

Manager, Parks' report for period ending Friday 28 July 2006

1. Manager's comments

1.1 Introduction

It is hard to sum a whole year up into a sentence or two, but if I had to, I would say that there was a lot to do, and a lot was achieved. Amongst all that, there were some definite highlights.

Four years after developing our marketing function, the marketing programme is really starting to bear fruit. Our recent annual Community Survey (May 2006) shows that while visitor numbers remain constant, recognition of, and satisfaction with the parks has grown beyond expectation. Added to that, this year's Regional Outdoors Programme had its most successful summer yet, with unprecedented numbers of people attending. The programme was then honoured by receiving a NZ Recreation Association Award at last year's Annual Conference. We also completed updating our suite of brochures and all our map boards, a project that has been going since the Council rebranded in 2003.

The Visitor Monitoring Framework project started this year with a review of how we calculate our visitation. As the project rolls out, we will have a complete system of robust data collection techniques to monitor park usage and awareness.

Our regular park maintenance programme went according to plan, with expenditure tracking slightly under budget. The Western Sector did very well considering they were under-staffed for most of the year, and had no Principal Ranger for 3 months.

The big 1080 operations in the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water collection area, Kaitoke Regional Park and the Akatarawa Saddle went very well, with excellent results and few complaints. Other pest animal programmes such as the ongoing Belmont possum control and the goat control programme added to the gains made in earlier years and have kept up the impetus of that work. The benefits of this work over a number of years are now being seen in the health of the forests and improved abundance of native wildlife.

Lastly, the management plans are continuing to churn through. Queen Elizabeth Park was completed, East Harbour completed to draft stage and Battle Hill is well underway.

1.2 Whareroa Farm

Just to recap, the Crown (under the Department of Conservation (DoC)) is now the registered owner of Whareroa Farm. As part of the purchase negotiations, an adjustment to the purchase price was made, sufficient to address some of the infrastructure that was removed as part of the State Highway One (SH1) realignment, and deferred maintenance built up over the last few years. DoC will repair boundary fences, maintain the house and do some weed control but will discuss with Council staff and the *Guardians of Whareroa* how best to use the small fund. Transit NZ needs to complete the SH1 realignment (expected early 2007) before a survey for title of the adjusted boundary will be available. Once all this work is completed, GWRC will be invited to consider taking over management and control of the property.

Of late, officers from DOC and GWRC have had several meetings and site visits with the *Guardians of Whareroa*. Essentially the Guardians would like a high level of involvement in the management of the property if GWRC decide to take on the role of running it. The

suggestion that is being floated is there could be two groups, one to be more operational and the other to be involved at a strategic level. This would be an interim measure and the strategic group could consist of Regional Council managers, DOC representative(s), Guardians, Regional Councillors and a KCDC Councillor. To some extent this second group is a bit like an establishment board. A GWRC decision on a strategic group can wait until the Council decides whether or not to take over management and control of the farm.

The operational group which can be formed now, would deal with the work the Guardians would like to do on the farm and would involve DOC and GWRC officers along with Guardians. It would be geared towards developing planting plans and implementing some initial planting programmes around the existing covenants. The Guardians have already received a grant of \$ 87,000 for the purchase of plants and they are eager to commence planning this work and implementing it.

1.3 Arboretum at Battle Hill

At the last committee meeting, officers were asked to investigate the feasibility of establishing an international arboretum at Battle Hill Farm Forest Park. At this point, I thought Council might find it interesting to read some background information about the Arboretum concept that was raised a couple of years ago where some preparatory investigations were undertaken at that time (mainly revolving around Queen Elizabeth Park). So here is a quick summary.

The basis of the concept was to develop a series of connected 'home spaces' within a park for people from different ethnic backgrounds. The home spaces could give migrants a 'piece' of home and be an attraction to people who don't normally visit the park. The proposal had come from discussions between Cllr Shields and members of ethnic communities including the Ambassador of Mexico. From discussions at that time with representatives of ethnic communities living in New Zealand, there was a feeling that some migrants do not feel at home here. The provision of home spaces was intended to make people feel 'at home' in New Zealand. It could be a place where different cultures are represented and would help develop insights into other cultures, encourage tolerance and widen international links.

The original proposal was to develop a series of 5 connected home spaces. The spaces would include trees, shrubs and structures from the representative region. It would also include spaces for games such as soccer and a combined event/performance area. A structured planting area would be developed initially to frame the home spaces. Each home space would be developed inside the frame of trees. The home spaces would be designed in discussions with the regional grouping or country it represents.

