

## **Manager – Parks**

### **Report for period ending Friday 16 March 2007**

#### **1. Manager's comments**

##### **1.1 A late start to summer**

The wet spring and late start to summer has meant that visitation to the parks up until the end of January was relatively slow. However, the fabulous spate of weather we have enjoyed through February and March has brought people out of their houses and in to the parks in their droves. With the weather we experienced through most of summer, I was expecting visitation to be well down for the year. However, the rangers are indicating that camping nights and general visitation levels have now risen to the point that they are on par with what they normally are at this stage of a financial year.

The long period of “spring” weather has also resulted in a very long vegetation growing period throughout the network. While this is good for the trees we have planted during the year, it has also meant that weed species have been doing well also. Staff and contractors have been very busy clearing vegetation from tracks, amenity plantings and doing weed control.

##### **1.2 Recent staff appointments**

Parks have made two important appointments over the period:

Erik VanderSpek has been appointed as the new Principal Ranger – Eastern Sector, replacing Fraser Oliver. Erik has been working for GWRC as the Environmental Ranger for the past couple of months and previously was with the Department of Conservation at Mount Cook.

Andy Marriott has been appointed as the new Ranger at Battle Hill Farm Forest Park. Andy takes over from John Bissell who moved to GWRC's Catchment Management Division. Andy is also a current employee of GWRC, being the Team Leader of the Construction Gang based at Battle Hill.

Both Erik and Andy have many challenges ahead of them in their new roles.

##### **1.3 Waitangirua Farm condition assessment**

We have instigated an asset condition assessment for Waitangirua Farm, looking at the overall condition of all infrastructure assets such as fences and buildings to ensure that these are appropriately maintained.

Officers have also been mapping and assessing the bush remnants on the farm. Not all of the remnants are covenanted and an assessment of these areas will assist future decisions about suitable fence-lines and pest control.



#### **1.4 Robin Release Possible for East Harbour Regional Park**

The care-group, Mainland Island Restoration Operation (MIRO), has been working to restore the ecological health of the forest in East Harbour Regional Park since 1996.

Since that time the MIRO forest health program has grown. After two major possum control operations completed by Greater Wellington in 2001 and 2004, possum numbers were reduced to low levels. MIRO has maintained these low possum numbers by servicing a trap network in the 1,500ha forest. Over thirty volunteers spend around 2,000 volunteer hours per year tramping into the forest, clearing traps and renewing baits located in bait stations near the traps. These baits are to keep rats, from eating the possum trap lures.

In 2006, Greater Wellington established a 300ha intensive rat-control zone in the heavily-forested headwaters of Gollans Stream between Butterfly Creek picnic area and Hawtrey. This area is regarded as the “mainland island” within which rats are being controlled by the use of a 150m by 100m bait station grid. The bait stations have been filled on a monthly basis and rat numbers have fallen steadily.

Now that predator levels are at low numbers, MIRO is applying to the Department of Conservation (DoC) for their approval to transfer a threatened native bird species. The Department will require that predator levels in the mainland island be maintained to appropriate levels for the species being released.

The cost of the robin introduction has been estimated to be \$8,000 to \$10,000. MIRO proposes to raise this money themselves through fundraising efforts. However, more than one release may be required, as it is possible that the robins could disperse into the surrounding unprotected area. The reintroduction is planned for April/May 2008.

## **2. Planning & Policy**

### **2.1 Management planning**

The draft Battle Hill Farm Forest Park Management Plan was released for public submissions on 10 February, following Council approval of the draft in December. Submissions close on 13 April and a public meeting will be held on 28 March. The Belmont Regional Park Management Plan is currently being drafted, following a Councillor workshop on this plan on 7 March.

Council approved the final East Harbour Regional Park management plan on 22 February. The next step is gaining the approval of the Minister of Conservation for land within the park that is designated as Scenic Reserve under the Reserves Act 1977. Officers are also in the process of sending out letters to submitters highlighting changes made to the plan as a result of the community consultation. The plan will be published once the Minister's approval is gained. The balloted deer hunt for the Gollan's Valley hunting area, and pig hunting permits, were advertised on 3 March.

### **2.2 Capital works**

Architects have prepared plans for a shelter building at the Paekakariki picnic area, Queen Elizabeth Park. Detailed drawings have been submitted to Kapiti Coast District Council for building consent.

