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Report 02.500

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Report to the Landcare Committee
from Trecia Smith, Environmental Planner, Flood Protection

Otaki River Mouth Lagoon

1. Purpose

To seek endorsement of the completed design concept for enhancing the Otaki River mouth lagoon and to advise the Committee on the outline programme of work proposed for 2002/03.

2. Background

In February 2000 Councillors considered Report 00.03 on game bird hunting on the Otaki River. One of the game bird hunting sites identified was the lagoon on the north bank of the Otaki River mouth. There was much discussion on the overall management of this site including issues such as rubbish dumping, 4 wheel drive use and the potential to make the river mouth estuary a “wildlife reserve”. Officers were specifically asked to report back on ways of controlling the damage caused by vehicles.

Following the February meeting Emily Williams, a Landscape Architect, was commissioned to look at possible ideas for the enhancement of the lagoon area. The Williams concept report included suggestions on how to control vehicle access and improve the recreational opportunities in the area. The concept was reported to the Committee in November 2002 (Report 00.779) and was incorporated into the Otaki River Environmental Strategy.

As a result of these investigations, provision was made to establish a “nature reserve” at the Otaki River mouth lagoon. Specifically \$10,000 in 2001/02 and \$29,000 in 2002/03 was budgeted into the Flood Protection 2000-2010 Operating Plan. The works were to include planting, constructing access tracks, and car parking. The first year’s programme was to prepare a design and confirm a management structure. The second year was starting the project’s implementation.

3. Existing Situation

The area around the lagoon and the river mouth is an important area to Ngati Raukawa, who have mana whenua over the Otaki Catchment. The project area includes part of the Pakakutu Pa site. Ngati Raukawa have been involved with the project since the initial stages of developing a design for the lagoon area. The Design Report is consistent with the Ngati Raukawa Otaki River and Catchment Iwi Management Plan 2000.

The Otaki River mouth lagoon was formed in the mid-1970s when the river mouth extended north, nearly to Kapiti Lane. In 1977 the former Manawatu Catchment Board moved the river south again by making a diversion cut approximately midway between the north and south stopbanks. The lagoon was formed from the remnant riverbed following the natural closure of the foredune, at the former northern mouth position.

Further to the above the following additional background information is provided:

- the lagoon is located in the coastal marine area, and the project area is located entirely within the lower Otaki River Soil Conservation Reserve.
- the vegetation around the lagoon has largely established naturally and includes native and exotic species, including a large area of silver poplars.
- the lagoon is vulnerable to future northward shifts of the Otaki River mouth, and cannot therefore be regarded as a permanent feature.
- the Otaki River mouth is a very popular fishing and hunting area.
- there are numerous vehicle tracks on the seaward and northern boundaries of the lagoon. Some of these tracks are used for fishing access; others have been formed by general recreational use.

4. Management Roles

The Regional Council, through Flood Protection, is the primary manager of the Otaki River Soil Conservation Reserve, which includes the river mouth lagoon area. However other agencies, including the Department of Conservation (DOC), Fish and Game NZ (F&G), and the Kapiti Coast District Council (KCDC) also have a role in managing the area.

The above agencies have been actively involved in the development of the design and have indicated that, where possible, resources would be available to achieve the aims and goals of enhancing the lagoon area. It is proposed that the Regional Council provide ongoing co-ordination of the enhancement project.

There is also a commitment from all agencies to actively seek the support of users, and the wider community, in the area's enhancement. This should ensure that we achieve the most effective result for the project.

5. Consultation

Ngati Raukawa, DOC, F&G and KCDC were approached first to identify possible concerns, constraints and suggestions for enhancing the area. The Williams 2000 concept plan was also used as a basis for discussing options. The Friends of the Otaki River were also informed of the project's scope, and results from initial consultation with the above agencies. All agencies and the Friends were involved in developing the final design presented in this report. In addition, comment was sought from the Biosecurity Department and Environment Division. Several site visits were held, including one with all agencies and the Friends present.

A draft design report was prepared on the basis of the above discussions and circulated to all interested parties for comment. The suggestions were then incorporated in the final design report (**Attachment 1**) which outlines the aim of the enhancement works and contains the final landscape plan (**Attachment 2**). Most issues raised in the consultation process were able to be included into the final design.

6. Environmental Enhancement Design

The environmental enhancement design report outlines the vision for this area as being:

“To enhance the Otaki River Mouth Lagoon to provide for the ecological, cultural and community values that make this environment unique.”

Through the consultation phase three elements were identified as being important to the overall success of the project. They are:

- Planting
- Weed and pest control
- Advocacy.

These elements have been incorporated into the design report, and the landscape plan, and for developing the prioritised stages for implementing the design (see **Attachment 2**).

The main threats to this area are weed invasion (including silver poplars), unlimited vehicle access along the dune system, and the river mouth moving to the north again. The design on the seaward side of the lagoon has taken into account that the area is prone to inundation by high tides in westerly storms.

7. Work Proposed for 2002/2003

The programme for 2002/03 is to undertake construction of the necessary infrastructure, including forming car parks, placing barriers, signage and some planting. This work will be undertaken by Flood Protection. The 2002/03 programme comprises the bulk of work indicated in Stage 1 of the landscape concept plan. Future stages comprise largely planting and weed control.

To begin the first stage, the project signs will be unveiled and the Friends of the Otaki River will begin the first plantings with help from interested members of the public on 21 September 2002. Councillors are welcome to attend the planting day if they wish, and a notice will be placed in the Councillors Information Bulletin prior to the opening.

8. Future Works

Enhancing the area will require more time and budget than currently available to Flood Protection in this financial year. The project will take many years to complete and will be completed as and when the various agencies, including the Regional Council, have resources available for the project.

It is anticipated that the main ongoing Regional Council efforts from July 2003 will come from the small environmental enhancement budget included in the annual maintenance programme. In effect the priority for this enhancement work will shift from the Chrystalls lagoon area, where the enhancement is largely complete, to the river mouth lagoon.

KCDC has made provision in their budgets for some enhancement work, while DOC and F&G have indicated that they may be able to contribute 'in kind' with advice and labour.

9. Communication

A press release will be prepared prior to the opening date inviting the community to the opening and to help with the planting in this first stage of this project.

10. Recommendations

That the Committee:

- (1) **Receive** the report.
- (2) **Note** the contents of the report.
- (3) **Endorse** the environmental enhancement concept for the Otaki River mouth lagoon, as set out in Attachments 1 and 2 to this report.

Report prepared by:

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Approved for submission:

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Attachment 1: Design Report for the Otaki River Mouth Lagoon (excluding appendices)

Attachment 2: Otaki Lagoon Landscape Concept Plan