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Report to the Landcare Committee
from Geoff Dick, Manager, Flood Protection (Operations)

Otaki River Mouth Estuary

1. Purpose

To advise the Committee on progress made in investigating options for reducing vehicle damage at the Otaki River Mouth Estuary.

2. Background

At the 3 February 2000 Landcare Committee (LCC) meeting Councillors considered a paper on Game Bird Hunting on the Otaki River. The discussion included debate over the potential to make the river mouth estuary a 'wildlife reserve'. This stemmed from the submissions made during the consultation on the duck hunting issue.

The LCC discussion about the estuary considered what were perceived to be current problems at the estuary and what could be done to resolve some of the issues including rubbish dumping, improper use of 4 wheel drives etc.

As a consequence of the discussion Committee members passed the following resolution:

“Request officers to report back to the Landcare Committee, by the end of June 2000, with proposals for preventing the damage caused to the estuarine and coastal area of the northern section of the Otaki River mouth by all forms of vehicle.”

Since the February LCC meeting a number of actions have been taken to meet the Committee request:

- The Flood Protection Operating Plan has been confirmed as part of developing the Council's new LTFS. The Flood Protection Operating plan includes provision to establish a “nature reserve” at the Otaki River mouth. Specifically \$10,000 in 2001/02 and \$29,000 in 2002/03. Work would include planting, construction of new access tracks and board walks, a car park and planting. The first year's programme would be part design work and part implementation.

- Emily Williams of G & E Williams Consultants was commissioned to develop concept plans for a walking trail on the north bank of the Otaki River between the estuary and Chrystalls Bend. This contract, now completed, includes some initial ideas on possible development at the estuary.
- Operations staff have inspected the area to consider what immediate actions can be taken to limit ongoing damage by vehicles.

3. Existing Situation

The Otaki River mouth lagoon was formed in the mid 1970s when the river mouth extended north, nearly to Kapiti Lane. In 1977 the former Manawatu Catchment Board completed a diversion cut approximately midway between the north and south stopbanks. The lagoon was formed from the remnant riverbed following the natural closure of the foredune, at the former northern mouth position.

The vegetation around the lagoon has all established naturally. The vegetation includes both native and exotic species, including a large area of silver poplars.

Some further facts about the lagoon include:

- The lagoon and surrounding vegetation is largely located within the Soil Conservation Reserve. The Regional Council is the primary manager of this land.
- The lagoon is vulnerable to future northward shifts of the Otaki River mouth, and cannot therefore be regarded as a permanent feature.
- The Otaki River mouth is a very popular fishing spot. There are two main fishing access routes:
 - from Marine Parade along the gravel beach front.
 - from the end of Kapiti Lane along the Rangiuuru stopbank to the riverbed approximately 600m upstream of the river mouth.
- There are numerous vehicle tracks on the seaward and northern boundaries of the lagoon. Some of these tracks are used for fishing access, others have been formed by general recreational use. Generally there is little encroachment into the lagoon area on the eastern or stopbank side, and on the southern or river boundary.
- Flood Protection have an informal agreement with the Otaki Recreational Fishing Club over the Rangiuuru stopbank access. In simple terms the access will be kept open provided the Fishing Club keep an eye on the area, remove any dumped rubbish, and generally look after the area.

4. The Williams Concept

Attachment 1 to this report is the concept plan developed by Emily Williams as part of a proposed walkway development on the north bank of the river from the mouth to Chrystalls Bend. Key features of the plan include:

- The development of a buffer zone, including vehicle barriers on the seaward side of the lagoon.
- Development of formal car parks on the existing grass area to the north – off Marine Parade and Kapiti Lane.
- Retaining the existing public access along the Rangiuuru stopbank.
- Enhancement planting and development of formal walkways.

Development of the seaward buffer zone, a key component of the Williams concept plan for enhancing the area, will not be easy. The area is prone to inundation by the sea at high tide during a westerly storm. Such a storm is highly likely to damage any 'natural' barrier.

5. **Immediate Actions**

Operations staff have inspected the area to see what immediate actions can be taken to prevent or limit damage by vehicles. Our view is that there is little that can be done immediately without the benefit of an extensive consultation process.

Generally the agreement with the Otaki Recreational Fishing Club is working satisfactorily. Closure of the Ranguru access is not recommended, however, closure of some secondary four wheel drive tracks is proposed.

It is not recommended to construct any temporary barrier on the northern and seaward side of the lagoon. A temporary barrier such as concrete blocks and cable is not likely to be well received. Such a barrier would be very ugly and is likely to upset a proportion of the community. In addition, it is unlikely that vehicles will "intrude" closer to the lagoon than they already have, and further damage establishing vegetation, over the next year or so.

6. **"Nature Reserve" Project**

Funding has been included in the Flood Protection Operating Plan to develop a "nature reserve" around the existing Otaki River mouth lagoon. Work on this project commences next financial year, 2001/02. One of the issues for the development of the "nature reserve" will be the control of vehicles. This will need to be incorporated into the design of the reserve. In the interim no further work on developing measures for the control of vehicles is proposed.

Consultation should begin early in the design phase of the 'nature reserve' project. The lagoon is situated in the coastal marine area, therefore consultation with the Department of Conservation is required. Ngati Raukawa have recently released an Iwi Management Plan for the Otaki River and almost certainly will want to be actively involved in the proposed development. The Friends of the Otaki River group should also be involved from the early stages of the design, and as a vehicle for community consultation. This process should ensure a high degree of community support for the 'nature reserve' project.

7. **Site Visit**

Committee members have previously expressed a wish for a field visit to the Otaki River mouth lagoon area. It would be helpful if members could confirm that they still wish a site visit to be arranged at the Committee meeting.

8. **Communication**

The proposal to develop a “nature reserve” at the Otaki River mouth will be discussed with the Friends of the Otaki River at the next convenient meeting as part of presenting the Williams walkway proposals. We will also seek initial feedback from the Department of Conservation and Ngati Raukawa in preparation for the design phase of the reserve project.

Due to the specific consultation being undertaken during this project, we consider that further general communication through press releases is not warranted at this stage.

9. **Recommendation**

That the Landcare Committee receive the report and note the contents.

Report prepared by:

Approved for submission:

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Attachment 1 : Concept Plan