

## Manager – Parks

### Report for period ending Friday 8 September 2006

#### 1. Manager's comments

##### 1.1 Queen Elizabeth Park Barn/Horse Riding Concession

After the Committee's decision at the last meeting not to restore the barn at Queen Elizabeth Park, and to build a structure to house the horse riding concession, Murray Kennedy and I have been speaking with the *Friends of QEP* and the *Paekakariki Community Board*. Both parties are still interested in the possibility of restoring the building and want time to be able to work with Council on a proposal where the community help fund the restoration. Mr Kennedy and I have given the two groups a couple of months to be able to come back to Council with a proposal, and Council can then assess its relative merits at that time.

##### 1.2 Tracks

The Councillors asked at the last meeting about how new tracks are developed across the network.

Ideas for a new track can come from a variety of different sources. Generally, the demand for new tracks come from unofficial 'tracks' that get a lot of use, where there is a proven desire to recreate in a particular area, a new track will provide variety for users, or where a particular type of track is required for a particular activity (i.e. for horseriding, mountainbiking or short loop walks which are becoming more popular). The standards that we follow for tracks are those that are set in the *NZ Handbook for Tracks and Outdoor Structures* published by Standards NZ.




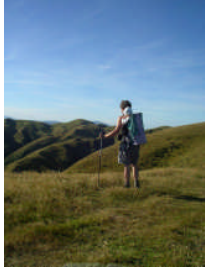
The process we follow to identify and develop major new tracks is:

- Potential new developments are highlighted as part of the management plan process as park enhancements and consulted on as part of that process.
- Priorities across the network are evaluated by officers
- Funding for higher priority or significant tracks is requested through the LTCCP/Annual Plan process and allocated by Council

Tracks that are considered minor by officers i.e. cost very little to develop or have little impact on ongoing maintenance budgets and work programmes, are approved by the Manager, Parks.

As background, attached is a map (**Appendix 1**) of the tracks that we have in the network, what type of track they are, and to what standard they are kept. **Table 1** summarises that information.

**Table 1**

Path	Walking track	Tramping track	Route	Total
				
25km	170km	260km	340km	795km

## 2. Planning and policy

### 2.1 Management planning

The first draft of the new East Harbour Management Plan was approved by the Policy and Finance Committee on 20 July and sent out for consultation on 25 July. Submissions on the draft plan close on 25 September. A public meeting to provide information on the East Harbour management planning process and to answer questions on the draft plan was held on 6 September. At the meeting there was some lively debate on the topics of hunting, mountainbiking, camping and dog walking. Feedback from that meeting will be presented to the Committee along with the other submissions in November.

The Battle Hill Farm Forest Park Management Plan is currently being drafted and will be ready for consideration at the November Committee meeting.

### 2.2 Pest control operations

Professional goat control operations are underway in Akatarawa and Pakuratahi Forests, Belmont Regional Park and the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water collection area. In Queen Elizabeth Park, rabbit dens are being fumigated in an attempt to lower rabbit numbers in the park. Night shooting has been used in the past to control rabbits, but has not been effective in preventing rabbit browse on plantings, such as the spinifex at Raumati. Contracts for this year's pest plant control are being finalised. Some work has started in Queen Elizabeth Park where sweeps are being completed for seedlings of boneseed, karo and brush wattle. Another pest plant team is being established to work on the big weed infestations, following the successful output of the team last financial year.

