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Report to the Policy and Finance Committee
from Andrew Annakin, Divisional Manager, Landcare and David Benham, Divisional
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Western Region Plantation Forests : Recreation, Heritage and Landscape Values

1. Purpose

Councillor McQueen raised issues on the future of the Pakuratahi forest in a report to the Landcare and Utility Services Committees (Report 00.33). Several Councillor workshops and a field-trip followed. These covered the broad issues of Council Forest Lands management (based on a pending review of the Forest Lands Interim Management Plan, programmed for 2000/01).

This report brings together Officer recommendations specifically relating to the Council's western region Plantation Forestry estate for:

- Recreation management;
- Mitigating the effects of logging around the Rimutaka Incline Walkway;
- Asset management in the designated Recreation Areas;
- Considering broad landscape issues associated with the Plantation Forests.

2. Recreation Management

The Council's Forest Lands (native and plantation) have always been popular for recreation. However, demand for recreation access has increased markedly since 1995, especially into the Akatarawas. This mostly comes from walkers, mountain bikers and motorised recreation groups and individuals, particularly following the 1998 ARAC¹ agreement.

The Forest Lands were for many years managed by a single entity, the Forestry Department. The Utility Services and Landcare Divisions were created in 1995 and Landcare assumed the role of recreation management in the Council's forests.

¹ Akatarawa Recreation Action Group (now called Friends of the Akatarawa).

Since 1997, Plantation Forestry have contributed \$32,000 p.a. towards security ranging in the plantation forests, provided by the Landcare Division (this dovetailed with recreation management in the area). Plantation Forestry now manage security directly and for 2000/01 the Landcare Division applied saving from the disestablishment of the WRC Rural Fire District to offset the loss of internal revenue while still providing recreation management services in the plantation forests. Plantation Forestry and Landcare Division officers have now developed a more formal agreement for recreation management within the Plantation Forests.

The key features are:

- Pedestrian and mountain bike access is assured and the Plantation Forestry Exit Strategy conditions are unchanged;
- Parks and Forests Operations will manage recreation access to and through the plantation forests in consultation with Plantation Forestry;
- Future enhancements are envisaged, e.g., mountain bike tracks;
- Plantation Forestry will accommodate the internationally recognised Karapoti Classic and other events using Plantation Forestry roads;
- Plantation Forestry will continue to maintain the roading network for operational requirements, though any surpluses from recreational user charges may be reinvested into road maintenance.

3. **Rimutaka Incline Walkway**

Logging Mitigation

The Rimutaka Incline Walkway is appreciated by users for its recreational and heritage values, which occur within an environmentally attractive river corridor. Earlier work and policy documents prepared by both the Plantation Forestry and the previous Regional Parks departments have endeavoured to minimise the impact of the logging operations on these values, e.g., the “*Rimutaka Incline Recreation Area Logging Impact Report*,” December 1997.

However, having experienced the logging operation in the lower sections either side of the Incline Walkway, the policies have not always worked in practice. Officers have reviewed their approach and reached general agreement on mitigation measures for the upper section logging based on the broad principle of a forty-metre vegetation buffer either side of the Walkway. These setback areas will generally be allowed to regenerate to form permanent natural vegetation barriers to the logging areas beyond.

Watercourses through logged areas will not be replanted; leaving a minimum ten metre revegetation riparian strip either side. Where logging occurs close to the Pakuratahi River, a twenty-metre setback area will be incorporated into any replanting regime (to be reported, in consultation with the Landcare Division, to the Utility Services Committee, in due course).

Although the Regional Soil Plan does not specify margin size, it does refer to the promotion of Council lands for the purposes of encouraging the healthy functioning of aquatic and riparian ecosystems. The Council intends to prepare a Riparian Management Strategy but no such strategy is in place at present.

Revegetation after logging will be necessary in some parts to meet Regional Soil Plan requirements. Where there is no replanting in *Pinus Radiata*, Plantation Forestry will meet the equivalent cost of pine tree seedlings. Landcare Division will have to fund the difference. The special ecological area known as the Manuka Swamp, south of Ladle Bend Bridge, will have a buffer zone up to the new logging road above the area (some revegetation may be required to protect the ecological values²).

Logging the lower sections anticipated leaving some pine tree avenues around the Incline Walkway. This has proven difficult to fulfil in all areas - due to soil and wind conditions; pine tree buffers need to be quite deep to avoid windthrow and other hazards. Therefore, for the upper section, Plantation Forestry will remove as many pine trees as possible, without disturbing the historic rail formation and cuttings. This will further maximise the return to the regional community.

Confirming the “Redline Zone”

Plantation Forestry and Landcare Division staff will work together on the specific mitigation measures to be adopted, by Plantation Block, within the overall 40 metre setback principle. Once the logging finishes, the retreat areas (previously referred to as the Redline Zone, see Report 98.44) can be mapped and recorded in the GIS system.

The same principle could apply to the lower sections around the Incline Walkway, though not in all areas of what is now established as a “working forest”; replanted and with new access routes established. Amenity planting in Douglas Fir has already occurred in some areas. Further Officer discussion is required on the final arrangement of vegetation buffers.