The cost associated with the development was assessed at the time to be approx. \$1,310,000 in setup costs over the first 10 years, then approx \$100,000 p.a. after that to maintain the areas.

2. Planning and policy

2.1 Capital works

2.1.1 Rail Trail Summit toilets completed

Staff have completed the construction of the replacement toilet building at the Summit Yards on the Rimutaka Rail Trail. The plumbing contractor has installed the water supply and septic tank disposal system.

2.1.2 QEP Paekakariki toilets started

Townscape Construction has started work on the replacement toilets at Paekakariki picnic area, Queen Elizabeth Park. The building is programmed to be completed by early October.

2.2 Asset management

2.2.1 Historic dam safety inspections completed

DamWatch consultants inspected the Birchville (Upper Hutt) and Korokoro Dams (Belmont) as part of the ongoing asset management of these structures.

2.2.2 Rimutaka Rail Trail bridges inspected

Duffill, Watts Tse consulting engineers have inspected vehicle bridges on the Rimutaka Rail Trail.

2.3 Management planning

The Draft East Harbour Management Plan has been approved for release for public comment, and was sent out for consultation in late July. Submissions on the draft plan close on 25 September. The draft of Battle Hill Farm Forest Park Management Plan will be considered at the September Landcare Committee meeting.

Staff are currently in discussions with Wellington City Council (WCC) staff about the possible transfer of WCC land in Belmont Regional Park. We have been managing this land since 1989 on an informal basis. As soon as details about any acquisition are clear, officers will report formally to Council.

2.4 Pest animal control operations

A number of ungulate pest control operations were completed in May. The animals culled were:

- 14 goats, 15 pigs and 3 deer in Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water collection area
- 11 goats, 3 pigs and 1 deer in Kaitoke Regional Park
- 25 goats and 3 pigs in Akatarawa Forest.

Judas goats are in use at all of these sites and this technique continues to work well in ensuring that the hunting time allocated is effectively used.

2.5 Pest plant control operations

The wet weather has limited pest plant control operations, but macrocarpas have been ring-barked in Battle Hill Farm Forest Park and wilding pine removal has continued in Pakuratahi Forest and East Harbour Regional Park.

2.6 Monitoring

2.6.1 Rodent monitoring

A second special rodent tracking monitor was completed to assess the effectiveness of the new 'non-toxic' bait being trialled in the area. *MIRO* volunteers assisted with this work. Again, over 80% of the tracking tunnels recorded rodents. The new bait is not being effective and has recently been replaced with Ditrac, which contains the toxin, diphacinone.

2.6.2 Ungulate Browse Plots

The ungulate browse plots have been re-measured in Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water collection area. The data from these plots has not been analysed as yet, but should show if seedling regeneration is improving as a result of the ungulate control that has been completed in recent years. Extra ungulate browse lines were installed in the Mainland Island site, as these will provide information about the response of seedling growth to pest control over time.

2.6.3 Wainuiomata Mainland Island

The bait stations were refilled in June. Bait-take had stayed much the same, but it is apparent from the monitoring results below that rat numbers have built up. There are also an increased number of possums being caught on the western boundary of the Mainland Island. It is good news that the Animal Health Board is planning to control possums on this boundary in the near future.

The May rodent/mustelid monitoring showed an increase in rat numbers (from 3% to 14% tracking rate). Outside the mainland island core, rat numbers increased dramatically from 6% to 39%. These tracking rates have risen higher than the target of less than 5%. However, it appears that there is a rat plague in the lower North Island and that it would be difficult to keep these numbers down no matter what technique was used. It is hoped that numbers will fall again after the next bait fill.

The *Rimutaka Forest Trust* (a Department of Conservation care-group) recently released six kiwi on Department of Conservation land not far from the boundary of the Orongorongo Water Collection Area. One male kiwi has moved away from the release site and has made a burrow on the edge of the water collection area.

3. Marketing and design

3.1 Brochures and signs

Completion of the Akatarawa Forest brochure and information panels signals the completion of a 3 year project to upgrade all the information panels across our network and the brochures for all the park and forest areas.

3.1.1 Akatarawa Forest brochure and panels

Feedback has been very good to date about both the panels and brochures.



