

## Manager – Parks

### Report for period ending Friday 17 November 2006

#### 1. Manager's comments

##### 1.1 Waka found at Queen Elizabeth Park

Officers helped the Historic Places Trust (HPT) and Iwi representatives recover a section of waka from the Wainui Stream in September. The piece resembled driftwood sticking out of the sand but fortunately a park visitor recognised the piece. HPT staff were enthusiastic about the find saying that “discovering such an intact and old piece of waka such as this is quite rare.” HPT is currently treating the Waka section to prevent deterioration. The treatment process involves soaking the waka in a wax-based solution. This process will take 2-5 years. The future housing of the waka no doubt will be a source of much debate.



Finding and recovering the waka section was a tricky job



Finally the section is retrieved



The waka section measures about 1.5m

##### 1.2 New Zealand Recreation Summit

In September, the Department of Conservation (DOC) hosted a recreation summit meeting to look at the challenges, opportunities and trends that would help set the direction for outdoor recreation on public conservation land for the next 20 years. The summit brought together traditional outdoor recreation users and professionals, and encouraged those not as familiar with outdoor recreation opportunities to attend.

The summit explored the current status of outdoor recreation and then considered recreational trends that will shape the future use of land managed by the Crown for conservation.

I have left a copy of the summit notes in the Councillor's Lounge for your information.

## **2. Planning and policy**

### **2.1 Management planning**

Hearings and deliberations for the East Harbour Regional Park management plan were held on 27, 28 and 29 November. A total of 72 submissions were received regarding the draft plan. It is anticipated that the final plan will be ready for Council approval early in 2007.

The Battle Hill Farm Forest Park management plan has been drafted and is being put forward for approval at this committee meeting (see report 06.660).

The Belmont Regional Park management planning process began in early October with a call for public submissions on the current plan, and a public meeting on 8 November. The closing date for submissions for the Belmont Regional Park management plan is 1 December.

### **2.2 Pest control operations**

Professional goat control operations completed in September resulted in the culling of a total of 169 goats, 12 pigs and 2 deer in Akatarawa and Pakuratahi Forests. In the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water collection area, 17 goats and 1 deer were removed during a check of the Judas goats. Good progress has been made in lowering goat numbers on Council land, especially in areas that have been 'hotspots' for many years, e.g. parts of Pakuratahi Forest. Ground-based possum and rodent control operations have continued in East Harbour Regional Park, Korokoro Valley and Speedy's Reserve.

The pest plant team have had a slow start to the year, with bad weather hampering initial operations. They are currently focusing on the climbing asparagus in East Harbour Regional Park, building on last year's success with controlling this weed around the Bus Barn area. Contracted pest plant control work is also underway in all of the parks and forests (excluding the Hutt catchment).

### **2.3 Monitoring**

Bird monitoring is in full swing, with annual surveys being completed in four parks and the two current water collection areas. In Kaitoke Regional Park, an annual count of kereru in the campground has shown a noticeable increase in numbers over time since 2002 (kereru shootings occurred in the park in that year). A 1080 control operation completed in the Kaitoke forest in the west of the park in winter 2005 and the Hutt catchment 1080 operation in 2003 would have provided a boost to these bird numbers.

<b>Year</b>	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Mean number of kereru</b>	29.2	54.6	57.5	77.8

In East Harbour Regional Park, MIRO completed quarterly bird counts and are about to start the spring counts now. The recent rodent/mustelid monitor in East Harbour has shown that rat numbers are starting to fall within the mainland island area in Gollans Stream. Only 26% of the tracking tunnels showed rat tracking within the mainland island, while outside, the result was 62%. This has been a dramatic drop within the mainland island, as the rat tracking was 80% in August (only three months ago).

## **2.4 Wainuiomata Mainland Island**

A bait fill was completed in early October. There has been an issue arise with the bait that had been in the bait stations since the last fill in August. Some of the baits are sprouting grass seed (millet and canary grass). This appears to be a fault with the manufacture of the latest batches of bait and has caused concern because of the biosecurity issues. MAF have ordered the removal of the bait and there will be a need to replace this bait type until the manufacturer regains registration.

