



Report 08.521  
Date 17 July 2008  
File PK/01/01/01

Committee Parks, Forests and Utilities Committee  
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## Environmental asset management plan performance indicator

### 1. Purpose

To report to the Committee on progress on the Environmental Asset Management Plan during the 2007/08 financial year in order to meet the performance indicator requirements of the Annual Plan.

### 2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report do not trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the *Local Government Act 2002*.

### 3. Background

The 2007/08 Annual Plan contains the following performance indicator:

*Environmental assets and settings within the regional parks and forests will be managed in accordance with the Parks Environmental Asset Management Plan service levels, and within a budget of \$1,118,000.*

*A report on compliance with the standards in the Environmental Asset Management Plan will be approved by Council.*

The performance indicator was **achieved** this year at a cost of \$841,568.

### 4. Progress on the Environmental Asset Management Plan

Ecosystem health in the parks and forests has continued to show improvements in many areas. The indicators used are showing that the Environmental Asset Management Plan has been successful in raising the ecological health of the parks and forests. The continued application of pest control has meant that pest numbers have fallen and the monitoring results are showing increases in indigenous seedling abundance and native fauna.

Possums, goats, pigs, rabbits, deer, and pest plants have been controlled according to the highest priority needs identified through monitoring work. Pest plants are controlled on Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) land according to the pest plant priorities identified through weed mapping and strategic analysis. Rat numbers have been lowered in the two mainland island sites and these areas are making a major contribution to the biodiversity gains on GWRC land. The Care group, MIRO, has recently released robins into East Harbour Regional Park. This is the first release of this species into a site that is not an island or predator-fenced (e.g., Karori Sanctuary) in the Wellington Region.

Monitoring work and surveys have continued to provide useful information for the environmental management of GWRC lands and about the success of control operations. Water Supply provides funding for the environmental programme through a contract with Parks. All Water Supply Contract Specifications have been met. Maintaining environmental health is an ongoing project but improvements have been achieved.

A 1080 possum control operation was planned for the Hutt Water Collection Area, Kaitoke West and Akatarawa Saddle this financial year. This operation was postponed until July 2009, as monitoring data showed that possum numbers had not yet reached the trigger level of 5 percent residual trap catch (RTC) over all those areas.

## **5. Key aspects of the work programme achieved**

A summary of the key aspects of the work programme achieved during the year follows.

### **5.1 Monitoring**

- Pre-operational possum monitoring was completed in the Hutt Water Collection Area, Kaitoke Regional Park and Akatarawa Saddle.
- Post-operational possum monitoring was completed in Dry Creek and Korokoro Valley in Belmont Regional Park, and in the Akatarawa Forest.
- Bird transects were remonitored in the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area, Kaitoke Regional Park, Queen Elizabeth Park, Battle Hill Farm Forest Park, Belmont Regional Park and the Hutt Water Collection Area.
- Hinau fruitfall plots were measured in the Hutt and Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Areas.
- Tawa fruitfall plots were measured in the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area and East Harbour Regional Park.
- Kereru counts were completed in Kaitoke Regional Park.
- Members of the *Ornithological Society of New Zealand* have finalised monthly bird monitoring in the Lakes Block of East Harbour Regional Park.

- MIRO volunteers completed their annual bird monitoring in the Northern Block of East Harbour Regional Park.
- Photo-points were rephotographed and assessed in the Hutt and Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Areas.
- Rodent and mustelid numbers were monitored in the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area, the Northern Block in East Harbour Regional Park, Battle Hill Farm Forest Park remnant and the dunes of Queen Elizabeth Park.
- Ungulate browse plots were remeasured in Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area.
- Monthly flowering and fruiting recording was completed in selected parks.
- Fish research projects were finalised in Queen Elizabeth Park and East Harbour Regional Park.
- Rata digital photography and foliar browse assessments were completed in the Hutt and Wainuiomata Water Collection Areas and East Harbour Regional Park.
- A review/remapping of pest plant infestations was completed in Cannons Creek, Korokoro Valley and Speedy's Reserve in Belmont Regional Park.

## **5.2 Pest Animal and Pest Plant Control**

### **5.2.1 East Harbour Regional Park**

- The “mainland island area” in the northern forest block was increased in size from 300 hectares to 350 hectares, to minimise rat reinfestation on one boundary. Bait stations laid in a grid throughout this area were refilled on a two monthly basis. Monitoring has shown that rat numbers fell to 6 percent tracking rate throughout the year but there has been a recent surge in rat numbers.
- MIRO volunteers have continued to maintain possum control in the Northern Block. Over 370 possums were caught. This is a great effort on the part of the volunteers.
- Four goats were culled from the Lakes Block.
- One deer was shot during the “Roar” balloted hunt.
- Further inroads were made into the major climbing asparagus infestation in the Northern Block by the Parks’ “weed team”. They also controlled infestations of old man’s beard, banana passionfruit, Japanese honeysuckle, bomarea, ivy and smaller infestations of 14 other species, mainly near park entrances, where these pest plants tend to invade.
- A contractor controlled 14 pest plant species at the start of the Muritai Track.

