



Report 09.626
Date 5 October 2009
File PK/03/02/02

Committee Regional Sustainability
Authors Murray Waititi, Manager, Parks

Parks and forest lands management planning

1. Purpose

To propose a structure, process and timetable for the review of the Park Network Strategy, Network Management Plan for Regional Parks, the individual park plans and Forest Lands Management Plan.

2. Significance

This report sets out a proposed process for the review of the management plans for Greater Wellington Regional Council's (GWRC) regional parks and forest lands. As the Council will be following the decision making procedure set out in the *Reserves Act 1977* that is more comprehensive than those required by the *Local Government Act 2002*, 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

The issue of the current structure of the Parks' key strategic and policy documents was raised during a recent Councillor workshop on the Parks Network Strategy. While no decisions were made at the workshop, there was discussion around the concept of a single consolidated management plan that covers all the regional parks and forest lands.

At that workshop officers indicated that they wished to review the current structure of the key documents, and recommend a future structure for them that would be clear and concise, while being useable and efficient to produce.

Once that review was completed, officers would then propose a process and timetable to complete the development of the Parks Network Strategy and the subsequent review of all corresponding park and forest land management plans.

4. What is the current park management plan structure?

Currently Parks has three layers of core strategic and policy documents:

4.1 Level 1 - strategic purpose

The Wellington Regional Planning Authority's *Framework for Regional Parks for the Wellington Region* provides a foundation document for the development of the regional park network.

The Parks Network Strategy currently being produced is intended to replace the foundation document. The Parks Network Strategy extends the foundation document to set the future direction for the management and development of GWRC regional parks and forest lands network for the next 20 years. The strategy itself will articulate the vision, mission, goals and objectives to be achieved by GWRC's network of parks, and define a set of guiding principles by which GWRC's parks and forest lands will be managed. A draft of this strategy has been produced for the Committee (see Report No. 09.625)

4.2 Level 2 - Parks network management plans

The next level of documents, known as the Network Management Plans (which includes the *Parks Network Management Plan* and the *Forest Lands Management Plan*), contain objectives and operational policies that apply to all GWRC parks.

4.3 Level 3 - Individual park management plans

The individual park plans contain a combination of network-wide policies that are to be consistently applied across all areas, and policies that relate specifically to individual parks. Therefore, the individual park management plans are comprehensive policy documents that relate to a specific park or area.

5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the current structure?

5.1 Advantages - individual park plans are specific and comprehensive

- As each park management plan is tailored to the park, they are able to contain detailed park specific information.
- Individual park management plans are standalone documents able to be distributed to individuals, groups or agencies with a specific interest in an individual park.
- Communities enjoy engaging in their "local" park but are less concerned about other areas. Individual plans foster this attitude.

5.2 Disadvantages - individual park plans are repetitive and time consuming to produce

- Each individual park management plan must undergo a comprehensive review process. As GWRC has one network strategy, two Park Network Plans, five regional parks and two forest areas, that means GWRC currently undertakes 10 plan review processes. On average, the review of a management plan takes 18 months to complete.

- A lot of the content from the Park Network Plans is reproduced verbatim in each individual park management plan causing time-consuming repetition and unnecessary duplication.
- Individual park plans do not emphasise where their content contains “network-wide” policies and objectives. Each individual plan could be perceived as being developed individually. This is contrary to the ethos of the network plans where the regional parks and forest lands operate as an integrated and functioning network of park lands providing a range of services, environments and functions between them.

6. What is the alternative?

Under the *Reserves Act 1977*, councils have the flexibility to provide management plans that are reserve specific, location specific, or include reserves from different areas, as well as non-reserve land.

The approach of preparing one plan that includes reserves from different areas, as well as non-reserve land, has been followed by Auckland Regional Council (ARC). ARC has one comprehensive management plan that includes all their regional park lands regardless of the land’s status (i.e., whether that land is reserve pursuant to the *Reserves Act 1977* or not). This document includes “network-wide” objectives and policies, and follows with specific sections relating to policies solely relating to individual parks.

This comprehensive plan contains objectives and policies relating to all parks in their network and requires only one review to be undertaken to cover their entire park network. ARC is currently reviewing their plan, which began in March of this year and is expected to be completed in July 2010.

