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Committee Parks, Forests and Utilities  
Author Amanda Cox, Manager, Marketing and Design

## Visitor monitoring framework - update 3

### 1. Purpose

To update the Committee on progress with the implementation of the Visitor Monitoring Framework. This year the project was aimed at:

- Establishing understanding of visit numbers in East Harbour Regional Park.
- Assessing visitor satisfaction through conducting a number of on-park intercept surveys.

### 2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision 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

#### 3.1 Introduction

We are now into the third year of implementing a Visitor Monitoring Framework for the network of regional parks. Studies have been conducted in Belmont Regional Park (2006) and at Queen Elizabeth, Battle Hill and Kaitoke Regional Parks (2007). This year it was the turn of East Harbour Regional Park.

A Recreation Study was conducted at East Harbour Regional Park in 2001, prior to Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) taking on management of the park. This comprised both quantitative (a visitor survey) and qualitative (focus groups) aspects, and was used to inform the review of the park management plan and a number of key management decisions. Since then there has been no on-park assessment of visit numbers, attitudes or satisfaction levels.

This project has two objectives:

- (1) To apply a systematic, robust and practical method of estimating total visitation to the park. This involves using the counts taken during the survey period to estimate total weekly visits at each entrance and identifying which entrances contribute 75 percent of that total figure. We then install counters at those entrances and extrapolate the monthly figures to 100 percent to estimate total visits.
- (2) To develop an accurate picture of people visiting the park by interviewing users at the point of use about their general activities there, what aspects appeal most to them and the benefits they get from using the parks.

This information complements that which we receive via the annual community telephone survey, management plan submissions, ranger reports and other feedback.

### **3.2 What happened?**

Temporary employees staffed all 20 entrances to the park over selected weekends and weekdays from 26 January to 9 March. They counted all people entering and exiting each entrance, whether pedestrians or cyclists. Three days (two weekend days and one weekday) were allocated to what we believed to be main entrances and two days (both weekend days) were spent at minor entrances.

Staff members also interviewed visitors at a range of park entrances. A total of 98 questionnaires were completed by park visitors.

The information gathered included:

- Number of people both entering and exiting each entrance (noting that some people complete loops via different entrances)
- Visitor activity, e.g., walking, cycling, running, etc.
- Visitor characteristics (how they reached the park, who they visited with, how long they spent there). People exiting Burdans Gate (n=21) were also asked how far they had been, so that we had some understanding of how many people had visited the actual Lakes Block.
- Visitor satisfaction with various aspects of the park, e.g., facilities, space, flora and fauna, behaviour of other people, and aspects of the park that were most valued
- Perceived benefits of visiting the park
- Demographic profile – age, gender, income, city of residence

### **3.3 Findings: East Harbour Regional Park**

According to the visit counts, approximately 1,050 people pass through Burdans Gate every week. Around 60 percent of those people had left the Coast Road to visit the Lakes Block of East Harbour Regional Park.

Based on the data gathered, we estimate a total weekly visitation in the northern forest block at 1,347 people. The entrances contributing 75 percent of this figure include (in order) Muritai Park, Kereru Track, Cheviot Road, Kowhai Street, MacKenzie Road, Ngaumatau Road, Point Howard and Dillon Street. Notably, all of these entrances are located on the Eastbourne side of the park.

### 3.4 Calibrations

The visit counts also indicated the proportion of use for entering or exiting the park and the following figures will be used in calibrating the raw visit counts:

Entrance	Entry/ exit ratios
Muritai Park	55/45
Kereru Track	60/40
Cheviot Road	55/45
Kowhai Street	45/55
MacKenzie Road	45/55
Ngaumatau Road	55/45
Point Howard	50/50
Dillon Street	50/50

Reasons for the variations may include car parking, public transport stops, toilets and cafes at either end, track gradient and/or the appeal of particular walks.