### **2.3 Pest Control Operation**

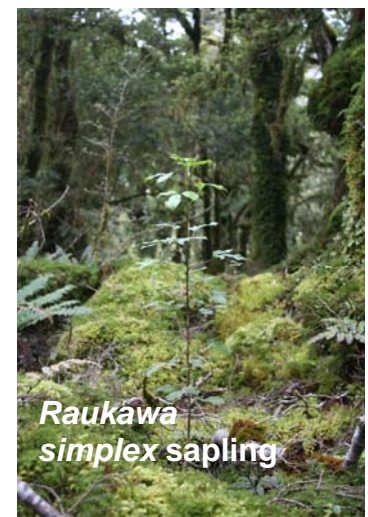
The first phase of installing a permanent bait station network in Dry Creek, Belmont Regional Park is complete. The second stage will involve getting the possum numbers down through repeat filling of the bait stations. Similar bait station networks in Korokoro Valley and Speedy's Stream in Belmont Regional Park have been recently re-baited, as part of those ongoing possum control operations.

Over twenty-six different pest plant species were controlled in Akatarawa Forest, East Harbour Regional Park, Wainuiomata Recreation Area and Kaitoke Regional Park. Because of fine settled weather, weed control workers have been able to catch up on spraying work including wilding pines in East Harbour and pampas in Queen Elizabeth Park.

### **2.4 Monitoring**

The monitoring team has been camping on Maymorn Ridge to complete the re-measurement of some of the permanent vegetation plots in the Western Hutt catchment. While the weather was generally favourable, there were some wet days to contend with.

The staff were pleased to find seedlings of *Raukawa simplex* at a height not normally seen in the Tararua Ranges. These plants are very palatable to deer and are now uncommon



forest species throughout the area. The pest control programme is now aiding the regeneration of these species.

## 2.5 Introduced insects and fungi survey

Parks recently completed a biannual aerial survey of the forests to check for introduced insects and fungi. This is very important as the Council's forests are located near a major port. A forest health expert flies over the forests, looking for any areas of dieback, and also completes some ground surveys. The expert reported that the forests of the Kaitoke Regional Park, Akatarawa and Pakuratahi Forests, Wainuiomata/Orongorongo and Hutt water collection areas are in a very healthy condition.

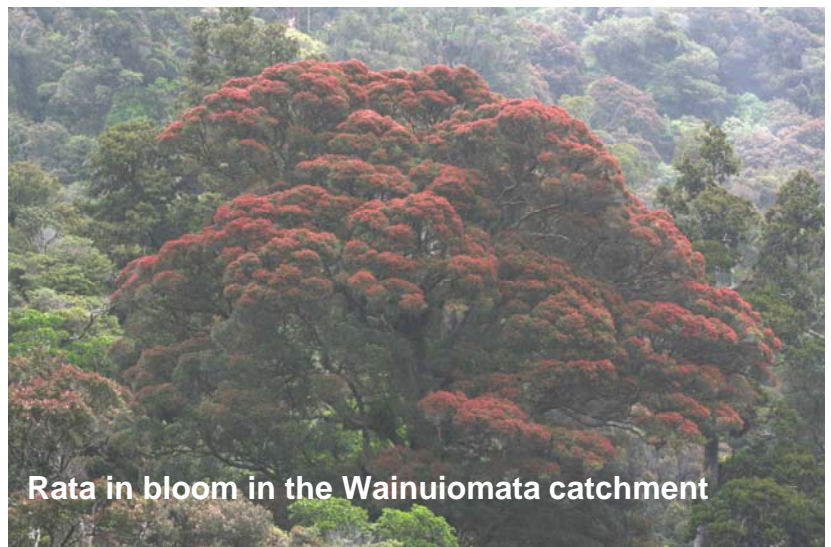
## 2.6 Rodent monitoring

A rodent/mustelid monitor was completed in late February in East Harbour Regional Park. The most recent monitor showed rats to be at 16% tracking rate within the mainland island area and at 28% outside. This monitor has shown that an area at Mount Hawtrey at the top of the intensively controlled zone is easily reinvaded as this line was the only one that recorded rat tracking. The rest of the lines had very few rat prints. This is an excellent result, as it shows the control techniques within the mainland island are working, but the Mount Hawtrey issue will need further investigation.

## 2.7 Wainuiomata Mainland Island

One bait fill was completed in January – brodifacoum was used. Bait-take fell in comparison to the last fill and 11 possums were caught. Rat tracking was completed and rats were found to be at 2% in the mainland island and at 94% outside! We are obviously succeeding in keeping rats down within the core. Mice tracked at 22% inside the mainland island and 5% outside, while hedgehogs were 17% inside and 5% outside. Mice are usually in higher numbers inside mainland island areas compared to outside. There is uncertainty as to why this is, but some theories are that there is less competition from rats, or that rats prey on baby mice. Some indication that the mainland island is benefiting the wildlife is being shown in the increased insect tracks seen in the tracking tunnels inside the core area.