3.1.2 Pakuratahi Forest photo panels

We were also able to commission four new signs for the Rimutaka Rail Trail, to replace several which had been in place since the trail opened in 1987. Complementing the new interpretation trail and based on a sign developed by DoC for the Cross Creek carpark, a large “Feat of Engineering” sign sits in the kiosk at the Kaitoke carpark. All the old panels in the Summit kiosk have been replaced with three large interpretation boards showing images captured during the 77 year life of the railway.

3.1.3 Loop track Interpretation - Kaitoke Regional Park

This new trail will bring to life the rain forest along the Loop Track through interpreting different elements of the forest including the emergent trees, canopy, epiphytes and forest floor. The aim is to create an engaging attraction for both children and adults in this very well used area near the Pakuratahi Forks carpark.

Officers are developing the structure and concept of the refreshed interpretation and it will be implemented in the new financial year.

3.2 Corporate planting days

Officers recently took a group of ANZ National Bank staff to the Friends of Maara Roa block in Belmont Regional Park for a day’s planting. With relatively steep terrain and less than perfect access, this site is challenging at the best of times. The Friends really

appreciated the assistance and the bank staff thoroughly enjoyed the day.

As a result of the recent communications via *Elements* and the local media, we have had a number of enquiries for corporate planting days. At the time of writing there were four planned – one with *EECA* on 23 July at Battle Hill and another with the *ANZ National Bank* on 26 July at Queen Elizabeth Park. *Honda* Kapiti will be joining the *Friends of QEP* at the second Whareroa Stream planting on 5 August while the Wellington and Wairarapa *Honda* dealers will be planting at Te Marua in Kaitoke Regional Park on 19 August.

3.3 Parks on show

The regional parks and forests were on display in mid July at a national Community Board Forum held at St Oran's College, Lower Hutt. Facilitated by Jenny Rowan and attended by approximately 130 Community Board members from around the country, this event was a good opportunity to showcase the parks.

The Wellington, Porirua, Lower Hutt, Upper Hutt, Wairarapa, Kapiti and Horowhenua *I-sites* have joined forces to take a stand at the *Women's Lifestyle Expo* to be held at the Events Centre on 26 and 27 August. For a minimal charge we are including the regional parks and forests in their display, which will be staffed by their own people.

During early July officers also hosted two senior *Malaysian Government Town and Country Planning* officials, taking them on a bush walk and into the Treatment plant at Kaitoke Regional Park. They were most impressed and enjoyed their visit.

3.4 Wellington Region Recreation Initiatives Group (WRRIG)

With the appointment of consultants *Algate*, development of the Regional Physical Activity Plan (RPAP) is now underway. WRRIG sees the RPAP complementing the Wellington Regional Strategy and as a means of collaboration between regional authorities such as Councils, District Health Boards and the education sector.

The first steps are desk research and identifying and putting in place the means of engaging with key stakeholders. While the RPAP may not necessarily mean more funding per se, it should help prioritise funding or work programmes relating to physical activity.

Early indications are that with a collective voice and well founded plan, the region will be well placed to communicate productively with the regional arms of central government agencies and develop programmes that would attract their support.

3.5 Friends of the parks

The *Friends of Belmont Regional Park* held their AGM on 12 June and their monthly meeting on 10 July. Peter Matcham was re-elected as Convenor and most of the committee were reconfirmed. Their aims for the year include membership, events (as part of the Regional Outdoors Programme), developing the old laboratory at the Hill Road entrance and broadening park usage.

The *Friends of Maara Roa* also held their AGM on 19 July.

Officers attended the *Friends of QEP* monthly meeting in July. Their AGM was held on 3 August with the guest speaker to be Kapiti resident and well known landscape architect Frank Boffa.

Around 20 *Friends of QEP* and other supporters turned out for first Whareroa Stream planting on 8 July, putting in around 1,000 plants. As Chairperson John Lancashire put it “we’ve had three years at this and there are 20 [years] to go”! With the stream fenced, partly reshaped and planting started, people can see the vision taking shape and it is easier to enlist their support.

Officers made a presentation to the Kapi-Mana branch of *Forest and Bird*. Ross Jackson spoke about the regional parks in general and about the environmental enhancement projects while Jaap Knegtman focused on pest control and monitoring.

4. Western sector

4.1 Belmont Regional Park

4.1.1 Maintenance:

Our staff have completed installing new information boards at various entrances throughout the park. Photos of Cannons Creek and Kelson entrances are shown below and on the next page.





