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**Committee** Landcare  
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## Community awareness and usage of regional parks

### 1. Purpose

To advise the Committee on the results of the 2006 telephone survey of regional residents' awareness, usage and satisfaction with the regional parks and forests.

### 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

As part of the annual planning process, Greater Wellington (GW) has targets to achieve relating to the public's awareness, usage and enjoyment of the parks and forests.

Since 2004 we have commissioned independent telephone surveys among a cross-section of residents to gather information that will assist us to measure progress against our targets. This phone survey is part of the Visitor Monitoring Framework "toolbox" that helps us develop a better picture of park users.

#### 3.1 Research objectives

These were defined as follows:

- (a) To assess the public's level of awareness and usage of the five regional parks, two forests and the Hutt River Trail.
- (b) To measure how park users rank the relative importance of specific park facilities.
- (c) To determine to what extent park users are satisfied with their visit, the park environment and with specific facilities provided.
- (d) To identify what park users value most about the parks they visit.
- (e) To elicit suggestions for improving the public's park experiences.

- (f) To determine what benefits park visitors derive from visiting the regional parks.
- (g) To identify any barriers that exist to use (or more frequent use) of the regional parks.

### 3.2 Method

The sample structure for the research remained consistent with the previous surveys, so that we can compare results where appropriate. The research was undertaken among a randomly selected sample of 500 residents aged 16+ years who live in the Greater Wellington Region.

Interviews were spread throughout the Greater Wellington Region in accordance with population distribution, in order to recruit a representative cross-section of the public.

As with the previous studies, the latest survey was combined with the Emergency Preparedness research undertaken for GW, as the joint fieldwork approach contributes worthwhile savings to the cost of the research.

### 3.3 Margin of error

With a sample size of  $n = 500$  we can be 90% certain that with a result of around 80% (e.g. awareness of a regional park), the true result would be plus or minus 2.9% (somewhere between 78.1% and 83.9%).

## 4. Summary of results

**Awareness** - 81% (up 3% from 2004) of residents can now freely recall a major regional park or forest in the Greater Wellington area. The average number of parks recalled has also marginally improved (2.2)

**Visitation** – overall this is very similar to the previous two years. 49% of residents have visited one regional park in the last 12 months. Queen Elizabeth Park has shown a decline possibly due to extensive road works in the area. Battle Hill visitation has increased.

**Users vs non-users** – overall the parks are used by a broad cross-section of the public, with a 49/51 male/ female split. However, park users are weighted more heavily toward:

- People over 30 years of age, especially those in the 30 to 49 year age group and:
- People from the mid to higher household income groups, especially those with incomes over \$70,000 per annum.

**Frequency** – most users (86%) visit between 1-4 times per year. There is a core (14%) of people who visit the parks monthly or more often.

This result is similar to those seen from surveys commissioned by other park agencies.

#### 4.1 Main activity undertaken

'Walking/bush walking' was, again, the most popular activity undertaken in the parks, accounting for 54% of the last visits to the regional parks/forests, down on the 64% level recorded last year. A variety of other activities were also noted, including:

	2005 %	2006 %
Picnicking	15	8
Mountain biking/cycling	7	14
Walking/running with the dog	6	6
Running	6	4
Camping	5	1
Swimming	3	2
Miscellaneous activities	6	12

'Miscellaneous activities' related to specific events that had been organised by various bodies (e.g. clubs, businesses and event organisers).

#### 4.2 Satisfaction

Park users were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with each of the parks they had visited in the past 12 months, as a place to undertake the activity in which they had specifically participated.

Their overall reactions were significantly more positive than last year.

Satisfaction Level	2005 %	2006 %
Very satisfied	49	75
Satisfied	42	21
Neutral	9	4
Dissatisfied	x	x
Very dissatisfied	-	-
<b>TOTAL PARK USERS</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Importance and satisfaction with park facilities** – toilets, walking tracks and signs/ information were rated the top three in terms of importance. 62% were satisfied with toilets, 88% with walking tracks and 80% with signs and information.

**Park environment** – most were satisfied with factors such as the park's Space and Place for their activities (97%), the flora, fauna and natural setting (95%), the number of people there (93%), behaviour of those people (94%) and the

role and contribution of the park to protecting our natural, cultural and historic heritage (90%).