The rata trees in the Wainuiomata catchment had a magnificent flowering season this year. Rata is a favourite food for possums and past studies have shown that high numbers of these pests can decimate these trees. The low number of possums in the area are helping the plants to fruit unhindered.



Rata in bloom in the Wainuiomata catchment

## **2.8 Lake Wairarapa**

Planning for the introduction of a Lake Wairarapa Park continues.

The recreational and ecological plans are nearly complete. Paul Champion, a national wetland expert, spent a day at Lake Wairarapa with staff from Greater Wellington and DOC to provide some information about the plant ecology of the lake edge and the hornwort infestation. Some plant community monitoring lines have been in place on the side of Lake Wairarapa for the past twenty years. Des Peterson of the Greater Wellington Catchment Management Division, based in Wairarapa, has re-measured these lines a number of times over that period. While the data Des has compiled needs further analysis, his GIS mapping shows the accretion of the lake margins over time. The vegetation and weed mapping groundwork has been completed.

Governance issues are currently being discussed with the two local Iwi.

## **3. Western sector**

### **3.1 Belmont Regional Park**

A large number of visitors have been enjoying the park throughout the period. The ranger has regularly patrolled the numerous tracks and has been able to offer information and help to many walkers, mountain bikers, runners and horse riders.

The ranger has worked with the Police and security consultants to deal with a variety of criminal activities which have affected the park facilities and public safety. Several stolen cars have been dumped at the Dry Creek entrance and gate chains were cut at this location on a separate occasion. A fire was started by an arsonist at the Oakleigh Street carpark, and there have been reports by the public of illegal activities at this location. Large amounts of rubbish have been dumped at each of these entrances on several occasions.

A Police dog team conducted a search with the ranger for a person between the Korokoro Dam and Cornish Street entrance. This individual had been reported by various members of the public to have been armed and behaving aggressively over the course of a week in late February.

There has been ongoing liaison with various Transpower contractors regarding the line upgrade from Takapu Road to the Haywards substation. There are significant health and safety issues to manage as part of this project, particularly in terms of limiting public access to work sites. It is also important to control the risks to the public visitors from contractor vehicle movements between site locations. The same applies to park access gates, including problems with these being incorrectly re-locked and thus limiting access to the ranger and other staff, or emergency services in the event of an accident.

The ranger has been working with the mountain bike community to improve trail opportunities and address health and safety issues in the plantation forest adjacent to Stratton Street, and also at Dry Creek. A voluntary trail construction and maintenance team is being formed from local clubs and individuals to maximise the potential mountain biking opportunities in this area of the park. All future work will be closely assessed and supervised by the ranger to ensure appropriate standards are met, and potential user conflict is effectively managed. External funding is being sought within the cycle industry to provide tools and sign/map resources for these focus areas.

The annual summer event programme is in full swing and the Park has hosted events at a number of locations. The Friends of Maara Roa held a guided walk at the Cannons Creek forest restoration area. A loop trip from Oakleigh Street to the historic Korokoro Dam took walkers through mature forest, and a knowledgeable commentary was provided by Bill Milne from the Friends of Belmont. An *Over the tops* open day was run from the old laboratory building on Hill Road. This event was hosted by the Friends of Belmont and provided the public with information displays and various activity options. These included 4-wheel drive tours, ecology walks, a marked novice mountain bike loop, and a guided walk to Cannons Creek.

### 3.2 Battle Hill Farm Forest Park

Fence lines are being repaired around the property and the water system is undergoing a thorough update. Plastic troughs are being replaced with larger concrete versions, maintenance and adjustments are being made to others. The water system is being mapped and a farm water supply plan is being prepared to address water supply issues as the use of the park increases, and farm fencing is rationalised.



Preparation for the planting season is beginning with tracks being sprayed and planting circles cut and sprayed. The horticulture team are maintaining a small nursery at the park which will supply some of our plants. The small flock of council sheep is being sold due to a number of the breeds' unsuitability to the environment at Battle Hill. These will be replaced with a flock of Romney Crosses which are expected to thrive here.

This has been a busy period in the park. Summer camping is reaching its peak, the Regional Outdoors programme in full gear and there are regular visits to the proposed wind farm site. Over Waitangi weekend the park was extremely busy with campers and picnickers. On top of that, there have been three school visits with talks and assistance from the ranging staff and six Pony Club events as well as a weekend riding clinic.