The advantages of this approach are that it:

- Eliminates the need to undergo a time consuming review process for each park management plan. All park areas can be reviewed in a timeframe that is only slightly longer than that needed to review an individual park plan.
- It avoids unnecessary duplication of network-wide policies and objectives in multiple park management plans. Under a consolidated management plan these network-wide policies are stated at the front of the document, while any park specific policies, concept plans for development and other relevant information are included in sections dedicated specifically to each park.
- The network approach to managing multiple park lands is given more weight, as is the role each park plays in delivering the strategic objectives and goals for the network.
- As each park has a specific section in the consolidated plan, this allows communities to remain engaged in issues that are particularly pertinent to their local park.

7. What needs to be done in order to consolidate the documents?

7.1 Legal requirements

Management plans remain a crucial tool for managing park land as they provide the community with certainty about the function and purpose of that land.

The *Local Government Act 2002* no longer requires regional parks to have management plans. However land held as reserve pursuant to the *Reserves Act 1977* still require management plans under that Act. For land held as reserve by regional and territorial authorities, a management plan is an efficient way of managing that land, as it removes the requirement for public notification or Ministerial consent for everyday matters.

Even though there is a requirement to have a management plan under the *Reserves Act 1977*, the Act does not stipulate the form the plans must take (although some guidance is given by the Department of Conservation which signs off plans). However, it is necessary that the plan must be prepared by following the provisions stipulated in section 41 of the Act. There is also no statutory requirement to have individual management plans for each park.

7.2 Timeframe

The Council is required to follow the Reserves Act provisions for the review of management plans for land reserved under that Act. As most of our regional parks contain land that is held pursuant to the Reserves Act, and for reasons of consistency, the *Reserves Act 1977* process for developing and reviewing management plans has guided the public consultation and development of all of GWRC's previous management plans to date.

For these reasons, if Council decides to develop a consolidated plan, Council must follow the Act's process for the review.

Following is a proposed timetable to complete the plan. The timetable has been developed in order to complete the process within this triennium. It is a very demanding timetable that has very strict deadlines and no margin for slippage. It also does not incorporate any "fine tuning" of the document in terms of readability and presentation.

Timeframe	Action
Mid-November 2009	Public notice advertises Council's intention to review its management plans and seeking public suggestions on the proposed plan
December 2009	Public comment closes, comments considered for incorporation into draft consolidated plan
Dec 2009 – March 2010	A consolidated management plan is prepared
Feb 2010	Workshop with Councillors on consolidated plan content
March 2010	Draft consolidated plan prepared for Regional Sustainability Committee
April 2010	Draft consolidated plan approved by Council for public consultation
May – June 2010	Public consultation period
July – August 2010	Public Hearings
September 2010	Plan finalised by Council

At this point I would like to point out that section 41(5A) of the Act allows the administering body of reserve land (this Council), on the recommendation of officers, to resolve not to give notice of its intention to prepare or review a management plan or invite and consider written suggestions on the proposed plan if it determines that written suggestions *would not materially assist in the plan's preparations*.

By resolving to enact this provision, GWRC does not need to seek initial suggestions or consider the comments in developing the management plan(s). However, officers consider that the additional time and effort to seek initial comments would not affect the timeframe for the development of the plan and would make the review process more publicly inclusive. As such, officers recommend that Council does not need to enact this provision.

8. Communications

If Council resolves to develop a comprehensive park network management plan and hence intends to review its suite of management plans, a public notice will be placed in local and regional newspapers advising the public of its intention to do so, and seeking community comment.

Should Council wish to enact section 41(5) and not seek initial comments on the proposed plan, the first opportunity for public input will be when the draft plan is approved by Council for public consultation.

9. Recommendations

That the Committee recommend to Council that it:

1. *Receives the report and notes its contents*
2. *Agrees to develop a comprehensive Parks Network Management Plan that incorporates the Parks Network Strategy, the Regional Parks Network Management Plan, the Forest Lands Management Plan, and all individual park and forest land management plans.*
3. *Agrees to follow the process for developing the consolidated Parks Network Management Plan as outlined in the Reserves Act 1977.*
4. *Amends its previous resolution (Report Minutes 08.924) regarding public consultation on the Parks Network Strategy to incorporate development of a consolidated Parks Network Management Plan.*
5. *Agrees to the content and timetable for developing a consolidated Parks Network Management Plan, as outlined in section 7.2 of this report.*

Report prepared by:

Report approved by:

Murray Waititi
Manager, Parks

Murray Kennedy
Divisional Manager, Water Supply,
Parks and Forests