### 2.3 Monitoring

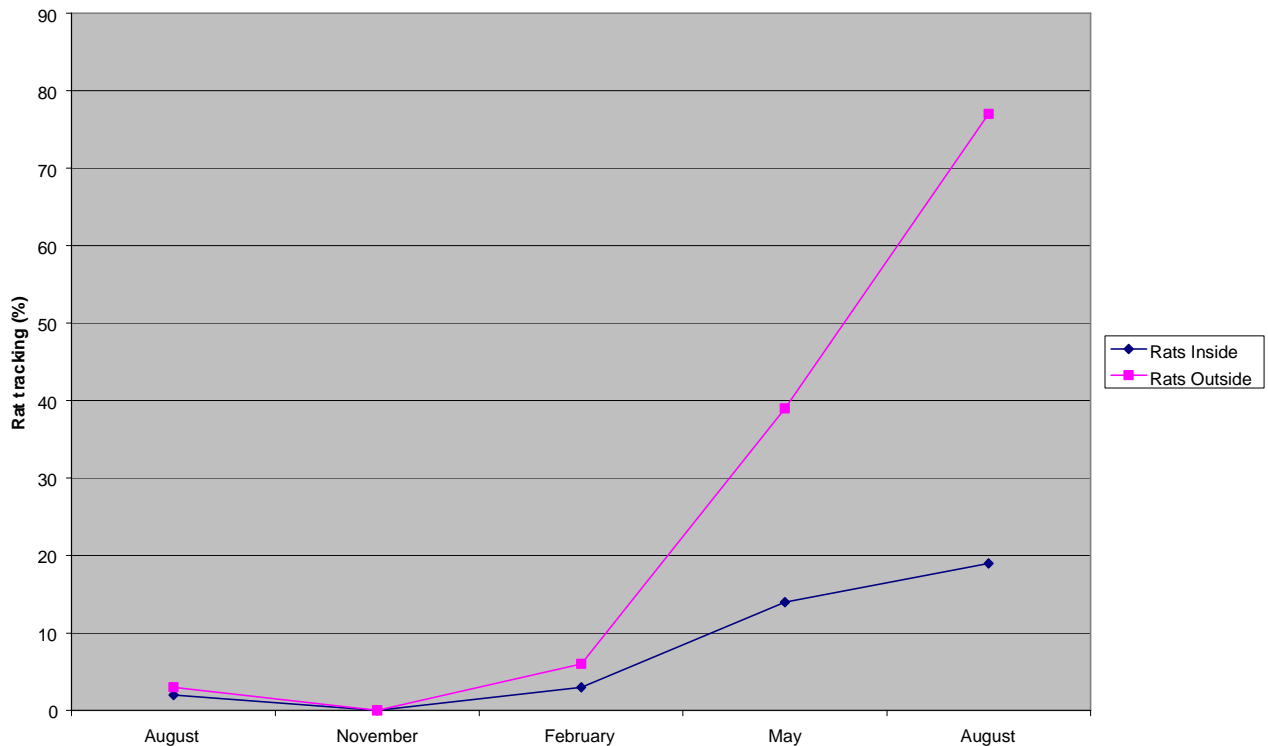
An analysis of the ungulate browse plots in the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water collection area show a small improvement in the abundance of seedlings in the browse layer (30cm to

1m in height). This is a positive response to the hunting programme. It is hoped that further improvements in the abundance of these seedlings will be seen over time. The hinau fruitfall plots were re-measured in July in both current water collection areas. A large drop in fruit being eaten by possums and rats was recorded in the Wainuomata/Orongorongo water collection area, as a result of the 1080 operation completed in August 2005. Last year, 77% of the fruit showed possum damage, but this year, the proportion fell to 6%. In the Hutt water collection area, 83% of the fruit were damaged by rodents. This is due to high rat numbers in the area.

## 2.4 Wainuiomata Mainland Island

A rodent monitor completed in August showed a dramatic increase in rat abundance in the area outside the mainland island (see Figure 1). 77% of the tracking tunnels recorded rat activity, while the toxin appears to be working inside the mainland island area, as the rats are being kept at a much lower level (19%).

**Figure 1: Rat tracking rate recorded since the August 1080 operation inside and outside the Wainuiomata Mainland Island.**



We are currently using a GPS unit to record the location of the bait stations within the mainland island. This information will be used to determine if there are any gaps that need to be filled in the grid.

From 2-11 August all possum traps and rat bait stations on the boundary of the Mainland Island and down Skull Gully, Drummond Ridge, West Branch and Long Ridge will be checked and filled. Approximately 60 possums and stoats have been killed since the last fill.