A possum monitor was completed in the mainland island in October and the result of 1.7%RTC is good news for the control programme. It is below the target level of 2% and all of the possums trapped during the monitor were located on Moore's Valley where reinvasion has occurred from neighbouring land that had not received possum control in the past. This neighbouring land is now part of a Tb operation.

Bird monitoring inside and outside the mainland island will be completed throughout November. Forty bird count stations have been set up in the mainland island and another 40 in the non-treatment area. Five minute bird counts will be made twice at each station, as will special distance recordings of tomtit and kereru.

## **2.5 Capital works**

QEP Paekakariki toilet completed

Townscape Construction has completed the replacement toilets at Paekakariki picnic area, Queen Elizabeth Park. The site will remain fenced off until the grass is established.

## **3. Western sector**

### **3.1 Belmont Regional Park**

Staff have been involved in constructing a bridge in the Korokoro Valley. The old bridge was flown out by helicopter and the new one was flown in from the Oakleigh Street carpark.



The bridge is stropped up...



and disappears down into the Korokoro Valley

Ranging services are limited at present due to the Belmont Ranger position being vacant. Waitangirua Farm reopened following lambing, and docking has kept Landcorp farm staff occupied over the month of October. 8,500 ewes lambed with a lambing percentage rate of 125% (see photo).



Docking gang in full swing Waitangirua Farm

Security at the Dry Creek car park has been of concern over the past few months with the area being targeted by thieves. Evidence supplied to the Police by Greater Wellington has resulted in the arrest and prosecution of one principal offender. We will continue to maintain a high level of monitoring of the area to help reduce the risk to public visiting the park.

Near Takapu Road, Transpower have started a substantial upgrade of the line to the Haywards Substation. Staff have been liaising with Transpower over issues involving the upgrade. About 40 large pine trees need to be felled in the Takapu Road area to allow for the line and pylon upgrade. As these trees were planned to be removed at a later date anyway by Greater Wellington, we were happy to have Transpower carry out the work. Staff are working with Transpower to manage public access as the work progresses. Some tracks will need to be closed to the public while line and pylon upgrade work is being carried out.

Staff were invited by Eastern Hutt School to attend a special assembly and accept weta motels constructed by children as part of their Take Action programme. Ranger staff attended a school picnic at the Stratton Street entry to the park to help mount the weta hotels near a bush walk.



Pupils from Eastern Hutt School proudly show off their Weta hotels installed at Belmont Regional Park

### 3.2 Battle Hill Farm Forest Park

With growing season in full swing, the weeds have come in for some attention as we try to hit them at their most vulnerable. Thistle work has continued, with the bulk of the work now complete. The other main weed on the farm to deal with is the gorse which is being sprayed by knapsack.

Soil tests have been carried across the farm to check on the fertility. This test is carried out every three years and it is hoped that after a sustained programme that the soil should be in peak condition for grass growth. The grass is certainly growing well at the moment.

Project Pateke is ongoing and the volunteers and staff are being diligent. The stoat numbers are definitely down on last year but the rat numbers are well up in response to less predation. The traps are spaced to take up the stoat's role in rat control. Feracol baits were laid throughout the bush reserve to target rats and possums. Monitoring showed the rat numbers were well up in the bush reserve. Being relatively small, reinfestation from neighbouring properties is a constant problem. The bait was laid to hopefully give the native birds an undisturbed nesting season again.

Staff have also been docking the mob of sheep the Council has as part of the park's education programme it runs with school groups.





Filming took place at Battle Hill in October. The company involved filmed an advert for 4WD tyres and needed a farm setting with buildings in the background. Battle Hill was ideal for it and the weather put on a wet day which is what they needed. Two of our resident sheep were included much to the delight of the company who were planning on using cardboard cut outs. Apparently Martha and Max will be signing a contract shortly!



Filming at Battle Hill



Two park sheep pose for the camera

Another subdivision is proposed for the southern boundary of the park which will mean that effectively the park will be surrounded by smaller blocks. This was always going to happen sooner or later but it emphasises the importance of maintaining open space areas throughout the Wellington region to ensure that they are there for future generations.

The park has reopened after what has proved to be a very successful lambing season. The ewes “went to the ram” in peak condition which resulted in a high percentage of multiple births. The critical period when the lambs were new was reasonably settled which meant a low mortality rate.

