

Report 16.104
Date 17 March 2016
File CCAB-10-137

Committee Environment Committee
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Minor amendments to retain currency of the Parks Network Plan

1. Purpose

To recommend to Council two minor amendments to the Parks Network Plan 2011 (PNP).

2. Background

The PNP is the current policy and overall management plan for the majority of the park network managed by GWRC. Section 41(4) of the Reserves Act 1977 requires the administering body (Council) to keep management plans under continuous review, adapting to changing circumstances and increased knowledge.

Two amendments are proposed:

1. A revised Map 20 which defines trails permitted for use by motorised recreation vehicles in the Akatarawa Forest. A new map is proposed for incorporation into the Parks Network Plan and is attached as **Attachment 1**.
2. A revision of the maximum stay period for camping at parks where camping is a permitted activity (Kaitoke, Battle Hill and Belmont Regional Parks). A maximum of forty days within a twelve month period is proposed (for each campground), and removal of the Stratton Street, Belmont Regional Park entrance as a 'designated camping area'.

Akatarawa Forest Map 20

The PNP identifies that the Akatarawa Forest is one of the few places in the Wellington Region where the wider community can undertake off-road activities with motorbikes, quads and 4WD vehicles. The area also caters for a range of mountain biking and multisport events.

Many of the tracks which are currently well used for motorised recreation (trail bikes and four wheel drives /4WD) in Akatarawa Forest are not marked on the current Map 20 in the PNP. This is because the full extent of the tracks used by trail bike riders and four wheel drivers was not known to GWRC when the PNP was finalised.

The tracks that were not previously mapped are largely in the forestry plantation blocks in the western part of the park. In almost all cases these tracks are remnants of the Forest's logging history and follow old tram lines and logging roads. They have been used for many years for recreation purposes and are not newly created tracks or 4WD roads.

However, there has also been historic 4WD access to wetlands in the Forest, at Whakatikei and Martins Creek. GWRC has been working with ARAC to divert or wholly remove access to these areas, noting their ecological importance. To be successful we require ARAC's support in securing user cooperation, and are pleased with the progress to date.

The PNP identifies that the Akatarawa Recreational Access Committee (ARAC) represents 4WD and motorcycle club and other like-minded groups that use the Akatarawa Forest. ARAC has worked closely with GWRC officers over several years to map and determine which of the previously unmapped tracks should be officially approved for motorised recreation access.

All trails in the Forest have now been accurately located and mapped with GPS and a new map has been drafted. The PNP noted that a Protocol for shared management (GWRC and ARAC) of the trail network was being developed, and would be published on the GWRC website when completed. The Protocol provides the criteria for assessment of tracks and is attached as **Attachment 2**.

Camping in regional parks – creating consistent rules

The PNP (section 6.5.4 policy 'o' (page 71)) identifies that camping stays are for a maximum of one week at Kaitoke Regional Park. However, many families currently stay for longer in school holiday periods. The Plan does not identify a maximum stay period for either Battle Hill or Belmont Regional Park camping areas.

In the PNP 'Managed Activities' section 7.3.3 (page 104) it identifies the Belmont Regional Park designated camping areas as the Stratton Street and Dry Creek entrances. Dry Creek is a popular and well-utilised camping area and there has been a recent significant increase in use of this area, consistent with the overall increases in motorhome tourism visits experienced throughout the region. The Stratton Street entrance is rarely, if ever, used for camping because of poor access for motorhomes, a small car park and little flat land. The area is now the hub of mountain bike recreation in the park. For these reasons overnight stays are no longer considered inappropriate.

A revision of PNP policies is proposed to remove the Stratton Street entrance as a designated campground, remove the maximum one week stay at Kaitoke campground, and to introduce a 'maximum forty day stay in a twelve month period' at each of the remaining three campgrounds; Kaitoke, Battle Hill and Dry Creek, Belmont. The revised maximum stay period will allow longer stays

but also limit the undesirable opportunity for campers to establish more permanent bases in the parks, such as staying for a week, leaving for a day then returning repeatedly. This proposed change means that an overall maximum of 120 days per year will be permitted if campers were to stay at all three GWRC park camping areas. Existing Bylaws will continue to be utilised where required for addressing inappropriate visitor behaviour.

This proposed maximum stay period compares favourably with DOC and other local government campgrounds where maximum length of stay varies between seven, fourteen and twenty one days with no maximum stay over a 12 month period specified, or monthly stay periods identified. For example, campers can stay a maximum of four nights in a calendar month at Wellington City Council sites.