Some attendees of a recent combined Australia/New Zealand Ecological Society conference visited Wainuiomata Mainland Island as a field trip option in late August. These visitors enjoyed the chance to see the flora and fauna of the area, but some Australians were disconcerted at the site of a dead possum in a trap (some possum species are protected in Australia).

### **3. Western sector**

#### **3.1 Belmont Regional Park**

Officers have added brochure holders to information kiosks at a number of park entry points. Staff have also had to clean or repair signs which have been ‘tagged’ at the Cannons Creek and Takapu Road entrances.

The cleanup of storm damaged trees in the area of Baked Beans Bend has finally been completed. It is pleasing that this difficult job has been completed with little disruption to the public. We are confident that the risk to the public walking through this popular area has now been substantially reduced. While large areas of trees remain standing, most are not near the track so won’t pose a danger to the public (photo below).



The track team has been carrying out general track maintenance over the period, including a tidy up of the track near Baked Beans Bend, which was affected by the storm damaged trees.

Limited ranging work has been carried out over this period as the (vacant) Belmont Ranger position has only recently been filled. Assistant Rangers continue to keep entrances clean and tidy and monitor public use.

The Principal Ranger has (along with other GW staff) been dealing with an application to utilise a small area of land within the park near Belmont Road for a water reservoir for a proposed subdivision next to the park. He also met on site with Transpower and the Department of Conservation staff to discuss issues Transpower has relating to the moving of transmission towers near the Takapu Road entrance.

Officers have put out signs on farmland to give park users advanced warning about the temporary closure for lambing. Officers have maintained regular contact with the *Landcorp* Farm Manager to check on farm management and access issues. Eight thousand ewes were crutched on the farm this period, in preparation for lambing.

A site meeting was held with senior *Wellington City Council* (WCC) staff to discuss land owned by WCC within Belmont Regional Park at Horokiwi Road, and potential future access into Belmont Regional Park from Grenada North through WCC owned reserve land.

The Principal Ranger has continued meeting with *Friends of Belmont* and responding to requests for assistance by *Friends of Maara Roa*, as well as general public enquiries about the park.

The Ixion Trails Club held a successful trail based at the Stratton Street entrance to the park. The event was part of a national series.

### **3.2 Battle Hill Farm Forest Park**

The park is now closed for lambing. Lambing is now in full swing and is going well in spite of the weather. The farm is running well and the stock were in good condition going into the winter which has certainly helped. As with previous years, access through the farm to the forest is being kept open, and the Battle Hill loop track will be available to walkers only. Retaining some public access through the park during lambing works well at Battle Hill and enables people to continue enjoying the park through this period.

It is thistle season again and a lot of time has been spent by the ranger keeping on top of them. This will help reduce the amount of aerial control needed.

The DOC200 stoat and rat traps have continued to be effective throughout the winter and animals are still being caught. This will reduce the numbers of predators breeding in the spring and give the native bird species a better chance of successfully breeding. Ferret and cat traps have now been placed throughout the park as part of stage two of the predator control programme. To date, none have been caught which is a good sign.

Contractors have been working in the bush reserve killing mature *Macrocarpas* by ring barking them. These will die standing and enable the vegetation on many of the ridges to regenerate. The *Macrocarpas* are currently creating an environment around them that stops most plant species growing. Though it is a big job, it will benefit the reserve in the years to come.

A successful community planting day was held at Battle Hill with thirty people attending. The weather was fine and the wetlands benefited from another 600 plants being added. Part of the group attending were people from the Mana Lions who are getting involved in the park. There were also representatives from the *Energy Efficiency Conservation Authority* who had a great day. Apparently the BBQ afterwards contained the best sausages they had ever eaten.

### 3.3 Queen Elizabeth Park

Fortunately, all the rain of late makes for a great planting season. The park has hosted both community groups and corporate groups for planting days at least once per week this period. We still have a couple more planned planting days left, but it looks like we will reach our goal of having 20,000 new plants in the park this year. The Wainui Stream bank has been the recipient of a good percentage of those plants. What a difference a couple of plants can make! As part of Greater Wellingtons initiative to rehabilitate and restore urban streams, the Wainui stream was identified as a great site for restoration. Under the skilful, hands-on leadership of Mobile Ranger, Dean Scott the Wainui Stream has received some well deserved attention this winter.

