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Committee Utility Services
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Wainuiomata–Orongorongo Water Collection Area access plan review

1. Purpose

To report back on Phase 3 of the Wainuiomata–Orongorongo Water Collection Area access plan ('the access plan'), and to seek approval for a new three-year access plan.

2. Background

In September 2000, the Council approved a programme for implementing managed public access to the Wainuiomata-Orongorongo Water Collection Area. The access plan provides for implementing managed access in three annual phases through to July 2003. Progress on access is to be reviewed annually by the Landcare and Utility Services Divisions and reported to the Utility Services Committee (refer reports 00.665 and 01.312).

Phase 1 provided for guided tours for organised groups by Landcare rangers and permitted hunting during the Roar (April/May).

Phase 2 doubled visitor numbers (from 20 to 40 per 'trip-day'), and began a programme for training volunteer interpreters to assist the rangers as tour guides.

Phase 3 expanded the programme further by providing for tours in the Orongorongo Catchment (as well as the Wainuiomata Catchment) and the full implementation of the Volunteer Interpreters Programme.

3. Phase 3 implementation (2002/03)

Last years programme was very successful. In February 2003 visitor numbers were increased to 60 per day in February 2003 as the Interpreters Programme became fully operational (i.e. when sufficient trained guides were available to maintain the 1:10 guide-to-visitor ratio, required under the access plan).

Wainuiomata

The 2002/03 programme provided for 12 trips. Council approved three initial trips of 60 people, which were followed by trips of 40, rising again to trips of 60 from February 2003. One trip was cancelled due to bad weather. Overall 11 trips were held with a total of 404 walkers. The guiding ratio of 1:10 has been maintained.

Orongorongo

As provided for in the plan, six trips of ten people were held in the Orongorongo Catchment from December 2002 to February 2003 for a total of 60 people. The guiding ratio was 2:10.

Hunting

There were no tours in April due to the public balloted hunt. Eighty members of the public obtained a permit and shot 8 deer, 6 pigs and 7 goats; a total of 21 animals, which was similar to numbers culled in previous years (23 in 2001 and 22 in 2002).

Research

Landcare Research trapped possums at five sites in the Orongorongo Valley as part of a study looking at gene flow in the possum population.

Victoria University staff took cores from the Orongorongo montane wetland to determine the age of layers through carbon dating.

Feedback

Feedback about the programme has been positive, we have had several letters of thanks from walkers who participated in the tours.

4. Proposal for 2003/04 to 2005/06

The past three years have seen a phased “ramp-up” of public access into the water collection area. In 2000 when the programme was initiated, it had capacity for 320 people per year. This year the capacity will expand to nearly 900 people per year. The programme is now mature and thus we propose a new three-year access plan with a constant level of access across the period. The proposed access levels are outlined below.

The previous review noted that Phase 3 of the access plan would be comprehensively reviewed and incorporated into the draft Forest Lands Management Plan for public consultation. We have reviewed our conclusions and now consider that there is no need for the proposals for 2003/04 to be included in the management plans. If changes are required in the future, the incorporation of the access plan within the management plan would constrain its amendment. Therefore we consider it more appropriate that the access plan be formally reviewed every three years through a report to the Council, rather than within the management plan context.

Wainuiomata

We propose that the number of trips (12) and number of people per trip (60) remain the same over the next three financial years totalling 720 visitors per year. However, we wish to recommend two key changes:

- that the tours be opened up to individuals as well as groups
- the ratio of guides change from 1:10 to 1:15 while maintaining the 60 people per trip size.

Although tours of individuals will be more work for staff, officers feel that with the pool of trained volunteers and staff they could manage with larger groups than in Phase 3 in 2002/03.

We suggest six tours of groups and six of individuals. The number of people participating in the group tours has waned over the year and this ratio provides equal opportunities for individuals and groups.

Orongorongo

We propose that the number of trips (six) remain the same over the next three years, but increase trip sizes from 10 to 15 while keeping the same number of guides. As two guides are required anyway, it would be possible to increase the group size to 15 without any difficulty. The guiding ratio would therefore change from 2:10 to 2:15. We recommend that the Orongorongo tours remain with groups only as fitness levels required are higher and we rely on the group leaders to ensure that members have the necessary fitness for the trip.

Hunting

We propose that a “roar” hunt and professional hunting be provided for as appropriate.

Resourcing

Phase 3 was funded from within the existing rates budget allocated to managing the land within the catchment. Costs are shared between the Water Group and Parks and Forests. Last year’s review report (02.442) noted that Phase 3 was achievable within existing budgets, however any expansion would require additional resourcing. To comply with the ratios of guides to people, as well as providing the administrative support needed to organise and run the programme, is very time and staff consuming. This is still the case. We consider that the proposals for 2003/04 can be achieved within our existing resources but any increase would require an increase in the number of staff dedicated to the programme.

5. The next step

If Council approves the proposals for 2003/04 to 2005/06 Landcare officers will begin implementation immediately. This will involve setting dates for the tours (in conjunction with the Water Group) and advertising for visitors. Ballots will be held to allocate the tours.

6. Communication

We will prepare advertising material to advertise the scheduled tours through to 30 June 2004 and how to apply to take a tour. We will also place information on the Council's website.

7. Recommendations

That the Landcare Committee recommends to the Policy, Finance and Strategy Committee that the Council:

1. *receive the report.*
2. *note the contents of the report.*
3. *agree to the proposals for access for 2003/04 to 2005/06 in the Wainuiomata Catchment as follows:*
 - *12 trips of 60 people*
 - *guiding ratios of 1:15*
 - *six 'group tours' and six 'individuals tours'.*
4. *agree to the proposals for access for 2003/04 to 2005/06 in the Orongorongo Catchment as follows:*
 - *6 tours of 15 people*
 - *guiding ratios of 2:15 (one of the guides must be a staff member).*
5. *agree that a public 'roar hunt' continue to operate through a ballot system.*

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