

Manager – Parks

Report for period ending Friday 8 June 2007

1. Manager's comments

This time of the year spells the start of the planting season. Officers have spent a lot of time over the past month organising Arbor Day and other planting days for community groups and volunteers.

Last year, some 40,000 plants were planted in the parks, and a raft of volunteers were responsible for most of that work being done. Their assistance is greatly appreciated. Planting days aside, the weather over the period has continued to be kind, so visitors are still taking the opportunity to visit the parks, and regular work programmes are going ahead unhindered.

I am really pleased to note that the Department of Conservation (DoC) has approved the East Harbour Regional Park management plan (on behalf of the Minister of Conservation). The plan has also been approved by officers from Hutt City Council (HCC), a requirement of the management and control arrangement for HCC land to be included in the park. This management plan will be the first plan covering the entire park since the park's inception, and is able to be applied to, and enforced over the entire park.

This period also saw Mike Tracey and *Kapiti Carpenters* complete the contract for major restoration work of the barn at Queen Elizabeth Park (QEP). Volunteers are now geared up to paint the barn and lay the brick floor in late June.

1.1 Rimutaka Summit Toilets and Tearooms

As per Council's resolution to close the toilets and not renew the lease for the Summit Tearooms at the top of the Rimutaka Hill (see Report 05.158), officers have notified the appropriate authorities and the current Tearooms lessee to organise the closure and removal of the facilities soon after the termination of the tearoom's lease on 31 December 2007.

2. Planning and Policy

2.1 Management planning

Officers have been working on reviewing the *Wellington Regional Council Bylaws for Forests, Parks and Recreation Areas* as all bylaws must be reviewed by June 2008 (See Report 07.338).

As per the last Committee meeting resolution, the letter of submission regarding registration of Old Coach Road has been sent to Historic Places Trust.

Parks have convened a second planning meeting to discuss the way forward on the Pencarrow Lakes culverts issue. Attendees included DoC staff and experts such as Mike

Joy (native fish) and George Gibbs (ecologist). Sinclair Knight Merz Limited has been contracted through Environment Division to complete hydrological modelling of the lakes to determine whether or not the current culverts are adequate for fish passage and to assess what changes in lake levels would occur if the culvert sizes were altered. There is more work to be completed but attendees were very positive about using this approach to determine the best course of action.

A Restoration plan written by ecologist Geoff Park for the land surrounding the Pencarrow lakes has recently been finalised. This plan will be discussed at the next Mainland Island Restoration Operation (MIRO) committee meeting, as MIRO have been growing plants in a nursery for the purpose of planting in the Lakes Block.

2.2 Asset Management system

2.2.1 QEP Paekakariki picnic shelter modified

Quotes for the picnic shelter at Paekakariki came in over budget so the architects are modifying the design and re-pricing. We have received the building consent from Kapiti Coast District Council and confirmation we do not need a planning consent as QEP is a designation on the District Plan. The project will not, therefore, be finished in this financial year as planned, but should be completed before the next summer season.

2.2.2 Yardstick survey completed

In 2004 we joined the NZ Recreation Association's "Yardstick" project, which is a system for comparing parks management data. Members include 55% of all territorial local authorities plus regional councils and Department of Conservation. Parks staff have completed the 2007 annual survey questionnaire and submitted data to the project. We hope to get the yardstick survey information back in the next couple of months and will then assess our operation against similar organisations in the parks sector.

2.3 Pest Control Operation

2.3.1 Pest animals

The applications for Medical Officer of Health consent and resource consent have been submitted for the Akatarawa Forest 1080 operation. A media release about this operation will be sent to Upper Hutt, Kapiti and Porirua papers in June. The Mangaroa/Kaitoke Tb operation is a few weeks away from completion.

2.3.2 Pest plants

The pest plant programme is making good progress on the parks' weed work because of the settled weather. The pest plant team has completed follow-up control of climbing asparagus in Speedy's Reserve in Belmont Regional Park and have started work again on this pest plant in East Harbour Regional Park.

Climbing asparagus (also known as snakefeather)



2.4 Monitoring

An audit of the permanent vegetation plot re-measurements has been completed by Landcare Research scientist, Dr Ian Payton. These plots are in various council forests. In his report, he concluded that “these were very well re-measured plots”. The data from this work not only informs our decisions about the health of our forests but also forms part of a national database. It is important that we complete work of a high standard for these reasons.