Officers have been kept busy maintaining buildings, structures, ground and tracks as well as a lot of weed spraying and rabbit control throughout the park.

Officers have also been busy with landscaping around the rangers office at MacKay's Crossing and have assisted managing the construction of the new Paekakariki toilet block. The construction is moving along nicely, with no negative comments from the community.

The new boundary fence on State Highway 1 has had some unfortunate attention over this period. On two separate occasions we have had to repair the fence due to car accidents where the culprits have fled the scene.

The park has hosted *Equestrian Federation* events, as well as a model airplane rally and a classic car parade. Officers also participated in Raumati South Residence Group community walk, which highlighted Queen Elizabeth Park's northern wetland.

The *Friends of Queen Elizabeth Park* held their 2006 AGM at which landscape architect Frank Boffa presented his ideas of what Queen Elizabeth Park could look like in the future.

## **4. Eastern sector**

### **4.1 Kaitoke Regional Park**

The recent wet spell of weather has meant the park has seen fewer visitors, although the campground has been getting the odd overnight stay, mostly from folks in motor homes. A few campers have been rained or frosted out after one night in their tents.

A morning was spent planting in the campground with the *Totara Park Cub Scouts* as part of their Conservation badge, and a talk was given to the *50's Up* movement about Kaitoke and the Regional Parks network.

Representatives and customers of *Honda Cars* attended a planting day at Te Marua. 1300 plants were planted at the beginning of a new track that will soon link the pump house area to the Ridge Track via the Amphitheatre. 12 more Totaras were planted by the public in the *Celebrate Life* grove.

The *Wellington Botanical Society* and park staff planted the extension to Te Marua Bush that was gained as part of the State Highway two Kaitoke realignment. This area has been fenced off adding a third to the size of Te Marua Bush.

Regular maintenance work was undertaken in the park this period including:

- Fixing and re-nailing fence lines at Te Marua.
- Felling old poplars and willows in the campground area
- Installing a culvert in the campground area to help with surface flooding.
- Forming a section of track from the Kaitoke Underpass to Kaitoke Loop Road. This will be asphalted once the ground dries and settles.
- Site preparation for *Honda* trees planting using community workers.

### **4.2 East Harbour Regional Park**

The tracks at East Harbour Regional Park have held up well considering the amount of rain over the past two months. The recent track upgrades and the maintenance of water tables have been crucial in minimising water run-off and its associated damage. Over the last few weeks, a great deal of officer time has been spent cleaning out drains and making sure storm water is evenly dispersed. Although the weather hasn't been the best, the park has still been well used by locals and visitors alike.

Apart from spending much of our time in the field keeping up with weather induced maintenance, we have also been busy planning works for the coming year. Track and park entrance upgrades will continue in the Northern Block while facilities and tracks will be further improved at the Lakes Block.

There have been a number of community-based meetings particularly with the *MIRO* group who are continuing to battle possums and other pests in the park. Their chief concern at the

moment, as is GW's, are the prolific rat numbers. The continued intensive pest work in the Mainland Island area within the park will hopefully see these numbers fall.

The EHRP ranger gave a couple of talks recently to the younger users of our great outdoors. These included the *Kiwi Conservation Club* at Upper Hutt and the *Eastbourne Scouts*. You soon learn never to underestimate kids as they come up with many interesting questions and on occasion are better informed than their parents.

The *Butterfly Creek Night Madness Run* is now a well established annual winter event which attracted record numbers this year. Over 300 people braved the dark and cold of night to compete in the two hour hill race into East Harbour Regional Park. Participants started and finished in pairs and had a choice of competing in either the run or walk races. At 8pm it was headlamps on and off into the night. The race started with a steep climb up the Muritai track and then down into the Butterfly Creek valley and back out via the Kowhai and Bus Barn tracks. Everything went well and there were no incidents.

