

Report 04.208
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Committee Landcare
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Regional Outdoors Programme 2004

1. Purpose

To report the success of the Regional Outdoors Programme in achieving its objectives.

2. Background

This year's Regional Outdoors Programme was one of our most successful ever. It arose from the 2003/04 marketing plan approved by the Landcare Divisional Manager. It was the third in a series of annual summer events programmes and ran from 3 January to 28 March 2004. This year the programme included 40 events, 30 of which run either by us or jointly with other agencies, clubs, volunteers or commercial operators. The other ten were run independently on Greater Wellington (GW) land.

The Regional Outdoors Programme contributes to two LTCCP success measures:

- *More people visit the regional parks* – through presenting “good value” events we overcome perceived barriers, e.g. lack of time, effort involved in organising transport, no-one to go with, etc.
- *More people taking some positive action for a sustainable region* – events can be very good ways of strengthening relationships with interest groups and clubs. They are finite projects, can be organisation specific, and are a way to recognise the work and skills of the organisation. Partner groups this year included the Friends of Maara Roa, the Friends of Belmont Regional Park, Hutt Valley Mountainbike Club, the Friends of the Fell Museum and the Cross Country Vehicle Club. These groups assist us to achieve the Council's vision of a sustainable region.

We also focussed on developing stronger relationships with other agencies and better outcomes overall through jointly running some larger events with them e.g. our work with Hutt City Council, Upper Hutt City Council and the Regional Public Health generated 540 participants in the “Valley to Sea” family bike ride, more than twice last year's attendance.

Most events in the Regional Outdoors Programme are opportunities to get “more people more active more often” – the national objective relating to improved physical and mental health. We included the SPARC “Push Play” message in our programme, to help reinforce the value of GW’s work with other community agencies.

Following last year’s feedback we gave the programme a greater recreational focus, with more “introductory” level events of wider appeal. It was good to hear many favourable comments about the new events and different opportunities for people to experience the parks and forests, e.g. “Have-a-go” horse riding, 4WD trips and helicopter rides.

This summer there were ten cancellations or postponements due to bad weather, particularly from February onwards. Repairing the effects of storm damage on top of organising events meant that many of the staff were stretched to complete their work programme this summer. Bad weather aside, it is fair to say we have pushed the limits of what we can achieve with our current resource levels and now need a workable balance between visitor demand and staff time and energy to run events.

3. Promotion

The programme had a total budget of \$19,000, most of which is applied to advertising and other promotional materials. This was \$5,000 less than last year, as we reduced the level of radio advertising. Promotions this year included:

- a four page liftout in the December 2003 Elements, distributed to all households in the region.
- 7000 extra copies of that liftout were distributed to Visitor Information Centres, libraries, pools and recreation centres. We also sent a copy of the programme and our Community Newsletter to our database of volunteers and those who had asked to receive it after participating previously (around 650 people).
- radio advertising on the Radio Network as part of the corporate advertising agreement. These promoted the programme as a whole and referred people to the events calendar on the GW website.
- public notices of a “monthly calendar” nature in key community newspapers in January and February.
- copies of the programme were also sent to journalists, e.g. Dan’s Diary, together with an initial press release.
- listings in the Wellington City Council “Stepping Out” March brochure.
- listings on our own and various other local authority websites, e.g. feelinggreat.co.nz.

Concentrating our promotions in late December and the first six weeks of the programme generated high awareness and bookings for events through to the end of March. If bookings were initially slow, e.g. Back Country Akatarawa, we would issue a press release closer to the event date, highlighting relevant issues in more detail, e.g. opportunity to try something not normally available. All in all we generated 38 press articles for the programme, a significant level of publicity for Greater Wellington.

4. Results

We are pleased to report a doubling of overall GW-event attendance and a 44% increase in average attendance over last year (see below). This was achieved by refreshing the programme, running several broadly appealing events jointly with other organisations and ensuring other events were well attended with extra press releases where necessary.

As with last year, we surveyed participants to monitor the programme. Satisfaction levels with how the events were organised, guided, the environment and facilities were once again very high. Top three sources of information about events remain the Elements liftout, community newspapers and word of mouth. **Attachment 1** summarises the survey results and **Attachment 2** lists some participants' comments.

Several events were booked out almost immediately, e.g. the 4WD sunset tours and trip up Mt Climie; wonders of Kaitoke at night, Glow-Worm Grotto and Have-a-go horse riding. On many others, demand easily exceeded supply.

There is certainly scope for low charges to fundraise for selected volunteer groups, to encourage them to help us organise and run events.

Key result areas	This year (Jan-Mar)	Last year (Jan/Mar)
Events run by GW (excl. cancellations)	26	20
Events run by other agencies on the parks and forests (excl. cancellations)	10	13
Participants at GW events	1550	726
Total programme participants	10114	5665
Average participation at GW events	59	36
First time visitors (as surveyed)	40%	48%

5. For the future

Many people phoned our booking officer with very positive feedback on the GW staff and the event planning and implementation. There was also a lot of appreciation expressed for free or low cost events.

Next year we will be looking for further, if incremental, improvements. In particular we will:

- maintain a strong emphasis on recreation, introducing special interest environmental events where relevant eg new wetlands and forest remnant track at Queen Elizabeth Park. Such recreational events (when you don't have to be super-fit) have several benefits:
 - they show what you can do in the park, even to those people who may not attend on the day.
 - they attract more people, delivering better value for our staff and financial input.
 - they provide a safe environment for some to “test” their fitness, as well as being enjoyable for more experienced people.
- develop stronger links with local iwi, Pacific Island and other cultural groups to develop events specifically tailored to their interests (still delivering on physical activity objectives and of reasonably broad appeal).
- review and refine the programme to keep it fresh and appealing:
 - consult early with volunteer groups and commercial organisations to offer alternative experiences
 - continue relationships with Territorial Authorities and jointly develop larger events that benefit our region, e.g. Valley to Sea bike ride, Lord of the Rings Rivendell camp, and have the potential to grow.
- make the administration as painless as possible, while still providing good customer service.
- consider surveying only new events for participant feedback (as results generally consistent for those run several times before). Streamline forms so one can be completed for family groups.

6. Recommendations

That the Committee:

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

Report prepared by:

Report approved by:

Report approved by:

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Murray Waititi
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Rob Forlong
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Attachment 1: Summer programme survey results

Attachment 2: Participant comments