The three-monthly East Harbour Regional Park rodent/mustelid monitor was completed in May. The results are not available as yet, but there is an indication that there is a surge in rat numbers in Wainuiomata (see Wainuiomata Mainland Island below). Extra lines have recently been installed at the northern end of the East Harbour mainland island to limit the rat re-invasion from the Wainuiomata side of the park.



Rodent/mustelid tracking tunnel

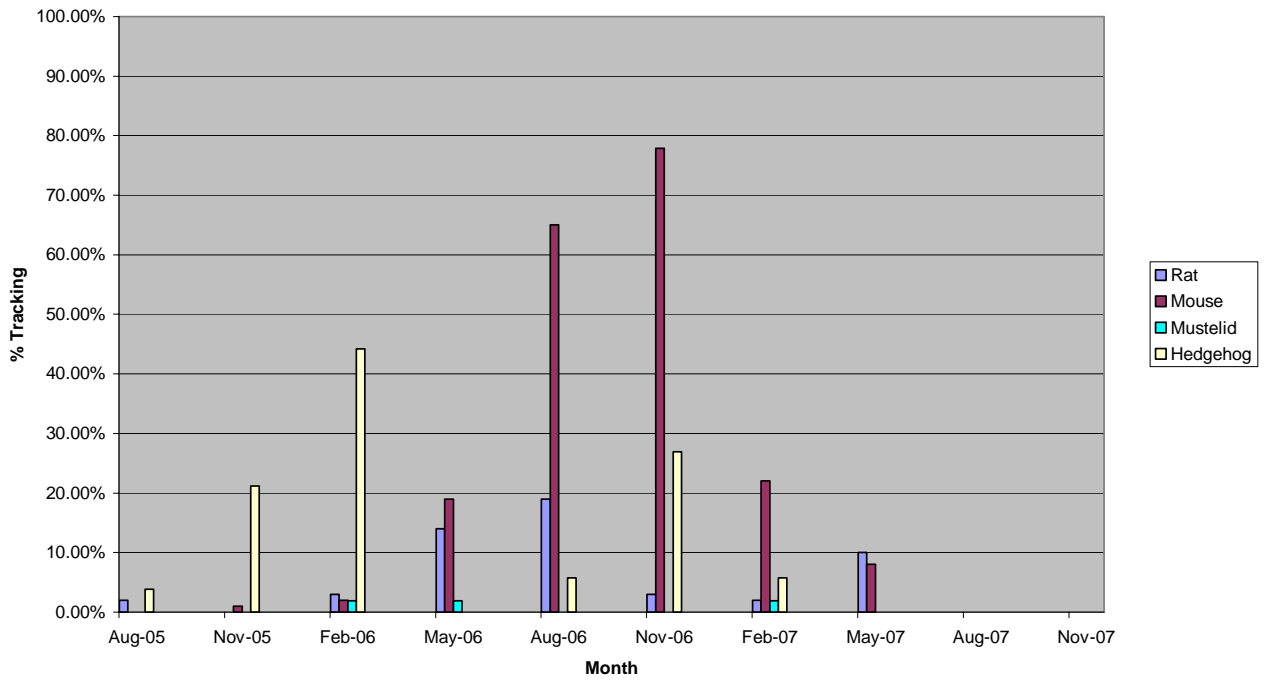
2.5 Wainuiomata Mainland Island

The rodent/mustelid monitor completed in May showed 10% rat tracking inside the mainland island and **100%** outside. There appears to be a big increase in rat numbers in general in the forest. This may be due to increased breeding because of the mild weather, or perhaps an abundant food supply. It is unfortunate that rats have increased above the 5% tracking rate target but other mainland islands around the country face similar problems in keeping rat numbers low when they reach plague proportions. Another bait fill is due in late May and the toxin will be changed back to *Diphacinone* now that the supplier has met the