- Boneseed was controlled beyond Burdan's Gate to stop the infestation front from spreading into the Lakes Block.
- Gorse was sprayed on the coastal escarpment between the two Pencarrow Lakes, as part of the "gorse exclusion zone" agreed to in the Landscape Restoration Plan for the Lakes Block.

### 5.2.2 Belmont Regional Park

- In Korokoro Valley a post-operational possum monitor showed numbers to be at 4 percent RTC in the treatment area, down from 9.7 percent RTC in November 2007. Earlier in the financial year there was a delay in the delivery of the three-monthly bait fills because of a lack of contractors but this operation is now back on course;
- The ongoing possum control operation in Speedy's Reserve also experienced some delays earlier in the year but the three monthly fills have now been reinstated.
- The new bait station network recently established at Dry Creek is working well. Possum numbers measured in April showed levels to be at 2.7 percent RTC (previously 13.3 percent RTC).
- Volunteers from the Friends of Maara Roa group have continued to maintain bait stations in Cannons Creek bush remnant.
- Pest plant control in the Korokoro Valley this year was mainly focused on the area surrounding the Korokoro Dam. Infestations controlled by the pest plant team and contractors include: old man's beard, hops, Japanese honeysuckle, ivy, periwinkle, elaeagnus and African club moss and eight other species.
- Regrowth of climbing asparagus and patches of old man's beard were controlled in Speedy's Reserve.
- Holly, wilding pine, Darwin's barberry and Himalayan honeysuckle were tackled in Sweetacres Reserve.
- Old man's beard was controlled in Cannons Creek.

### 5.2.3 Kaitoke Regional Park

- Possum control of the front faces of the park were completed as part of the Mangaroa/Kaitoke Tb operation in early September. Possum levels fell from 8.7 percent to 0.2 percent RTC.
- Eight goats and six pigs were culled in a professional hunting operation, making use of the Judas goats present in the area.

### 5.2.4 Battle Hill Farm Forest Park

- Bait was renewed in the bait stations in the bush remnant throughout the year, as part of the ongoing possum control operation. Rats are controlled as by-kill.

- Mustelid trapping and some cat control was continued in the remnant and on the farmland by volunteers.
- Persistent holly control over the years is now showing benefits in the bush reserve, but some stumps still needed retreatment. Other infestations controlled include sycamore, hawthorn and 10 other pest plant species in the regenerating hillside near the camping area.
- Six goats were culled in the plantation forestry section of the park.

#### 5.2.5 Queen Elizabeth Park

- Possum control operations were continued in the bush remnant, the dune remnants and Whareroa Stream bush.
- Rabbits were controlled by night shooting.
- Workers in the park remained vigilant in scouting for any seedlings of boneseed, Italian buckthorn and boxthorn infestations that have now been removed from the dunes. Continuing control of pampas, gorse, karo, elderberry, Cape ivy, tradescantia, Japanese honeysuckle and German ivy infestations was completed.
- Control work was continued on blackberry, Japanese honeysuckle infestations and resprouting willows in the Poplar Avenue wetland.
- A volunteer has been trapping mustelids around the wetlands at MacKay's Crossing.

#### 5.2.6 Akatarawa Forest

- A major 1080 possum control operation was completed in the Akatarawa Forest (over 14,000 hectares) in September. A post-operational possum monitor showed that possum numbers fell from 10.4 percent to 0.4 percent RTC.
- A ground control possum control operation initiated in the Cannon Point area to keep the boundary of the 1080 operation away from suburban properties has been maintained on an ongoing basis.
- Goat control operations in Akatarawa Forest resulted in the culling of 80 goats and 1 pig.
- Old man's beard, hydrangea, buddleia, Japanese honeysuckle, hops, Darwin's barberry, sycamore, alder, privet, dogwood, cherry and pampas infestations were controlled. Garden plants that may spread from the gardens of recently removed batches at Karapoti were also controlled.

#### 5.2.7 Pakuratahi Forest

- Possum control was completed in Pakuratahi Forest as part of the Mangaroa/Kaitoke Tb operation. Possum numbers fell from 2.7 percent to 0 percent RTC.