Detail of campground stay changes proposed

The PNP current policy for Kaitoke Regional Park (section 6.5.4 policy ‘o’ (page 71)) and change proposed is:

o. To permit camping and overnight stays, including campervans, at designated sites only (indicated through park signage and information). ~~Stays are for a maximum of one week.~~ Campervan dumpsites are not provided.

The PNP current rules and proposed changes for ‘Managed Activities’ (section 7.3.3 and 7.3.4 (page 104)) are:

Camping

7.3.3 To provide camping at the following designated sites:

- a. Battle Hill Farm Forest Park: Battle Hill entrance campground
- b. Belmont Regional Park: ~~Stratton Street entrance campground and~~ Dry Creek entrance campground
- c. Kaitoke Regional Park: Kaitoke entrance campground.

7.3.4 Camping may be restricted to some locations or conditions (refer to Rule 7.2.3):

- a) **Stays are for a maximum of 40 days in any 12 month period at each campground.**

3. Communication

Akatarawa Forest

The Akatarawa Forest land is held under the Wellington Regional Water Board Act 1972 as future water collection area for future water supply, forestry and recreation purposes. Under this Act the preparation of management plans is not identified. However, the policies and management directions for the Akatarawa Forest have been included within the PNP, developed under the Reserves Act 1977, and consideration has been given to its provisions. The Reserves Act (s 41 5A) identifies that public notification is not required if it is determined that written suggestions on the proposed plan would not materially assist in its preparation.

Officers suggest that amending a map illustrating the full track network which is already used for motorised recreation will not significantly change the directions for management identified in the PNP.

However, some public consultation about the proposed map change is considered appropriate. Public notification will ensure that any interested parties have an opportunity to comment on this minor formal change to policy. Accordingly an eight week consultation period is proposed and engagement activities are outlined below. **Attachment 3** is the proposed summary consultation document outlines details of the proposed change for Map 20.

Camping in Regional Parks

The changes proposed for increasing the permitted length of stay, but identifying a maximum overall stay period is a positive one for the majority of campers. Similarly an eight week period of engagement is proposed with notices published at all campgrounds and communication about the change through a variety of media as outlined in the Engagement section below.

4. The decision-making process and significance

Overall the matters are considered to have low significance. However, officers recognise that the matter referenced in this report will have a higher degree of importance to the recreational users of the Akatarawa Forest, particularly members of ARAC who are very keen to retain access to the forest, and have assisted with track maintenance work. We also expect some interest from conservation groups around the region. The change proposed to the policy for camping at Kaitoke may be of interest to agencies such as the New Zealand Motor Caravan Association and possibly some regular campers.

The matter requiring decision in this report has been considered by officers against the requirements of Part 6 of the Local Government Act 2002 (the Act). Part 6 sets out the obligations of local authorities in relation to the making of decisions.

4.1 Significance of the decision

Part 6 requires Greater Wellington Regional Council to consider the significance of the decision. The term ‘significance’ has a statutory definition set out in the Act.

Officers have considered the significance of the matter, taking the Council's significance and engagement policy and decision-making guidelines into account. Officers recommend that the matter be considered to have low significance. Because of the extensive engagement with the main recreational users to develop the revised Map 20, and the long standing use of the trails which were previously not mapped, there are expected to be few general community concerns with the new proposed Map 20. The changes to create consistency in campground maximum stay periods are generous and positive and unlikely to negatively impact park visitors.

Officers do not consider that a formal record outlining consideration of the decision-making process is required in this instance.

4.2 Engagement

The following engagement processes are proposed for the two amendments:

Akatarawa Forest Map 20

- Public notice in the Upper Hutt Leader newspaper
- Direct mail communication to all recreation clubs that utilise the park and conservation groups with an interest in the park
- Poster with the draft map on park notice boards at park entry points and Orange Hut in the park
- Information on the GWRC website
- Drop in session for interested parties to discuss the proposed map change at the GWRC Upper Hutt Depot
- Media release and promotion via social media

Camping in Regional Parks

- Notices on sign boards in the camping areas and at Rangers offices
- Information on GWRC website and promotion via social media
- Direct mail notification to camping stakeholders such as the Motor Caravan Association, local government agencies and DOC.

Feedback is invited via written submissions, face to face engagement and a feedback form.

5. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. ***Receives the report.***
2. ***Notes the content of the report.***
3. ***Recommends that Council approves the proposed amendments to the Parks Network Plan for public consultation.***
4. ***Recommends that Council approves a two month consultation period for the proposed minor amendments to the Parks Network Plan 2011.***

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Attachment 1: Revised PNP Map 20

Attachment 2: Akatarawa Forest Track Protocol

Attachment 3: Summary consultation document for Map 20