We have been preparing building consents for relocating the QEP ranger office to the Stratton Street entrance at Belmont Regional Park. Preparation work to uplift the building from QEP has been held up by wet conditions.

Work has been completed felling pine trees that were damaged in the February 2004 storms from the Korokoro Valley. A qualified arborist removed trees that present a hazard to users of the tracks in the area. Once the work is completed we can have confidence that hazards have been significantly reduced for users of the area.

4.1.2 Dry Creek area

Unauthorised hunting is occurring at Dry Creek and staff are following up with increased ranger surveillance of the area. On a brighter note, a duathlon was held at the entrance over this period.

4.2 Battle Hill Farm Forest Park

4.2.1 Maintenance

Preparation for planting days has involved spot spraying and clearing areas to be planted. The restoration areas are looking good and we have had a good survival rate from last years plantings. With strong grass growth during autumn there has also been plenty of weeding to carry out as well.

The left hand branch of the Puketiro Loop track has had a facelift with the water tables and any water damage being given a good clean up. The farm and camp ground roads were also graded and re-metalled ready for the coming summer season.

Contractors have completed dividing the northern Transmission Gully paddock into three. The flats have been divided into two paddocks and the hill separated from the flats. The original paddock was too big for the size of the farm. The fencing work will enable the area to be grazed much more efficiently and reduce the weed issues.

Spraying and general weed control has been ongoing, making the most of the reasonably settled weather conditions.

4.2.2 Ranging and Events Held

Arbor Day at Battle Hill was once again blessed with fine calm weather and everyone involved had a great time. Students from three local schools took park alongside GW staff, Councillors and locals. The planting took place in the Swampy Gully wetlands which are really starting to look great. Approximately 600 plants went into the ground.

The Ranger hosted a visit from a River's Engineer from the Hawkes Bay Regional Council who looked at how we run our parks and how we handle our compliance and enforcement issues. A look around Battle Hill was followed by a site visit to the Hutt River and a tour with Thane Walls our Hutt River Ranger. Many of the issues they are facing in the Hawkes Bay revolve around the rivers so it was an informative visit.

The Ranger also attended the Inaugural Sustainable Farmland Conference held in Wellington recently. Some good topics were covered and it was well worth the effort.

A few hardy souls are still running events on the park despite the coldest June in 33 years. Two harrier events and a school cross county event have been held with three others cancelled due to bad weather. We have even had several groups out camping!

4.3 Queen Elizabeth Park

4.3.1 Maintenance

Staff have been working on landscaping at the MacKay's Crossing entrance. Lots of new plants have been planted and mulch placed near the buildings. Picnic tables have been placed at the horse paddock and tram barn area, so parents can now sit and watch their children enjoying those activities.

4.3.2 Ranging

With all the rain, we have had a relatively quiet start to the winter although we still get a great deal of driving offences about the park and have issued a couple of trespass notices for reckless driving. We have also had a number of motorcycles on the tracks. Because of this we have increased our patrolling to cover areas frequented by the motorbikes. Ranging staff have also been busy with planting days as well as managing the removal of Pampas along the inland track and at the Tilley Road entrance.

4.3.3 Events Held

Arbor Day kicked off our winter events. We had wonderful weather for the 250 local students that showed up to help plant over 1,000 trees into our Arbor Day site. It was a very successful day. We have hosted a couple of harrier events, each bringing in a couple of hundred runners. We have also had some orienteering and equestrian events.

5. Eastern sector

5.1 Kaitoke Regional Park

5.1.1 Ranging

The cold and shorter winter days have meant a decline in visitation at the park, although the hardy regular hikers and dog walkers still visit. This allows the ranging team more time to

complete maintenance and environmental work projects around the park. It is also a chance to recover from the onslaught of visitors that summer brings.

5.1.2 Maintenance

During the period we have removed a large *Macrocarpa* from above the workshop area and planted 1,000 shrubs in and around the campground. A pump was also installed in the large facility building at the campground to cater for increasing water usage during summer, and we established two new gardens for the Celebrate Life Totara Grove at the Te Marua entrance.

5.2 East Harbour Regional Park

5.2.1 Maintenance

With the larger scale projects in the 2005/06 financial year completed, work in this period has concentrated on general maintenance and further improvements to tracks. A good example is the Kowhai Street track where additional surface work and run-off drains were needed. This shows that regular maintenance is crucial if key tracks are to be kept at an acceptable standard particularly in steep country. The Kowhai Street entrance is the quickest and probably the most popular route into the Butterfly Creek area.

