

Parks and forests management plan review

Communications and community engagement plan

Background

Early in 2009 officers had agreement from Councillors to develop a Regional Parks Network Strategy to give parks a vision and direction for the next 20 years. This was instigated for the following reasons:

- Parks' founding document – "*Regional Parks for the Wellington Region*" (1976) was published 30 years ago. Despite ensuing changes in governance, society and the environment, there had been no review or evolution of this founding document
- GW has taken on a number of other roles in the region eg, sustainability leadership, transport planning. These new roles may have a significant effect on our parks
- Regional parks potentially contribute much to the prosperity and wellbeing of the region through eco-system services, resilience to climate change and well-managed recreational open space
- New parks were being taken on with no particular rationale or vision
- There is no clearly articulated expectation for the management of the regional parks network

A Parks Network Strategy was developed to resolve these issues, articulating the vision and a purpose for our parks and forests, and an overarching framework for future development and management. This was developed by canvassing current and potential parks users via interviews with individuals and a wide range of groups and organisations including government and non-government agencies, Friends of Parks, special interest groups and community groups.

A Councillor workshop to discuss and finalise the strategy prompted participants to consider whether preparing individual park plans was the most effective way of planning for the future of our regional parks network (currently, GW has separate management plans for each of its parks and forests – these are kept current by being reviewed on a "staggered" basis). The outcome of their evaluation was that one consolidated management plan – essentially a "one stop plan" incorporating the Parks Network Strategy and all individual park plans – would be a more efficient and effective management planning tool.

The benefits of having a consolidated management plan:

- The current Regional Parks Network Management Plan (2003) is due to be reviewed, providing an opportune time for GW to improve the way it reviews management plans
- Ensures that park management plans are aligned with, and reflect, the new Parks Network Strategy
- Avoids duplication of policies and shortens the review timetable

Officers have begun the review of GW's parks and forests management plans, beginning with a pre-draft invitation to make submissions open to the public from 16 November-18 December 2009. Once officers have analysed the feedback and carried out other community engagement activities (outlined in this plan), a draft consolidated plan will be developed, which will go through a formal public consultation in April 2010. Officers will continue to engage with the community during the second consultation phase with public

meetings around the region to discuss the draft plan. The new consolidated plan is likely to go to Council for approval at the end of September 2010.

This is a positive move for GW and we believe it will improve the way our regional parks network is managed. Having a consolidated parks plan will make it easier for our stakeholders to participate in decisions about parks, whilst giving them a more cohesive view of our regional parks network and what it has to offer. However, it's a different way of doing things and the changes we are making are likely to be questioned and criticised. Hence we need a thorough communications and community engagement plan so that all interested parties are engaged and feel that they are being listened to throughout this process.

Legal obligations

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 process for developing and reserving management plans is used to guide the public consultation process. Under the Act there is an initial (pre-draft) opportunity for the public to submit. Officers then take these submissions into account when developing the draft. When the draft is released a further opportunity to comment is given. This will include a public hearings process.

Hutt City Council (HCC)

Some reserve land in Belmont Regional Park and East Harbour Regional Park is vested in HCC. HCC have agreed to GW managing this land. The agreement (using Section 17 of the Local Government Act 2002) also states that GW will work closely with HCC when preparing the plan. In particular:

- Provide a summary of any objections and comments received (draft stage) and a statement to the extent to which they were allowed or accepted to HCC
- Provide HCC with the final plan for endorsement by HCC officers, prior to GW approval

Department of Conservation (DOC)

As the management plan will apply to reserves classified as Scenic, DOC is required to approve the final plan.

Greater Wellington's objectives/success measures

To raise awareness of the review and ensure that GW receives a high level of feedback/input from all stakeholders.

Key messages

- SOCO (single overriding communications objective): A "one-stop" plan for the management of GW's regional parks and forests
- Seven second sound bite: One consolidated plan, incorporating all individual parks and forests, will be the simplest and most effective management tool for managing our regional parks network

Other key messages

- It's the right time to make a change – our current Regional Parks Network Plans are due to be reviewed and we need to incorporate the Parks Network Strategy's vision and goals
- It's important that the new plan reflects the community's aspirations for our regional parks network – especially as visitor numbers continue to increase and our society becomes increasingly urbanised
- GW will be seeking the public's feedback as it develops the draft plan, including an extensive public consultation process on the draft plan

Spokesperson/people

- Subject-matter expert – Jane Davis
- Chair of Regional Sustainability Committee – Cr Chris Laidlaw

Key stakeholders

External:

- Local government politicians
- Landowners with our parks (DOC and the Hutt and Wellington city councils)
- Other city and district councils in the region
- Ara Tahi/iwi
- Friends of Parks groups
- Other environmental and recreational groups that use our parks
- Individual park users (eg, walkers, cyclists)
- Concession holders
- Other groups or individuals with an interest in our parks
- Regional ratepayers

Internal:

- Councillors
- Executive Leadership Team (ELT)
- GW Park Rangers
- Other Parks staff
- Strategy and Community Engagement staff
- GW staff

Community engagement tools/tactics

Pre-draft

- Contact community groups (including but not limited to ARAC and Friends Groups) with the offer of senior staff members for pre-draft talks
- Meeting with Councils and DOC
- Meetings with iwi (liaise directly with Te Ati Awa Ki Whakarongotai and Ngati Toa, Morrie Love will give feedback from Wellington Tenths Trust and Taranaki whanui)

Draft

- Letters to a list of key stakeholders (including individuals and groups who made submissions during the pre-draft consultation) inviting submissions on the draft plan

- Copies of the draft plan sent to all territorial authorities, Friends groups and other key community groups, public libraries, and other relevant locations
- Community meetings in Lower Hutt, Kapiti/Porirua and Wellington to discuss the draft once it has been released
- Media releases
- Public notices in the *Dominion Post*, the *Wairarapa Times Age* and community newspapers
- Articles in *Our Region*
- Dedicated web pages
- Notices posted in regional parks' community noticeboards
- Prior to the final plan release, gain officer approval of the plan from HCC and general agreement at officer level from DOC on the plan's content.

Staff engagement tools/tactics

- Meet with ELT then Councillors
- Reports to GW committees
- Develop suite of materials and web pages eg, summary handout, questionnaires and research results that are easily referenced
- ½ day meeting on the review with Eastern and Western park sectors
- All-staff lunchtime presentation following the release of the draft plan
- GWennie news

Timeframe

Steps	Who	Timing
Pre-draft submissions	GW	Nov-Dec 2009
Summary of pre-draft submissions to Regional Sustainability Committee	GW	Feb 2009
Pre-draft community engagement	GW	Feb-March 2010
Prepare draft	GW	Jan-March 2010
Councillors workshop	Councillors	March 2010
Draft published	GW	May 2010
Public consultation on draft	GW	May-June 2010
Hearing of submissions	Regional Sustainability hearing subcommittee	July 2010
Changes to draft	GW	August 2010
Final draft to Regional Sustainability Committee	Regional Sustainability Committee	September 2010
Adoption by GW	GW	September 2010