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Report PE 99.556

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PUBLIC EXCLUDED

Report to the Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee
from Cr Ian Buchanan

Suggested Rewanui Regional Reserve

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of an opportunity to purchase land for the purposes of establishing a Regional Reserve.

2. Public Excluded

Grounds for exclusion of the public under Section 48(1) of the Local Official Information Act 1987 are that the public conduct of the whole or relevant parts of the meeting would be likely to result in the disclosure of information for which good reason for withholding exists – i.e. the enabling of negotiations without prejudice or disadvantage.

3. Background

The Regional Council and its predecessor Catchment Board has been involved with the protection of remnant indigenous forest on privately farmed land in the Wairarapa from 1980 until 1997. Protection of many small isolated pockets of forest was achieved through cost sharing arrangements between the landowner, Council and the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust. All the work was completed on private land, which is often inaccessible to the general public.

Over the seventeen year period to 1997 a total of 5,000 hectares was fenced off on 129 properties. Approximately one third of these areas have subsequently been protected with a QE II covenant.

The cessation of this programme was the result of reduced funding, and a prioritising of work to more closely align with just soil conservation objectives.

On a number of occasions in the past staff had approached the trustees of the A.T. O'Connor Trust to gauge interest in the protection of some 60 hectares of remnant indigenous forest. The Trust farms the 280 hectare property, Rewanui, located at the junction of the Castlepoint and Riversdale Roads. A number of conditions relating to public access were unacceptable to the Trustees and the area is still subject to ongoing stock grazing.

4. Rewanui Bush

The Department of Conservation has recently mapped indigenous vegetation in the Eastern Wairarapa Ecological District, and recommended areas for protection. Field surveys of the highest priority areas were undertaken resulting in 49 Category One Recommended Areas for Protection (RAP).

Rewanui Bush is a Category One area and is described as one of the best remaining examples of lowland forest in the ecological district with high species diversity, substantial numbers of kereru, and occupying a wide altitudinal range. The forested hillslopes present an impressive scenic aspect to a portion of the Masterton – Castlepoint Road.

5. Development Option

Rewanui is ideally situated between Masterton and Castlepoint and offers considerable potential as a Regional Reserve. Adjacent to the farm is 3.6 hectares of Masterton District Council land. The site therefore has additional potential to develop picnic areas, bush walkways, and educational and recreational opportunities.

The balance of the farm contains a diversity of landforms that could either be sold to offset purchase costs, or alternatively developed for a range of uses such as an arboretum, soil conservation reserve or forestry demonstration site.

Any development in this area should involve joint discussions with Masterton District Council. Other key stakeholders are adjoining landowners, the Department of Conservation, and the Royal Forest and Bird Society.

6. Funding Option

Rewanui has a 1993 Government Valuation of \$365,000. Preliminary discussions with a local real estate agent suggest that this would be indicative of the upper end of the market.

Council currently holds a fund that was a product of the 1989 Local Government reforms. The Regional Parks Land Purchase Reserve fund was established by new and/or defunct local authorities whereby quantities of unattached money was pooled for the possible purchase of land to be incorporated into the Regional Parks network. The 1998 Annual Report (page

38) lists the Fund at \$561,000. Consideration would also need to be given to the place of a possible Rewanui Reserve within the overall framework of the existing Regional Park structure. Ongoing funding issues would also need discussion between all interested parties.

7. **Communications**

At this stage, communications on the matter should be postponed until a number of aspects in relation to the intentions of Council have been determined.

8. **Recommendation**

- (1) *That staff, jointly with Landcare Division staff, reviews the regional values associated with the proposed Rewanui Reserve and report back to the Landcare and Rural Services and Wairarapa Committees.*
- (2) *That the use of the Regional Parks Land Purchase Reserve be investigated as a source of funds to enable the purchase of Rewanui.*



Cr I M Buchanan