**Campsite**



**Swimming hole**

The Conservation Corps has begun their annual pilgrimage to Battle Hill to get a taste of rural work. This year they will be helping in maintenance and revitalisation of fence lines, water trough installation, pouring concrete fire pads as well as the usual releasing and preparation for autumn planting in the restoration areas.

In the Regional Outdoors programme we have had the *Have a go Horse riding* with Angela Dickie from the Green Barn, the *Four Wheel Drive Sunset Tour* with the Cross Country Vehicle Club, the *Helitramp* and a *Project Pateke* open day in which we showcased the pest control operations underway here. This is run in conjunction with the Mana Lions as well as the core Project Pateke volunteers. *Outstanding in the Field*, a rural careers day for secondary school students was held in the Ken Gray Education Centre.

### 3.3 Queen Elizabeth Park

Now that the rain has stopped we are seeing a dramatic increase in park users. Bookings that were cancelled earlier this summer are now being rescheduled for this period. The park has been a hive of activity with groups as large as 200 – 300 people enjoying their corporate or family picnics, with each one wanting to out-do the other in terms of activities. One group even had a ‘Mission Impossible’ air castle (pictured right) for them to enjoy on the day.



**Mission Impossible air castle**

With this increase in people ranging staff have been kept busy keeping things tidy as well as managing the public. Officers have put

up “No Motorcycle/Quad Bike” signage at the entrances to all tracks and amenity areas, unfortunately we continue to struggle with this inappropriate activity.

The ranger has continued to meet with a number of community groups interested in the park. With the holidays being over, there has been a renewed interest in public projects.



**Botany of the Dunes**

The Regional Outdoors program has come to a close this period, both *Botany of the Dunes* and *Landforms of the Park* were well attended and everyone had a great time.

The park also hosted this year’s first corporate volunteer day. The Environmental Risk Management Authority (ERMA) spent a great day at the

park releasing last year’s plants from various forms of weed growth. They thoroughly enjoyed the work.

Officers have installed new brochure holders on all the kiosks throughout the park. The brochures have been well appreciated by the park users and we are having a hard time keeping the holders full. Much to the Ranger’s surprise, she has not picked up any discarded brochures on the tracks.

Officers have been kept busy this summer dealing with a tremendous amount of tagging and vandalism of the toilet blocks and signs, and maintaining the tracks. The ranger attended a Tracks and Structures workshop and is working on innovative ways of managing the eroding Coastal Track.

Fulton Hogan was on site this period sealing the ranging office carpark as well as the ring road to the barn. The MacKays Crossing entrances are really starting to look nice and tidy. (pictured right).



**Fulton Hogan on site**



## 4. Eastern sector

### 4.1 Kaitoke Regional Park

Summer has finally arrived and as a result the campground and swimming holes have been busy. Camping numbers for the 06-07 summer are now on a par with last years approximately 5,000 camper nights. Given the late start to summer this year, it is a pleasing result. One family from Upper Hutt has had their tent on site since Boxing Day! As a joke, the ranging team have installed a letter box outside their tent as they spend more time at Kaitoke than at home! With the children back at school, family camping is now more popular on the weekends. Several school groups have camped overnight and there have also been five tours/talks given to visiting schools on water infrastructure and forest ecology.



Raroa School Camp 2007

A further three events were held as part of the regional outdoors programme. They were the *Go Bush Day*, in conjunction with the Mountain Safety Council, the *Buggy Walk* in conjunction with Sport Wellington, and the *Water Walk* which showcased the magnificent forest at Kaitoke Regional Park and the Te Marua Treatment Plant.

Apart from the Regional Outdoors Programme, other events of interest in the park have been a night tour (including feeding the resident eels), was given to 20 Kiwi Conservation Club members from the Forest and Bird Society. Also, a group of students from Upper Hutt College completed a revegetation project, clearing an area adjacent to the campground of blackberry and gorse and then planting several hundred native seedlings.



Kaitoke Buggy Walk March 2007



**Weir Picnic area water supply**

The Weir Picnic Area toilet water supply was fixed after it was damaged by vandals. This supply which is fed directly from Norbetts Creek is a great example of kiwi ingenuity and bush engineering and has provided a steady supply of water over many years. Siemens have repaired the power cabling under the Farm Creek ford that supplies the cell phone sites on the Hutt Water Collection Area access road.

## **4.2 East Harbour Regional Park**

Two significant developments regarding track maintenance are currently underway at the park. The Fern Gully track, which starts at Gardiner Grove in Wainuiomata, is undergoing complete refurbishment which will include a regrade of the entire track, rebenching of the steeper sections, storm water run-offs and surface work.