The final corporate planting day was held at Battle Hill with thirty people from URS attending. It was a successful day and the last 500 plants for the season were put in the ground.



Corporate planting group at Battle Hill

The busy summer season is approaching and a lot of time is currently being spent taking bookings for events and camping. School visits are flowing in (when the weather allows) to make the most of the lambing season.



School visits are picking up along with the weather



Kindy kids feeding the pet sheep and her lamb

The resident falcon has been seen quite a bit around the farm buildings which are proving to be a happy hunting ground for him. The Kereru which usually spend a lot of time in the elms around the woolshed have wisely stayed put in the bush reserve.

### 3.3 Queen Elizabeth Park

Staff have been quite busy tidying up the park for summer. We have received a number of compliments as to how nice the park is looking. The landscaping for the ranging office is almost complete. The last thing to do is seal the carpark, which will occur when Transit seal the new section of State Highway One.



Staff begin the landscaping work around the Ranger Office at Mackays.

Staff have been dealing with a number of offenders this period. With the help of the police, two vehicles have been impounded as a result of their owners breaking the Unauthorised Street and Drag Racing Amendment Act 2003. With the help of the Fire Service a small driftwood fire was extinguished near the Wainui stream. We had a rainy school holiday this period which really enhanced the number of inappropriate activities on the park.

We finished the 2006 planting season this period with three final corporate planting days in September and October. We are estimating that approximately 20,000 plants have been put into the ground this year!

Staff conducted bird surveys throughout the park. The NZ falcon was noted as well as a couple of bellbirds.

Staff attended a number of community interest group meetings including; Friends of QEP, Guardians of Whareroa, Millennium Walkway Group, Kapiti Cycleways and Bridleways, Raumati South Residence Group, Paekakariki Community Board, and the Kapiti Emergency Services Coordinating Committee.

We have hosted a couple of NZ Equestrian Federation events. Each event sees more riders than the last. The federation is making some much needed improvements to the jumps in order to accommodate this increased interest in the course.

The Tramway museum had a great turn out for their “Expo” during the Kapiti Classic Car Festival. As a result the park was incredibly busy with a lot of visitors over that weekend.

## **4. Eastern sector**

### **4.1 Kaitoke Regional Park**

Spring and the onset of daylight saving has seen an increase in park users but the changeable weather has meant that this has been spasmodic. The wettest Labour weekend in 10 years resulting in a quiet beginning to the camping season with only 100 camper nights over the three days which was well down on previous years. Some regulars braved the conditions and it is always good to catch up with these folks who all commented on the good work done by the Ranging team in the campground area during the winter.

After a quiet winter there has been a rise in illegal and anti social behaviour within the park. Several cars have been broken into at the Ridge Track car park. A stolen vehicle was burnt out adjacent to the entrance at Te Marua. Several youths have been caught driving recklessly and a youth was arrested for pointing a replica plastic pistol at staff as they left the treatment plant. This is a timely reminder that not all park users are legitimate and caution is always prudent. Patrolling has been stepped up accordingly.

An injured kayaker was airlifted out of the Hutt River gorge about 500 – 800 metres downstream of the Strainer House after dislocating his shoulder.

Thirty staff from Argest Technical Services Ltd attended a planting day at Te Marua at which 1300 plants were planted to extend the bush remnant opposite the pump house. This group will certainly be invited to more events as the catering they provided was outstanding, leading to a well fed Ranger team on the day! This late season planting was quickly organised by the Environment Division.



The annual Centennial Cup Relay competitors braving inclement weather mountain biked the Kaitoke Hill Track as part of this event which links the Hutt River Trail with the Rimutuka Rail Trail.

An extension of the concreted pad at the large facility building has been completed to tidy up the patchy grass and to solve the problem of mud being carried through to the covered barbeque area on peoples' shoes.

## **4.2 East Harbour Regional Park**

The constant rainfall has certainly tested out the work carried out by GW on the tracks at EHRP. However, after each storm the tracks have generally recovered well so the initial work was well worth the effort. The high winds brought down the odd tree over various tracks but these have been dealt with fairly quickly. Spring vegetation clearance has taken place on tracks throughout the park and because this is now managed more efficiently, this only needs to be minimal. Further directional track signage has been ordered and will be used to complete the network in some of the less visited areas.