Specific Issue, Ladle Bend “Straight”

The Pakuratahi East logging plan (PE-00.406) anticipates using 700 metres of the Incline Walkway historic railway formation south of Ladle Bend Bridge for a logging road; widened and strengthened to take 20 tonne truckloads. This remains Plantation Forestry’s preferred approach. However, following a recent site visit with Councillor McQueen, Plantation Forestry investigated alternatives for accessing the nearby plantation blocks.

At an additional cost of around \$150,000 (against gross logging returns of some \$600,000), alternative extraction routes could be constructed to carry logs up the adjacent Pig Gully. This option uses two right-angle crossings of the rail formation (post-logging mitigation will reduce the visual impact between rotations). However, the alternative option is still subject to a thorough survey of the proposed new roads.

² Rimutaka Incline Walkway Ladle Bend Wetland Site Assessment; M. McIntyre et al; School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University Wellington; February 2000.

Clearly, the most efficient solution is to use the rail formation as a logging road thereby maximising the financial return to the Regional Community. Additional protection will be required for one small (3 metre) historic bridge and an historic culvert. Most pine trees would be removed and the forty metre vegetation buffer principle applied. The logging road then becomes a walkway and the railway route itself remains.

Heritage Considerations

For the Council, this is a choice between the commercial returns and the value of maintaining a specific heritage feature (the rail formation); as opposed to a logging road that would become a recreation asset. Two Acts are also relevant to decisions on using the historic rail formation; the Historic Places Act 1993 and the Resource Management Act 1991.

The Historic Places Act states that it is not lawful to destroy damage or modify any archaeological site unless it is through an authority granted by the Historic Places Trust. An archaeological site is defined as *any place in New Zealand associated with human activity that occurred before 1900*. The Act outlines a process for obtaining an authority and gives the Trust the powers to approve, apply conditions, or deny consent to an activity.

The Resource Management Act requires local authorities to have particular regard to heritage values when developing policies and making decisions about resources. The Council's RPS has various objectives and polices relating to heritage management and protection. The Upper Hutt City Council District Plan contains a *Schedule of Significant Heritage Items*. Items in the schedule include the "*Rimutaka Railway - original line, cuttings, embankments and retaining walls*".

4. Designated Recreation Areas

At various points within the Council's Forest Lands, usually entry nodes, the previous Forestry and Recreation Departments developed several designated Recreation Areas. Some of these areas now fall within, are adjacent to or bisected by, Plantation Forestry areas, most notably the:

- Rimutaka Incline Walkway Recreation Area (aspects discussed above);
- Tunnel Gully Recreation Area;
- Wainuiomata Waterworks Recreation Area.

These areas are publicised within the Regional Parks network and covered by the Forest Lands Interim Management Plan 1996; plus a published management plan for the Tunnel Gully Recreation Area (1988). There have also been suggestions of creating a regional park around the Rimutaka Incline Walkway and of incorporating the actual Incline route to Cross Creek (currently managed by the Department of Conservation).

Through the current exercise, several blocks of exotic plantings have been highlighted within the designated recreation areas and there is uncertainty as to whether these trees, mostly Eucalyptus, should be managed as Plantation Forestry assets or for their amenity values. Officers recommend that:

- Plantation Forestry manages the template for the rifle range in the Rimutaka Incline Walkway Recreation Area. Landcare Division will continue to manage the area occupied by the rifle range firing mounds, Go-Kart and Gliding clubs;
- Tunnel Gully reserve area stays with Landcare Division;
- Further Officer discussion is required on protection measures for the Tunnel Gully bridges and the remaining historical rail formation, noting that this is one of the most modified sections;
- Wainuiomata Waterworks Recreation Area is confirmed as a management asset of the Landcare Division.

6. **Landscape Issues**

At workshops, Councillors have sought to consider whether landscape issues may also be important when considering plantation logging methods and replanting. For example, some forestry blocks may make a noteworthy contribution to regional landscapes, while others may be “working forests”.

The Council needs to consider whether some of its Plantation Forestry blocks have particular landscape values such that the management of these assets requires a particular approach.

7. **Recommendations**

That the Policy and Finance Committee:

- (1) *Note that Plantation Forestry and Landcare Division officers have agreed on a recreation management regime for the Council’s western region Plantation Forests.*
- (2) *Note that Plantation Forestry and Landcare Division officers have agreed to protocols for applying appropriate measures (based on the principle of establishing forty metre permanent vegetation buffers, adjacent to the Rimutaka Incline Walkway, plus ten metre riparian strips each side of watercourses), to mitigate the effects of logging on recreation, environmental, and heritage values.*
- (3) *Consider the options for logging access to the Pakuratahi East plantation blocks as they affect the historic railway formation “straight” south of the Ladle Bend Bridge; and either*
 - (a) *spend \$150,000 and cross the railway formation at two points;*

or

- (b) use 700 m of railway formation south of Ladle Bend Bridge and avoid expenditure of \$150,000.*
- (4) Note that the Tunnel Gully Reserve (1988 Management Plan) and the Wainuiomata Waterworks Recreation Area will remain amenity assets managed by the Landcare Division.*
- (5) Note that the Rimutaka Incline Walkway Recreation Area rifle range template will now be managed by Plantation Forestry; land occupied by the rifle range mounds, Go-Kart and Gliding clubs, plus the Bulls Run Road Motorcross track, will continue to be managed by the Landcare Division.*
- (6) Consider whether some of the Council's western region Plantation Forestry blocks have particular landscape values, such that additional consideration is required as to their management.*

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