

Report 03.172
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Committee Landcare
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Regional Outdoors Programme 2003

1. Purpose

To report the success of the Regional Outdoors Programme in achieving its objectives.

2. Background

The Regional Outdoors Programme arises from the Greater Wellington Regional Council's (GWRC) marketing strategy for Parks and Forests. This season's programme ran from 6 January to 30 March 2003 (1 November to 31 March last season).

Following the debrief of last years programme we decided that we needed to look at a slightly smaller one this season. We also focussed on the period following Christmas when people are not so rushed and the weather is more settled. This resulted in only one cancelled trip due to bad weather, as opposed to nine last season.

Parks and Forests staff worked with other council departments, local authorities (Wellington City Council, Hutt City Council), local businesses (Top Adventures, the Kennett Bros), clubs and community groups in organising and promoting activities that would appeal to a wide range of people.

The activities ranged from recreational walks, sporting events, open days and educational tours. Those run by Greater Wellington generally blended recreation and education, with interpretation from rangers and other experts. They were targeted towards groups of around 20-30 people so that everyone could see and hear the points of interest. Some events, e.g. the Rimutaka Rail Trail walk, Lighthouse and Lakes walk, drew more people and needed correspondingly more staff input and resources.

Activities run by outside agencies tended to be either sporting events or open days that required little interpretation but significant staffing and organisation e.g. the Big Coast, Karapoti Classic, Pauatahanui Food and Farm Festival.

3. Promotion

We used a variety of media channels, to target a broad range of people and achieve optimal attendance levels:

- The programme was published in the December *Elements*, and distributed to all households in the region.
- Event calendars were distributed to Visitor Information Centres, libraries, pool and recreation centres, Department of Conservation centres and previous participants.
- Radio advertising was taken out on The Radio Network.
- Public notices were placed in key community newspapers.
- Press releases were placed with the print media.
- The events were advertised on various Territorial Authority websites e.g. feelinggreat.co.nz and in their promotional leaflets, e.g. Stepping Out.

4. Results

Once again we carried out satisfaction surveys at the conclusion of each of the GWRC events, and at some of those organised by outside agencies. These surveys rated satisfaction levels and asked for some basic demographic data, e.g. place of residence, age, and gender.

A brief summary of participation in the summer programme is set out in the table below:

Key Result Areas	This Year (Jan-Mar)	Last Year (Nov-Mar)
Events run by GWRC	20	36
Events run by other agencies on GWRC land	13	18
Participants at GWRC events	726	771
Total programme participants	5665	9136
Average participation at GWRC events	36	30
First time visitors	48%	32%

Some highlights of the Programme included:

- the Nature Discovery Treasure Hunt which attracted over 130 people.
- the 4WD sunset tours at Battle Hill which were booked out within hours of being offered.
- 90 people attending the rescheduled Rimutaka Rail Trail.
- good attendance at special interest events, e.g. Botany of Coastal Dunes (24), In-depth Guide to the Rainforest (28); Landscape & Wetlands Walk (28).
- a total of 25 newspaper articles described specific events in the programme.

Customer satisfaction with the organisation, guiding, setting and facilities were once again extremely high. Many participants commented favourably on the quality of information and the unexpected “extras”, e.g. refreshments and portaloos.

Attachment 1 has more detail on the Regional Outdoors survey results.

5. For the future

Feedback from staff involved with in the events as well as from the visitor satisfaction surveys, gave a very positive impression of the Regional Outdoors programme. The users said the Programme was well organised, an excellent way to entertain and educate the public, and affordable for all. In many cases it galvanised the locals – who may never have visited a regional park – to get outdoors and enjoy themselves.

Recommendations from the debriefing sessions are for incremental improvements rather than major changes. The main findings from the debrief are as follows:

- Review and refresh the programme of events to:
 - explore new features of the parks and forests
 - provide some introductory level (and interactive) special interest events, i.e. Beginners Guide to the Rainforest equivalents
 - make GWRC events more attractive to younger people, with more interactive, school holiday and/or recreational activities
 - minimise clashes with other events, e.g. Wellington Cup
 - include more details in the programme, e.g. level of difficulty, child-friendly.
- Develop a booking system, including an answer service and email to enable people to leave messages after hours.
- Booked events are easier to plan for and manage. Maximise the number of these in preference to casual attendees. Having a waiting list for all booked events will allow for the inevitable cancellations.
- Maintain the plan of free or low cost events. Consider accepting donations to help cover costs where transport is involved.
- Include the entire range of events in Elements (the March programme was separate). Make the Elements insert more user and display-friendly.
- The radio advertising promoted the programme as a whole (rather than specific events) and referred people to the Greater Wellington Regional Council’s website for more information. Given that radio can only be an indirect source of information, we should limit radio advertising.
- Use press releases as much as possible. As many of the events were free (and news is limited over summer) newspapers were very open to picking up press releases. In several cases they published entire articles and photos as supplied.

6. Communication

The summer programme was well publicised while it ran. We do not propose further communication at this time.

7. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. *receive the report.*
2. *note the contents of the report.*

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Attachment 1: Results of Regional Outdoors survey