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Committee Landcare Committee
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The concept for managing Lake Wairarapa wetlands

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of the development of a vision for the Lake Wairarapa wetlands, and to update the Committee on current progress toward implementing that vision.

2. Significance

The matters 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 to developing a vision

The Lake Wairarapa wetlands form the largest wetland complex in the lower North Island and have been significantly modified over the last 150 years through the 1855 earthquake, drainage for agricultural development, flood protection works, high nutrient levels and the introduction of exotic flora and fauna.

The Lake Wairarapa wetland area is considered a feature of national and international importance for its flora and fauna, and is traditionally important to local Maori for food gathering. Additionally it is an integral part of the flood management scheme for the Ruamahanga River valley in the southern Wairarapa, a rich pastoral farming area, and is regionally important for several recreational pursuits such as game bird hunting, yachting, fishing and nature study.

The development of the vision for Lake Wairarapa wetlands was prompted by the Department of Conservation (DoC) in 1989 when they produced a discussion document on the management of Lake Wairarapa wetlands as a step towards developing a comprehensive management plan for the entire wetland complex associated with the lake. DoC considered that the Lake Wairarapa wetlands should be managed as a single unit to:

- a) Bring a unified and balanced approach to management that takes into account the needs of the various users of the wetlands or adjoining lands
- b) Protect and enhance the importance of the wetland for wildlife conservation
- c) Co-ordinate the development of the wetland as a recreational, educational and scientific resource.

To facilitate the development of the vision, DoC formed the Lake Wairarapa Co-ordinating Committee to represent the various parties with an interest in the management of the Lake Wairarapa wetlands. The Co-ordinating Committee comprised organisations with statutory responsibilities for the management of the wetlands (including Wellington Regional Council), landowners, Iwi, user groups and scientific advisors.

In 1991, the Lake Wairarapa Coordinating Committee prepared the *Lake Wairarapa Wetlands Management Guidelines* (See attachment 1). The management guidelines provide the basis of the co-ordinated management of various functions and values of Lake Wairarapa. It was anticipated that if the guidelines were successfully implemented, the quality of the wetlands should be maintained or even improved for the benefit of future generations of wildlife and people.

The guidelines were formally adopted by this Council in August 1992 with the Council also resolving to liaise with other relevant agencies to co-ordinate the implementation of the guidelines.

In 2000, after extensive public consultation, the Department of Conservation released the *Lake Wairarapa Wetlands Action Plan* (see attachment 2). The Action Plan sets out the management direction for the land administered by DoC at the Lake for the following 10 years (2000 – 2010). The plan was developed to help DoC implement the goals and objectives of the Co-ordinating Committee's guidelines as well as complying with DoC's Wellington Conservation Management Strategy.

4. What does the vision involve?

4.1 The area in question

Attachment 3 shows the area of publicly held land that would form the basis of the wetland management area. The area encompasses Lake Wairarapa, Lake Onoke and their associated wetland margins. It wasn't anticipated that any privately held land be purchased for inclusion in the management area, but the managing body would be working with the various landowners to promote the goals and objectives of the guidelines.

4.2 The goals to be achieved by a management body

The Co-ordinating Committee produced the following goals and objectives that were to form the basis of any future management of the wetland system.

Goal 1: To manage the Lake Wairarapa wetlands to protect and enhance their intrinsic and cultural values.

Goal 2: To integrate land-use management of the Lake Wairarapa wetlands and surrounding productive land.

Goal 3: To promote enjoyment by the public and to provide for sensitive recreational, scientific and commercial use of the natural and historical resources of the Lake Wairarapa wetlands.

Goal 4: To promote public understanding of and foster support for the protection of the natural and historical heritage of the Lake Wairarapa wetlands.

Over time, it is envisaged that the important cultural, wildlife and ecological values of the lake would be protected, and that the lake would become a destination for recreation, education and research. For instance a visitor centre could be created that provided interpretation, education and research facilities to visitors based around a significant wetland environment. The Lake could also become a recreation node for different forms of outdoor recreation.

4.3 Implementing the vision

This vision requires a lot more work to be done by the managing body to firm up priorities for implementation. While the Lake Wairarapa Wetlands Action Plan details a number of management actions that are required to implement improvements in this complex system, there are some areas where research is required to assist with future decisions about managing the system.