### **4.3 Wainuiomata/ Orongorongo Catchments**

Culverts have been cleaned out on all the walking tracks in the recreation area to keep them flowing over this wet period. Rangers have been putting metal down on the Sledge track to suppress mud holes that have formed over the winter. A digger was used to place boulders around the Truss Bridge abutment in the Recreation Area that had been severely scoured out in previous floods. Unfortunately there was another severe flood a week later that undid all this protection work. It has been recommended with the help of GW's Flood Protection Department that rock rip rap be placed on the riverbank upstream of the bridge to permanently repair this ongoing problem.

Cars have been doing major damage to the small bit of grass not bollarded off at the car park. Motorbikes also have been coming in on the weekend and staff have been patrolling in the late afternoon to catch these offenders. Locks and chains were placed on the three new gates up the Moores Valley track. A new sign was put on the top gate as the last sign had been stolen.

On 22,23,24, and 25 August, *Wainuiomata Intermediate School* did their Take-Action workshop at Wainuiomata Catchment. The ranger gave a one hour guided tour to the children around the Sledge Track, looking for invertebrates, bird life and describing the tree and the forest structure. The ranger also explained how the forest helps keep our drinking water clean.

### **4.4 Akatarawa/Pakuratahi Forests**

We have been through an extremely wet period, but officers are happy to report that our forest areas have received little damage apart from two or three minor slips. Staff continue to monitor and repair road surfaces accessing the recreational areas – Rimutaka Incline, Tunnel Gully reserve – and continue to monitor the track surfaces within these areas, making repairs where necessary. In the Tunnel Gully Reserve, the water levels are very



high and culverts are working at their maximum capacity. Should we receive more rain, the water will run over the road and cause damage to it.

During this period we have assisted the *Upper Hutt Deer Stalkers Association* with maintenance to the road that allows vehicles from the Rimutaka Walkway through to the rifle range. Our input in this has been to make available our digger and an operator, and the Deerstalkers Club has paid for the materials. This only required use of the digger for half a day.

Gate security continues to be an issue, and since our last report we have had two gates in the Akatarawa Forest vandalised. Both these gates were internal gates, (approximately 5 km away from entry points), and prevent motorised access to the large plantation area of Puketiro Forest. The gates were repaired immediately as access to the plantation logging operations carries inherent risks for recreational users.

Pictured right is evidence of the inherent dangers associated with accessing vehicles areas that have not been maintained for vehicles! This vehicle is now sitting in the Akatarawa West River in the Karapoti Gorge. The Karapoti Gorge forms the legal access for recreational users on the eastern side of the forest. This portion of the access is under the control of Upper Hutt City Council. We continually liaise with Upper Hutt City Council on this access. No injuries resulted from this incident.

We will be removing this wreck immediately, but this will require a bulldozer with a winch as the distance from the edge of the road to the vehicle is anywhere from 120 to 150m and is very steep.

Staff have completed a training course for staff involved in work with aircraft (helicopter/plane). The aim was to ensure all of our staff had the unit standard



under the national qualifications system for safety working in and around aircraft. This situation arises often for staff involved in poison operations, rural fire fighting operations, boundary assessments, fertilising operations, search and rescue etc.

The day was very successful. All staff were accredited with the unit standard and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon.