The Korimako Road track has also received a fair bit of attention, particularly on the section above the track entrance. Water run-off flowing down the track had previously been finding its way onto the vehicle road adjacent to the houses. The tracks team used the digger to reshape this steep and rutted section and installed a number of run-off drains. This has the effect of dispersing any run off before it gets to the road.

General maintenance has also been carried out on the Dillon Street track in Lowry Bay. This has included cleaning up the steps adjacent to the entrance and also ring barking and cutting out numerous sycamore trees in the vicinity.

5.2.2 Events Held

About 30 volunteer possum trappers at East Harbour Regional Park celebrated their achievements on June 23 with a fish and chips supper at Eastbourne. The evening was all the more significant in that the latest monitoring results showed a residual trap catch of 1.8% which was great news for all concerned. The evening was jointly organised by *MIRO* members and the park ranger. These occasions are also a good opportunity for volunteers to get to know each other, bearing in mind they generally work independently on different trap lines. *MIRO* and GWRC staff gave a brief update on the pest work and passed on their thanks to the volunteers. Fortunately no one talked too long so the chips didn't go cold!

5.3 Wainuiomata/ Orongorongo Catchments

5.3.1 Maintenance

Culverts have been cleaned out on all the walking tracks in the recreation area to keep them flowing over this wet period. Officers have been putting metal down on the Sledge Track to suppress mud holes that have formed. A digger was also used to block the old entrance to the Moores Valley ridge vehicle track at the front gate.

The last stage of the boundary fence has been completed. This now achieves a 18km deer fence that runs from High Misty to the OK Main old pipe line by the Rangers house. This will keep out stock, pigs, goats, deer and deter the public from entering the water catchment

from private land.

5.3.2 Ranging

Locks and chains were once again removed from the top gates on the Moores Valley track. The gate was shut with no sign of trespass. The sign that was installed on the gate was also removed and could not be found. The gates have again been locked.

A hunter with an aggressive Alsatian dog was caught on the Moores Valley track. This person would not give his name but said he had come from private property and would go back. The name of the private property was a name not known to staff. The same person was reported to have been seen in the recreation area on 25 July but a search of the area failed to find him.

Three people walking near the swing bridge area had driven a car inside the gate that had been left open moments before by staff to access the Recreation Area tracks. These people removed their car on request.

5.3.3 Events Held

On 16 July, we held our last Wainuiomata and Orongorongo Catchment Tour until October 2006. The tour went without a hitch and the public have responded well and seem to thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to walk in Wellington's most pristine lowland podocarp forest. We have even had a lady who has been on about five tours including three Orongorongo tours which are a 21km day walk.

5.4 Akatarawa/ Pakuratahi Forests

5.4.1 Maintenance



As depicted in the above photos, wind-thrown trees are an ongoing issue throughout not only our roading network, but also our walking track network within the recreational areas. As these photos identify, often these windfalls are very dangerous situations if they are suspended above walking tracks or roads. In this particular instance, the two wind-thrown trees had to be removed with the use of explosives (i.e. using a cherry picker, explosives were placed where the fallen tree rests on the stump, and the explosives were then detonated from a distance). This works very successfully.

5.4.2 Ranging

As identified in previous reports, security for our forests is always an ongoing issue. Some people are very resourceful in inventing ways to either get around, over or through our gates. As we allow access for mountain biking, horse riding and walking in specific areas, allowing motor cycle or vehicle access into these areas is dangerous.

The pictures below show the security required at the end of Bulls Run Road to prevent motor cycle and quad access into an area that has been reserved for horse riding, walking, mountain biking and other passive recreational pursuits.



Although the photos show something you would expect to see at Fort Knox, it is surprising how quickly people will find ways around them, the last option being to attack the gates, be that with a gas axe, hacksaw or what are often being used nowadays, rotary disc grinding machines used on demolition sites. These have the ability to cut through steel, concrete etc.

5.4.3 Events Held

Recreational access to both forests continues. Access can be for recreational 4WD club events, training needs for the police department (police dog training, vehicle driving, special tactical operations group exercises, motor cycle training), army, Regional Council staff driver training and also firewood recovery by the general public. All of these access requirements are coordinated via the events calendar published weekly to ensure there is no conflict between various trips/exercises.

Murray Waititi
Manager, Parks