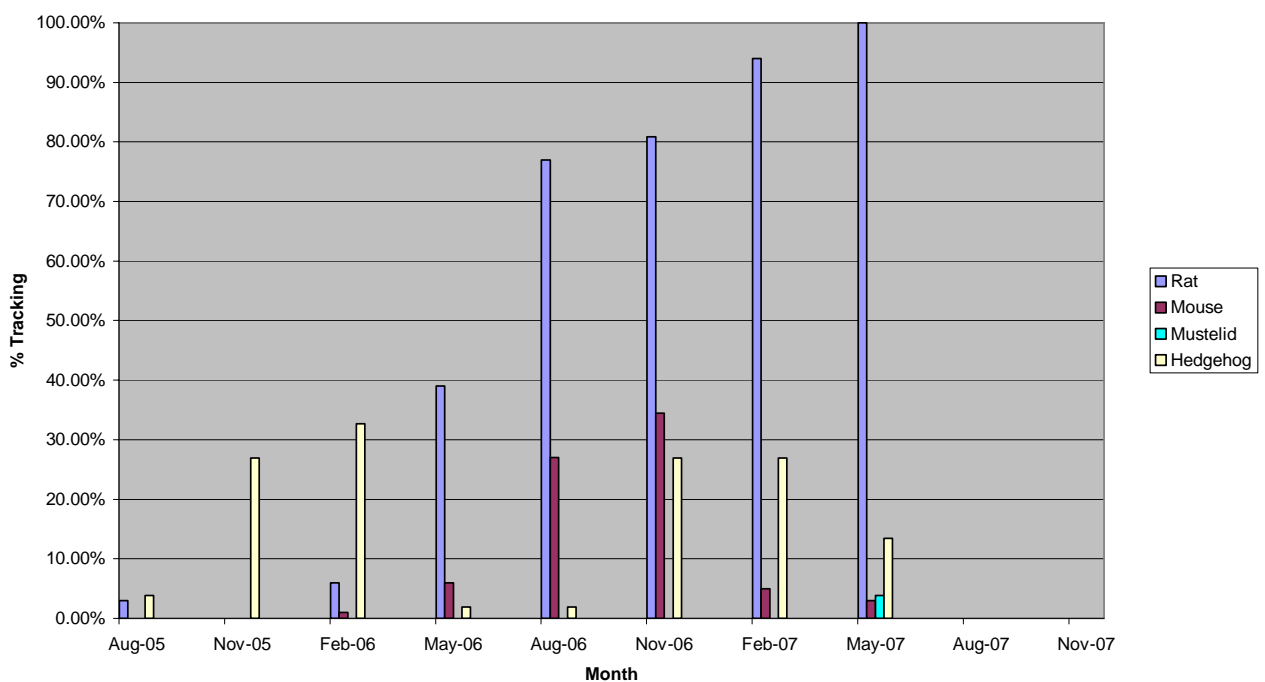
manufacturing standards necessary to remove the risk of viable weed seeds being present in the bait.

Wainuiomata Catchment Monitoring Results

Wainuiomata Catchment Mainland Island



Wainuiomata Catchment Control Site



3. Western sector

3.1 Belmont Regional Park

Visitors have continued to enjoy the park during May and early June. While the visitor numbers have reduced, the ranger has noted good numbers of walkers, mountain bikers, runners and horse riders throughout the park.

Liaison has occurred between the ranger and DoC about the ex-LandCorp shepherd's house located near the end of Takapu Road. This building is in a very poor condition and no longer habitable. The decision has been made by DoC to dismantle the building and dispose of the materials off-site.

The ranger has continued working with the mountain bike community to improve trail opportunities and address health and safety issues in the park. Parks staff have been meeting to discuss processes for assessing voluntary work proposals and managing health and safety requirements.

A block of pine trees adjacent to the Hill Road car-park has been removed by parks staff. An external contractor has removed a block of pine trees below the Oakleigh Street car-park.

An important Waitangirua Farm boundary gate has been replaced at the point where Duck creek exits the park. The previous gate was severely damaged by the unauthorised entry of unknown persons. Entry was gained from Whitby via the Silverwood Forest property.

A possum control operation using the new bait station network at Dry Creek has been carried out by GWRC Bio-security staff.

A road bike/run duathlon event was run at Dry Creek, with 90 competitors enjoying this location.

3.2 Battle Hill Farm Forest Parks

Camping has slowed down since Easter, but with the incredibly fine weather the visitor numbers in the weekends are still very high with lots of family groups, horse riders, walkers and mountain bike riders making the most of the sunny winter days.



Family enjoying picnic



Children feeding the ducks

Transit NZ and Opus Consultants have been undertaking preliminary survey and geotechnical investigations for the Transmission Gully route. The investigation involves a walkover of the route to identify geotechnical features and the identification of sites for more intensive investigations of soil and rock samples.