Safety briefing from the pilot



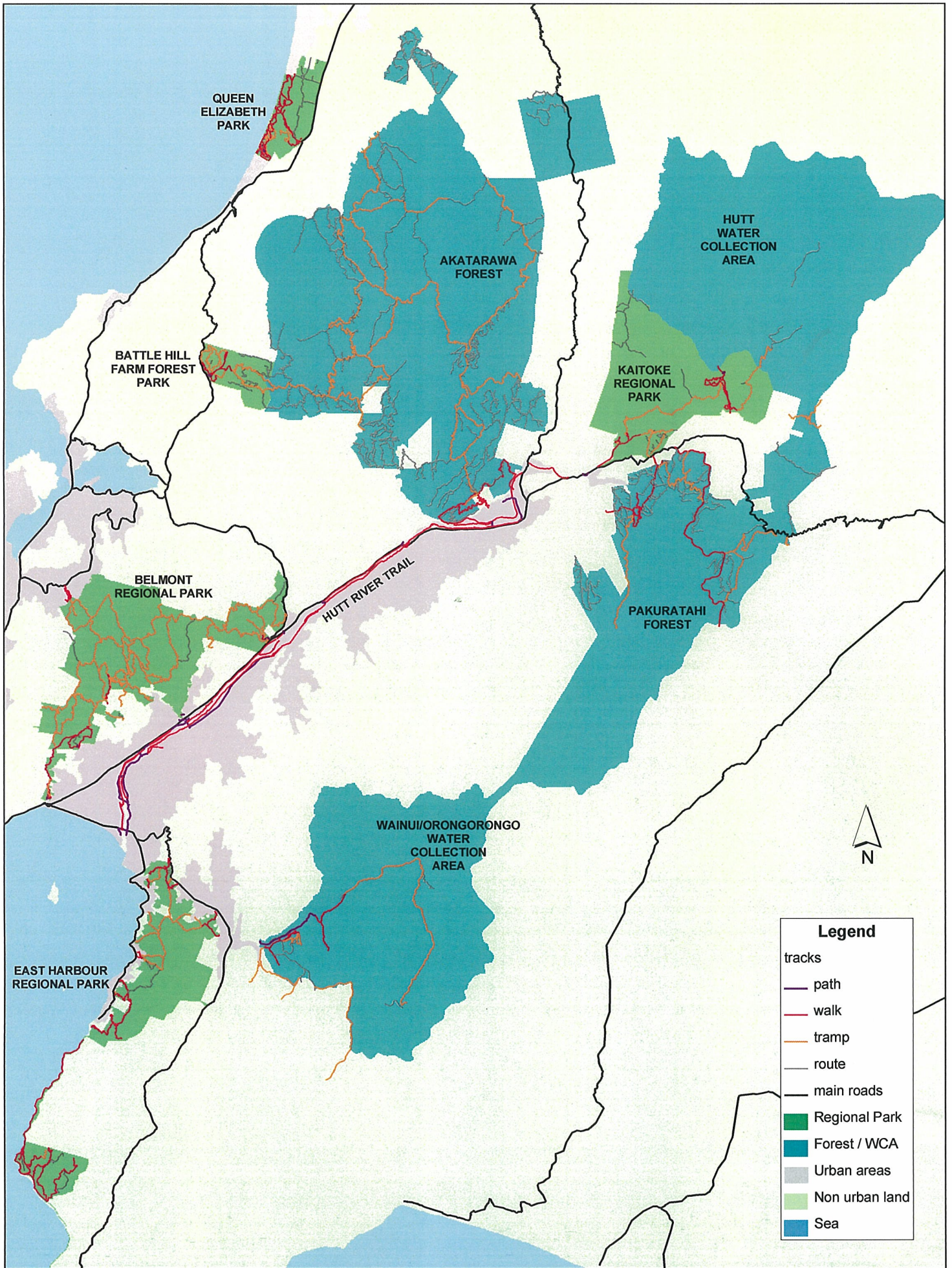
Entry and exit while helicopter is hovering

Recreational access to both forests remains steady, even in light of the poor weather conditions. The most popular being motorised access for 4WD clubs in the Akatarawa Forest and mountain biking events in the Pakuratahi Forest. The use of mountain bikes

continues to grow, with a very popular sport at the moment being orienteering mountain biking. Several other groups have also been enjoying night rides in our area. Unfortunately the pressures of life for some people have meant time for recreation is limited, therefore more and more night-time activities are being undertaken.

Feedback on our recreational areas, their condition, etc. continues to be very positive as does feedback on the installation of toilet facilities in these remote areas.

**Murray Waititi**  
Manager, Parks



Appendix 1  
 Greater Wellington Regional Council  
 Parks and Forest Tracks

5 2.5 0 5 Kilometers

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