It would be useful to get an initial scoping study carried out to identify where different values are and what constraints there might be on different uses, or where uses would be most appropriately situated. This scoping exercise would also pull out all existing information sources and monitoring information on values at the site, collate them, and identify gaps that are highest priority to fill.

Officers would recommend that ecological and recreational scoping studies are completed over the next 18 months in order to provide information to aid the development of a long-term implementation plan. The Action Plan could also be reviewed so that priorities can be reassessed and re-agreed to by all parties.

Funding the planning and investigative work for the next 18 months should be in the order of \$200,000 in total.

4.4 Integrated Management

Due to the complex wetland system and competing land uses, it is seen by GWRC that no area within the wetland area could be treated in isolation. As such, it would be beneficial if the management of all the publicly held land be granted to one single managing body that represents the interests of the lake users, owners, neighbours and others that had a vested interest in its protection and development.

It is also acknowledged that while there are plans in place to be followed to achieve a future goal, the plans largely sit idle awaiting a level of investment that is sufficient to properly implement them. Until such a time arrives, weeds and pests continue to threaten the wetland environment of Lake Wairarapa. If any real progress is to be made to implement the Co-ordinating Committee's guidelines, the managing body will have to have some real resourcing. With that in mind, this Council took the mantle of lead agency and incorporated Lake Wairarapa Wetlands into its 1999 Long Term Financial Strategy (LTFS) and funded the implementation of the guidelines accordingly.

4.4.1 Governance structure

Because of the significance of the lake in ecological, recreational and cultural terms, DoC, as landowner, has indicated that it would wish to retain a governance and management role for the lake and its environs.

With that in mind, there is anticipation that this concept would require a different governance structure than that traditionally used by this Council. There are a number of governance structure options available to ensure that a co-joint governance and management arrangement can be developed that is satisfactory to all parties. GWRC and DoC are working to find a suitable governance structure with emphasis on an integrated management approach, and a shared governance and management structure.

While officers are still looking for a solution, there are options available that are being assessed. These options vary from using a purely contractual arrangement in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding, through to creating a Park Board with advisory and technical groups from GWRC and DoC providing information to that Board.

4.4.2 Land Transfer

The main difficulty facing officers at the moment is creating a structure that allows the managing agency to legally hold the publicly owned land because of the way the Crown land is currently designated.

The largest blocks of lands around Lake Wairarapa (and the lake itself) are held as *Stewardships*, which are administered under the Conservation Act. The complicating factor is that while a body may be appointed to manage stewardship areas, a vesting of management control is not able to be done under the Conservation Act. The land could be redesigned to reserve, however, the areas are not defined sufficiently at present to enable their status to be changed (by a statutory process) to reserve so a control and management agreement or vesting could be pursued. Other lands around the lakes are held as *Government Purpose: Wildlife Management Reserves* and as *Scenic or Recreation Reserves*. All lands managed by Greater Wellington or other Territorial Authorities are held as reserves, as there is legislation within the Reserves Act that allows for this.

There are three possible solutions to this difficulty that are currently being looked at:

- a) A co-joint management agreement in principle, (which is essentially a Memorandum of Understanding), that sets expectations and contractually binds the parties, while the land ownership and designation remains the same
- b) Changing the designation of the land, then vesting those lands in a managing body
- c) Obtaining an Act of Parliament change to enable the lands to have their management and control transferred to another managing body.

Discussions with DoC have progressed to the point that the mechanisms to enable the land transfer and the governance arrangements to happen have been assessed and there seems to be a way through. With this being the case, confirming the governance structure and the mechanisms for transferring the land has taken top priority.

At present, options b) and c) are being pursued. Initial discussions with DoC indicate that both these options would be suitable, and amenable to them. These options may involve surveying and other costs associated with their implementation, however they do provide a good level of certainty and accountability among the parties over the long term.

Officers plan to have a firm course of action with the intention of being able to formalise a way forward with DOC on these matters within the next six months. With Council approval, planning will begin in the new financial year and continue for the next 12 – 18 months, where the Council will be in the position to prioritise projects for implementation from the implementation plan. We should be in a position to start an effective programme of implementation by the end of 2007.

5. Recommendations

That the Committee recommend to Council

1. *receive the report*
2. *note the contents*

Report approved by:

Murray Waititi
Manager, Parks & Forests

- Attachment 1:** Lake Wairarapa Wetlands Management Guidelines
Attachment 2: Lake Wairarapa Wetlands Action Plan
Attachment 3: Map – Lake Wairarapa Wetlands