Once again there have been plenty of community meetings e.g. MIRO and communication with various neighbours. Along with Gail Abel, the MIRO chairperson, we have taken a number of new volunteers into the park and given them basic inductions regarding possum trapping work.

There was yet another multisport event held at the park on Saturday October 14. The main ridge in the northern forest block was used for the 7km hill run section of the event, starting at Puriri Street in Wainuiomata to Ferry Road in Days Bay. Part of the Lakes Block was also used for the mountain bike section. Around 350 participants took part in the event, 100 of those ran the hill section and a further 100 mountain biked through part of the Lakes Block.

It appears that increasing numbers of people are discovering the track network within the Pencarrow Lakes Block of East Harbour Regional Park. Park ranger staff have received plenty of positive feedback particularly now that the tracks are well signposted. GW staff were recently working at the block during midweek, a time you would generally expect to be quiet, when around 50 school children and teachers were seen heading enthusiastically for the new boardwalk at the head of Lake Kohangapiripiri. A number of trampers later followed in their footsteps and duly commented on how well the access had improved. It's great to see such a range of people checking out one of Wellington's great natural treasures.

## **4.3 Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Catchments**

The spray programme over the last few months has been going well. There is approximately 45km of track spraying undertaken to control weeds including broom, gorse, ragwort and foxglove.

The Pack Track has been cleared for the upcoming season of Wainuiomata Water Catchment Tours. Four Parks staff carrying chainsaws, a scrub bar, loppers and hedge clippers walked the 7km track and cleaned up windfalls and vegetation growth.

A large pine came down across the Wainuiomata River and took out the power lines to the treatment plant and blocked the main access road. The power was fixed that evening and the next day the pine across the access way was cleared. We are working with Flood Protection to get the pine out of the river.

From 10-13 October all Possum Warrior Kill Traps, Rat Pelifeef Bait Stations and Stoat Traps were checked in the Mainland Island. The rat stations closest to Moores Valley ridge were mostly empty and have been filled. The next refilling and check of traps is programmed for early December.

On Labour Day our top gate on the deer fence was pulled off its hinge with a vehicle and driven over, damaging the gate. The Police are following up leads to the people responsible for this damage.

During November the Ranger has been undertaking bird counts with volunteer Gail Abel. The public has mentioned to the ranger on a number of occasions that the number of tui and wood pigeons present this year has largely increased compared to other years.

Wainuiomata Catchment tours were held on 15 October and 26 November. The people on these tours seemed to thoroughly enjoy a day to look at an excellent patch of native forest.

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

We had the first wild fire for the season. This fire encroached on Greater Wellington Regional Council land and also had the potential to threaten the plantation forests situated in the Tunnel Gully/Maymorn/Martin Block area. The weather on the day was blustery, northwester winds which pushed the fire quite quickly through the scrub. The fire also threatened two residential houses – one quite badly (downpipes melted and a small portion of the deck was burnt). Fortunately due to the quick response of the NZ Fire Service, the Upper Hutt Rural Bush Fire force and our own staff, this fire was dealt with promptly and efficiently, with no other damage apart from what has been identified.

Fires of this nature definitely reinforce the need for Council to continue training staff in fire suppression, as in a large scale event it is obvious the volumes of personnel that could be required may well be difficult to coordinate during a working day.

Requests for recreational access and all other forms of access continue on a regular basis. With the assistance of our reception staff we cater for all requests and to date there have been no problems, no issues and no complaints. During this period as part of the Wilderness Expo, a successful duathlon event was held in the Akatarawa Forest.

We continue to liaise with a wide range of groups regarding access, not only recreational but also access for training requirements with the NZ Army (training exercises on Regional Council land are now a regular thing, i.e. on a weekly basis), NZ Police, recreational 4WD clubs and also staff driver training requirements.

The focus of maintenance continues to be controlling water, i.e. run-offs, culverts, water tables/streams and creeks. As you are aware, this winter has been a particularly wet one but fortunately the rain we have been receiving has not come in large volumes. It has been more consistent over a long period of time. This has meant that the damage has been minimal as maintenance has been consistent.

**Murray Waititi**  
Manager, Parks