends to show a reasonably even gender spread in most areas. In both the 1998, 1999 and 2000 surveys, the 30-39 and 40-49 age groups account for around 45 percent of visitors who responded to the surveys. However, this does not necessarily reflect the percentage of users in those age groups, as some age groups/users may be more inclined to respond to surveys than others.

(7) *Ethnicity and City/District*

As noted, this year respondents were asked to specify their ethnicity and the city or district where they live. Ethnicity generally reflects the trends in the 1995 benchmark survey with people classifying themselves as Pakeha, European or New Zealanders making up some 73 percent of respondents. Maori respondents totaled 5 percent.

As expected, the respondents were largely regional residents. In general, residents from the territorial authority closest to each Park were the predominant respondents. Battle Hill is an exception, where Wellington City respondents outweighed those from Porirua City. At Kaitoke, respondents from Wellington, Hutt and Upper Hutt Cities were about equal. At Kaitoke and at the Rimutaka Incline/Tunnel Gully Recreation Areas, 4 percent of respondents were international visitors. At Kaitoke, another 4 percent were New Zealand visitors who reside outside the Wellington Region. As in 1995, most regional park users came from Hutt City, followed closely by Wellington City, then Upper Hutt and the Kapiti Coast. Wairarapa residents made up almost 2 percent of respondents to the 2000 survey. They were recorded at Kaitoke, Rimutaka Incline/Tunnel Gully Recreation Areas and at Queen Elizabeth Park.

6. **Where To Now?**

The more detailed report, with full results, will be analysed by managers and staff to determine appropriate actions and responses to suggestions and concerns raised during the survey.

In each park there are a number of minor matters raised that may be easily addressed within existing budgets. The Manager, Regional Parks (Operations) will action these, together with Rangers, (e.g., improving signs, policing dog control). Capital expenditure to replace “big ticket items” such as toilets and bridges has been programmed over the next 10 years. However, the need for better pest plant control (identified by many respondents in all areas) is still to be dealt with through the Pest Management Strategy and Environmental Asset Management Plan.

Given the low sample numbers this year and feedback which suggests that a longer period of time may be needed between surveys to get more indicative results, we intend to make the visitor satisfaction survey a biennial event. It is envisaged that comprehensive site or topic specific surveys, (e.g., East Harbour Regional Park Harbour) will be undertaken in alternative years, to aid us in our parks planning.

The full report will be tabled at the Landcare Committee meeting on 4 May 2000. Councillors can obtain a copy of that report from Regional Parks (Strategy & Marketing).

7. Communications

Regional Parks staff will prepare a press release and photo in conjunction with Corporate Communications to publicise the overall level of satisfaction with the Regional Parks Network.

8. Recommendation

That the report be received and the contents noted.

Report prepared by:

Approved for Submission:

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Attachment 1 : Summary of Comments