On the other side of the park at Point Howard, an old track which previously met a dead end due to property development has been incorporated into the Dillon Street track forming a scenic loop walk above Lowry Bay. The work has opened up options for short walks in the area and there has already been some very positive feedback from local residents.

The Bus Barn/Korohiwa track entrance refurbishment at Eastbourne has now been completed resulting in a much more respectable park entrance. Although well known to the locals, it is now much more visible to visitors from further afield.

There have been a number of events based at the park in recent weeks. Three summer programme events, including a fully booked Lower Gollans Valley off-track tramp and the ever popular Lighthouse and Lakes around Pencarrow Head, were enjoyed by all.



**Bus Barn/Korohiwa Track entrance**



The annual *Mt Lowry Challenge* took place on 25 February and attracted some 338 competitors. This hill race, to the highest point of the park and back, covers some 11km and has become one of the park's major events.

### 4.3 Wainuiomata/ Orongorongo Catchments

Construction of the lower earth dam at Wainuiomata Catchment is well underway and will be completed in April. The area should look something like this photo (right) but with slightly less water surface area once the project is complete.



The spray programme over the last month has been going well with all the tracks being sprayed to control annual weeds including broom, gorse, ragwort and foxglove. Also, the Wainuiomata boundary fence has been sprayed to control gorse.

The rangers have also helped out on the following jobs over the past month to make sure everything runs smoothly.

- Mustelid monitor during the week 26 February
- Pine removal from the Gum Loop track
- Buddleia removal from the catchment area.

Public vehicles have caused the usual damage of ripping the lawn in the recreational area. Also we had a vehicle that was used in a robbery and left in the park after it crashed into a bollard. This was removed by the police for forensic investigation.

*Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Catchment Tours* were held on 11 February, 25 February, 4 March and 11 March. The people on these tours seem to thoroughly enjoy their look at an excellent patch of virgin forest.

#### 4.4 Akatarawa/ Pakuratahi Forests

Events in the forest areas this period have included the *Karapoti Classic* mountain bike race and the *Kapi-Mana Motorcycle Enduro*, also, several events from the Regional Summer Programme like the *Rimutaka Rail Trail* and *Kev the Kiwi* in the Tunnel Gully Recreation Area.

Requests for access from recreational 4WD vehicles, motorcycles, orienteering/mountain biking clubs is steady and is not causing any conflict with our own logging operations, nor has it had any negative effects on adjoining land owners.

The dumping of stolen/abandoned vehicles continues with several stolen cars appearing in the Rimutaka Rail/Trail carpark and also several abandoned vehicles in Tunnel Gully Recreation Area. Fortunately, with the assistance of "Pick-A-Part" the removal of these vehicles is no longer a financial burden, as the company will pick them up and take them away for nothing. The frustrating part about it is that often abandoned cars get burned out which does cause damage to sealed road surfaces and also creates an unsightly mess.

We have had a wedding in Tunnel Gully during this period which had very good weather and was thoroughly enjoyed by all participants, especially the happy couple!

The restoration of the Orange Hut began on 1 March 2007 and we expect to complete it, all going well, by the end of April. It is a very positive move to get this project under way, as this is a very significant structure for the wide range of recreational groups that comprise Akatarawa Recreational Access Committee. This certainly generates a feeling of involvement amongst these groups and also a sense of ownership as they have also taken on the role of "forest watch dog" amongst themselves. This in turn has ensured that the group's treat this important asset with respect.

The Police Search & Rescue organisation has staged their annual Search and Rescue exercise in the Akatarawa Forest. This was a very successful event and included not only volunteer ground personnel and police staff but also the Air Force who used an Iroquois helicopter. This certainly increased the capabilities of the Police to cover a large area more efficiently as opposed to having to run search crews long distances in vehicles.

This period has consisted predominantly of mowing vegetation on several arterial routes within the Akatarawa Forest and alongside the Rimutaka Rail Trail walkway. This has improved the visual impact for walkers along the Rail Trail and provided an opportunity for cyclists, should they encounter vehicles, plenty of room either side of the road formation.

We continue to monitor culverts, water tables and run-offs and these are cleared as and when required. As you can appreciate, with the dry spell of weather we are experiencing, water has not been a serious concern.

The Rimutaka Prison inmates continue to assist us with a range of tasks, i.e. this period they have been carting building materials to a bridge site at Tunnel Gully reserve, fixing potholes and cutting back vegetation alongside roads/tracks.

**Murray Waititi**  
Manager, Parks