A year 13 student from Wellington College has been working in the park one day a week through a job experience scheme *Gateway Project*. He turns up every Tuesday and works with ranger staff learning skills such as fencing, animal handling, and pruning.

Paramoana School held their annual cross country event with around 400 children involved. The day was a great success with the course run over the north and south airstrip, using some of the extensive horse jumps in the area.

The ranger gave a talk to a class of international students from Weltech who are studying English as a second language. The talk was about the Bush Reserve and farm, with Norm Cobb (the farm lessee) giving a shearing demonstration. Ranger staff also gave the Johnsonville Probus group a talk about Transmission Gully and the effects building a major motorway would have on the farming and recreational aspects of the park.

The talk included a site visit to the area in question.

A group of sea scouts camping at Battle Hill were given a talk about flora and fauna in the Bush Reserve.

3.3 Queen Elizabeth Park

The coastal track from Whareroa Beach to Raumati South has had a much needed upgrade. Due to the multiuse nature of the track, enhancements had to be made to meet the recreational requirements of the community. Parts of the track have been widened and had basecourse applied to make them more resilient. Unfortunately, the track looks a bit like a bombsite at the moment but it will “heal over” in the next few months leaving a great asset for park users.

The Friends of QEP have been hard at work on their Whareroa Stream project. Some earthworks have been done, a temporary track has been set up and signage for the track has been ordered. The community is

Whareroa Stream project



actively utilising this track already. There is still quite a lot to be done, but the group is well on they way. With the track being 'open', they are hoping to attract additional funds to complete the project.



Local playcentre kids planting

Officers have been incredibly busy getting ready for the winter planting season. We kicked off the season with a great day on the Wainui Stream. Staff organised a planting day with the local Paekakariki playcentres. We had a great turn out and approximately 400 plants were put into the ground. That is good work for tiny hands. Fun was had by all, a sausage sizzle capped off the event.

During May, GW's Biosecurity Department conducted a mustelid trapping operation in the farm area of QEP. The operation took place over a 13 day period and targeted mustelids such as stoats and ferrets. No mustelids were trapped during the operation, only four cats.

The Tramway Museum's 'Sunday Funday' is proving to be quite successful. Each month they have a different theme, which seems to encourage people to come back. There has been lots of good food, including a hangi, as well as plenty of stalls and activities.

Victoria University Harriers held their annual event at the park this period. It was a gorgeous day so they had a great turn out with approximately 500 runners.

4. Eastern sector

4.1 Kaitoke Regional Park

Winter has seen park visitation drop dramatically, although the regular dog walkers are still frequenting Te Marua. There has been little comment from them either negative or positive about the forthcoming 1080 operation. Many are used to the operations by now and know the precautions to take.

Three planting events were held for Arbor Day with Plateau School, Heretaunga Scouts and IAG Ltd. Over 1500 seedlings were planted at sites in Te Marua and the campground area.

Arbor Day event with Plateau School



The Te Marua Pony Club which leases grounds within the park held their annual cross country event in which more than 90 riders took part.

Te Marua Pony Club cross country event



Kaitoke Hill underpass

Six hundred metres of boundary fences have been replaced on the Pakuratahi Terrace leases to prevent cattle escaping and heading over the access road into the Hutt Water Collection Area.

A new gate has been installed at the Kaitoke Hill underpass to deter quad and trail bike riders whilst still allowing access for permitted horse riders.

The Park Ranger's house has had routine maintenance completed, including the installation of a new wood burner, garage doors and cleaning of all site buildings.

4.2 East Harbour Regional Park

4.2.1 New signs installed

Further signs have now been installed at the park to highlight changes made to park use approved by Council during the recent management plan reviews.

Information map boards have been installed at the ends of the newly designated mountain bike route. This will give riders a clear indication of the route from Wainui Hill in the north to Stanley Street at the southern end of Wainuiomata.

The route linking the main ridge above Days Bay to the Mackenzie track above Eastbourne has now been officially signposted as a route. This effectively gives continuous track access from Wainui Hill to Butterfly Creek.

4.2.2 Sheep in the Lakes Block

There is an issue at the moment with high numbers of sheep entering the Pencarrow Lakes Block. This is in part due to fence breakages but mainly because stock are gaining access along the beach. As a result, we are working with the neighbouring farmer to upgrade sections of the northern boundary fence. The beach issue is an ongoing problem because of continual gravel build-up. We will probably need to look at securing the foreshore boundary with additional either rocks or robust fencing in the next financial year.