**Most valued aspects** - Visitors gave a variety of responses, but the main themes centred on the following:

	%
It is a relaxing/peaceful place to go	22
The flora/native bush/native trees	20
Easy access – close by/suitable for all ages	15
The views/scenic views	9
Well maintained/good tracks	8
The openness/open space	8
The bird life/New Zealand bird life	7
The cleanliness/freshness of the area	5
The scenery/great scenery	4
The history/information about important landmarks	4
Safe/a good area for children	4
Other features	11

**Preferred change** - Park users were asked the following question: “If you had a magic wand and could make one change to the park you last visited, what would it be?”

Reflecting the high levels of satisfaction expressed earlier, 80% of respondents would not make any changes to the park. Typical comments were:

*Just leave it as it is.*

*Preserve what it has at the moment.*

*Do nothing. It is great the way it is.*

The 20% of park users who identified a park feature that they would like improved gave a variety of suggestions. The main ideas put forward were:

	%
Re-populate the bird life/plant more native trees.	4
Protect the beach (at Queen Elizabeth Park) from erosion	3
Have more toilets; upgrade toilets	2
Have more/better information about local history	2
Trials a café in the park	2
Have more deer/easier access to game	1
Widen tracks for cyclists/establish a bike trail	1
Establish easy walkways/accessibility for the disabled and elderly	1

### 4.3 Overall satisfaction levels

Ninety-nine percent of park users indicated that, overall, they were satisfied with the park they last visited. Seventy-five percent stated that they were ‘very satisfied’ with the experience.

In relation to the network of regional parks, 84% overall said they were satisfied with the network, with 47% being “*very satisfied*”.

**Perceived benefits from visiting a regional park** – all of the park users interviewed were able to identify a benefit that they personally received from visiting a regional park. In order of mention, these were as follows:

<b>Perceived benefits</b>	<b>% Park Users Mentioning</b>
It keeps me in touch with nature	43
It keeps me fit/healthy	28
It is uplifting/refreshes me/provides relaxation	22
It lets me get away from the stresses/strains/pressure of the city	19
It is something I can enjoy with my family/children/partner	13
It is something I can enjoy with my friends	9
It provides freedom to walk my dog without a lead	6
It is educational/facilitates learning about parks/history/natural resources	5
It provides plenty of variety/activities	2
Other benefits	3
<b>Average number of benefits mentioned</b>	<b>1.5</b>

### 4.4 Barriers to usage

Twenty-five percent of the total Greater Wellington residents interviewed stated that there are barriers, or factors that prevent them using the regional parks on a more frequent basis than they do now.

Approximately half these people said that the main barrier to visiting was time. That is, work, family and other commitments limit their usage of the regional parks.

The other main limiting factors identified included: weather (at certain times of the year), life-cycle factors (such as old age, or having very young children) or health/lack of mobility.

Very few respondents (less than 5%) mentioned any limiting factors relating to park facilities.

## 5. Comment

It is great to see the marked increase in user satisfaction with the regional parks. We should see this as a reflection of good park planning, appropriate service levels plus a good match between the expectations we create and the experience we deliver.

Awareness is slowly going up, assisted by our new collateral and the success of the Regional Outdoors Programme. We need this increase to deliver our goal of more people using the regional parks.

With that in mind it is also good to note that barriers to usage are centred on the (non)users rather than gaps in what we do. Factors such as a lack of awareness or information on what is available have been cited in previous years as reasons why people do not visit the parks.

Of course “lack of time” is a perception. Given that every user could list at least one personal benefit of visiting, the onus is on us (among and with other agencies) to encourage people to prioritise their “time out” in the regional parks. With the visitation rate of around 50% of residents not budging in the last three years we need to keep working strategically to realise the potential offered by the regional parks in delivering better outcomes for the community.

## 6. Communication

The key results from this survey have been included in the Greater Wellington Annual Report 2005/06 and associated press releases. We will also mention them in the next edition of Green Shoots newsletter which is to be distributed in early December.

## 7. Recommendations

*That the Committee:*

1. ***Receive the report.***
2. ***Note the content of the report.***

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