- Forty-six goats were culled during professional hunting and a further 51 goats removed by the Ranger throughout the year.
- Volunteers are maintaining a trap network established in Tunnel Gully to keep possums at low levels. They have caught 129 possums since they began in February 2007.
- Pest plant infestations targeted were wilding pine, cotoneaster, buddleia, sycamore and hawthorn near the Rail Trail, prickly hakea near Kaitoke Hill, and tradescantia on the Rimutaka Hill Road.

#### 5.2.8 Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area

- Eighty-eight goats, 14 deer and 41 pigs were culled in professional vertebrate control operations. The Judas goat control programme has continued to work well here but there is ongoing reinfestation in the Orongorongo Catchment from the eastern and southern boundaries.
- Four deer, one goat and one pig were culled during the “Roar” recreational hunting ballot.
- Regrowth of buddleia plants has been controlled in the Wainuiomata Catchment.
- Further progress was made in the control of pest plants in the Wainuiomata Recreation Area. The weed team targeted Himalayan honeysuckle, blackberry, Japanese honeysuckle and seven other species, while a Contractor controlled tradescantia in the area.

#### 5.2.9 Hutt Water collection Area

- Nine goats, two pigs and 10 deer were culled professionally in the Hutt Catchment and Judas goats checked.

#### 5.2.10 Lake Wairarapa Wetlands

- Alder trials were completed in Lake Domain Reserve, using both the weed team and contractors to assess the costs of ground control for this pest plant species.

### 5.3 Mainland Island Projects

The Wainuiomata Mainland Island is continuing to go well. The yearly operational plan, as developed from the strategic plan, was completed for 2007/08. The work involved:

- Boundary bait station/trap servicing every month.
- Mainland island core bait station/trap checks every two months.
- Rodent/mustelid monitoring every four months.
- A major ungulate control operation and winter pig hunting.
- Stoat trapping on boundary and main ridges.

- Possum monitoring inside and outside the mainland island.
- Buddleia control.
- Bird monitoring and fruitfall plot measurements.
- Ungulate browse measurements and photo-point establishment.
- Cat trapping.

Possum numbers have remained low (0.5 percent RTC in the mainland island and 1.9 percent RTC outside in the intensive pest control site), while rats varied between 2 percent and 19 percent tracking rate in the intensive control area. Forty-three pigs, three goats and two deer were culled within the core site. Bird count assessments have shown the beginning of some differences between the Mainland Island site and the non-treatment site. Other GWRC staff members, including Water Supply, Biosecurity and Environment, are also involved in this project. Biosecurity provides staff time and technical expertise.

In East Harbour Regional Park the intensive control site has been under way since June 2006. GWRC is working on this project in partnership with the care group *MIRO*. Eight bait fills were completed during the year and rodent/mustelid tracking was monitored on a quarterly basis. Rat numbers fell to 6 percent but rose again to 22 percent tracking rate in May. *MIRO* released robins in the area in June. This is the first time this species have been present in this forest for over 100 years.

#### **5.4 Permits**

Eleven natural use permits were processed for the parks and forests. Nine of these were low impact, e.g., research permits or small amounts of material being collected, while two were high impact, e.g., collection permits for nurseries. There were 366 hunting permits issued during the financial year. These permits covered recreational hunting in the Hutt Water Collection Area, Kaitoke Regional Park and Akatarawa and Pakuratahi Forests.

#### **5.5 Fire protection**

One of the predominant threats to a balanced native vegetative cover is fire. Any fire will probably result in the destruction of vegetation cover over the burnt area.

Staff members attended four fires this year, after they had been controlled by the Rural Fire Authority. There was one fire at Tunnel Gully in Pakuratahi Forest, two at Queen Elizabeth Park and one in Belmont Regional Park. The fire risk in the Hutt Valley and the Kapiti Coast was “very high” to “extreme” for some weeks but did not reach total fire ban level.

Fire training exercises have been held during the year, so that we maintain a team who has met the minimum requirements needed to fight fires and is ready to assist the Rural Fire Authority with its firefighting commitments.

## 6. Where to from here

During the 2008/09 year we will continue to implement the Environmental Asset Management Plan by:

- Completing programmed pest control operations using the most effective techniques.
- Resurveying some of the parks and forests for pest plant infestations, as the pest plant plans are now due for review.
- Continuing to work towards an integrated programme of pest control in high ecological value areas on GWRC land.
- Implementing the Mainland Island pest control programmes in selected sites in East Harbour and Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area.
- Exchanging knowledge and ideas with other agencies, such as the Department of Conservation, territorial authorities, Landcare Research and the Coastal Dune Vegetation Network.
- Continuing to work with the community.

## 7. Communication

This report is part of the verification process for meeting Annual Plan performance indicators.

## 8. Recommendations

*That the Committee:*

1. *Receives the report.*
2. *Notes the content of the report.*

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