4.2.3 Recreational Hunting Period

As approved by Council as part of the Parks Management Plan review, recreational deer hunting took place over four weeks during April, a period traditionally associated with increased stag activity known as “The Roar”. This was implemented through a balloted permit system which was a first for East Harbour Regional Park. In the interests of safety, hunting was restricted to a specified area situated within the Gollans Stream catchment north of the Butterfly Creek picnic area. In addition to this, two permitted hunters only were using the area at any one time. A total of two deer were shot. Given the limited timeframe between the management plan completion and the hunting period, the administration and planning input from Parks staff ensured the project ran relatively smoothly.

4.2.4 Crazyman Multisport Event



The hill run section of the Crazyman multisport event was held in the northern forest block attracting 354 competitors. The 18 km run utilises a number of tracks in the park starting at the Bus Barn/Korohiwa track at the southern end of Eastbourne and finishing on the Puriri track at the northern end of Wainuiomata.



Crazyman Multisport competitors

The hill run comes in between a 12km kayak from Petone to Eastbourne and a 38km mountain bike ride along the Eastern Hutt hills to Stokes Valley returning via the Hutt River Trail. Overall around 600 people competed in the various sections of the event.

4.3 Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Catchments

The opening of the Tana Umaga track has been delayed as we are waiting on Tana Umaga to advise a date he can attend an opening. The track preparation and signage have been completed and looks excellent.

New information signs at the recreational Sledge Track have been erected. These signs show the public what native trees and shrubs we have in the area, and also have a drawing of the species so the public can identify them.

An uncommon rush plant that was going to be “drowned” once the lower Wainui dam is decommissioned was donated to the Wellington Wetland Society and relocated. There is another larger area of this rush that will remain once the dam is filled as it will not be affected by the new water levels.

The police also had an exercise at the Orongorongo Weir in late May. They used one of their underwater pumps to drain and clean the lower scouring chambers. This was a great opportunity for the Police to use their pump and for the Council to get the chamber cleaned.

Catchment tours were carried out on 13 and 27 May. Over 100 people attended these tours and the public still seem to be enjoying access to the Catchment through these events.

In June, a Kea Scout Group planted a group of plants in the recreational area in accordance with the Wainuiomata Recreational Area Landscape Plan.

4.4 Akatarawa/Pakuratahi Forests

4.4.1 Training

During this period a rural fire training exercise for GW and DoC staff and members from the Upper Hutt Volunteer Rural Bush Fire Force was undertaken in the forest. This training exercise was centred around the use of aircraft, both helicopter and fixed wing, and the aim of this training programme was for all participants to attain the Unit Standard for Safety Around Aircraft. I am happy to say that all of the persons present at the course passed with flying colours, and all participants agreed that this was a worthwhile exercise and they thoroughly enjoyed the day.



Staff from GW, DoC and Upper Hutt Volunteer Rural Bush Fire Force benefit from *safety around aircraft* training



4.4.2 1080 Operations

We continue to operate closely with Bioworks in preparation for the Mangaroa and Akatarawa operations. This involves assisting to identify the many private land owners, private water supplies, and identify possible locations to operate the helicopters that will be involved in applying the pre-feed and then the poison.

We are also putting together a plan to patrol all of the main arterial roads within the forests after the application of the poison, and any baits that have landed on these roads will be hand removed by Regional Council staff during the 5-7 day forest closure that will be in place immediately after the drop.

We continue to remove abandoned/stolen/burned out vehicles from several areas around the Upper Hutt region. Unfortunately this is an issue the Police struggle to get on top of and we can only assist where possible.



Abandoned and burned out vehicle

We are currently assisting our Biosecurity Department based in Masterton to secure at least 50 wild pigs for analysis. The pigs are needed to identify any Tb that is apparent within the wild pig population. To accomplish this we have enlisted the assistance of several well known and trusted local pig hunters. We have made keys available for these hunters to be able to access the forest and have informed other GW departments, and the vast range of recreational clubs that may be accessing the forest, of their movements.

During this period we have had eight recreational 4WD club events, two motorcycle events held by the Kapi Mana Motorcycle Club, two Army training exercises, several small scale horse club events and a large volume of the public requesting access to secure firewood.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Murray Waititi', with a small arrow pointing to the right at the end of the signature.

Murray Waititi
Manager, Parks