## 4. Visitor survey satisfaction results

	East Harbour Regional Park
Main activity	Walking
Secondary activity	Walking the dog, mountain biking
Main reason for visiting	Access; enjoy natural features of the area
Level of "very satisfied" with park as place for their activity	73%
Who do you visit with?	Majority either alone (48%) or with a partner (32%)
How long do you spend in the park?	56% spend less than 1 hour in the park; 41% spend 1-4 hours there.
How often do you visit?	56% visit at least once per week
Which other parks have you visited?	The next most visited areas were the Hutt River Trail, Belmont Regional Park and Kaitoke Regional Park.
What are the most important facilities?	Walking tracks and signs. Toilets and seats were the third and fourth ranked facilities
What are you most satisfied with?	Space and place (settings and views)
What do you value most about the park?	The natural settings, the easy access
What benefits do you get from visiting?	Exercise and fitness, relaxation, contact with nature
What would you change about the park?	23% say "nothing"; 15% would control more pests; more wildlife (8%), more mountain bike tracks (8%); more rubbish bins, especially for dog poo (7%); more native bush (5%). Other requests included safe car parking, more signs, toilets, lookouts and drinking water.

	East Harbour Regional Park
"Very satisfied" overall with park? With network?	73% 51%
How can we describe you?	82% from Lower Hutt; 12% Wellington City; 3% overseas visitors. 59% have h/hold income 50K+; 52% aged 40-59 yrs. 90% New Zealand European/ New Zealander. 55/45 male/female  Of the visitors to Burdans Gate, 60% were from Lower Hutt and 24% were from Wellington.

## 5. Comment

For the sake of consistency, we should commence visit count reporting at the start of the 2008/09 financial year. This will also allow time for new counters to be installed at the two entrances currently without them.

East Harbour Regional Park is a well used area, offering many experiences, values and benefits in common with the other regional parks. Exercise, contact with nature and general physical and mental well-being remain consistent themes, with most visitors strongly valuing the natural settings and flora and fauna. The refurbished and realigned tracks and the new Hawtry Route have added to the park's appeal and changed recreation patterns.

The Wainuiomata entrances are significantly less well used than those on the Eastbourne side of the park. Wainuiomata is a community of around 17,000 people, over three times the size of Eastbourne. Two main differentiating factors have been shown to influence park use:

- (1) People with higher incomes are slightly over-represented in surveys of park users. Household incomes in Eastbourne are nearly twice those in Wainuiomata. While the regional parks are free to use, there are other issues typically associated with households on lower incomes, e.g., two parents working and lack of family time that affect levels of recreation in parks.
- (2) Wainuiomata is more ethnically diverse than Eastbourne, with around 23 percent of the population identifying as Maori and 10 percent as Pacific peoples. Although they use the regional parks, they have been observed as more likely to do so in groups, with the park as a background for social activities. The opportunity for group activities is very limited in the northern forest because of the dense forest and unique topography; and in the Lakes Block because of transport restrictions.

Past experience tells us that hilly terrain can be off-putting to people who are less physically active. Improvements requested such as seats, lookouts and distance markers all help provide a "reward" for venturing into the park, and reinforce a sense of achievement for visitors. We will investigate opportunities to promote shorter walks via city streets and shorter park loops in partnership with Hutt City Council as a more achievable starting point.

While East Harbour is a regional park, most users are locals, often carrying out more than one activity, e.g., dog walking, running. Their comments have weighted the feedback, so that we see fewer calls for toilets and drinking water than in other regional parks, as these visitors are only a short distance from home. Notably there is only one public toilet reasonably near one of the Wainuiomata entrances to the park, whereas there are at least three facilities in Eastbourne plus the toilet at Butterfly Creek.

Based on current usage and the new Hutt City Council mountain bike park in the eastern hills, there is plenty of scope to promote mountain biking via the designated tracks in the park and thus encourage loop rides.

Of all the regional parks, East Harbour is one of the closest to the main population centres, offers unique natural areas albeit in hilly terrain and is the best serviced by public transport. We should expect ongoing increases in visitation and the level of engagement by locals and the wider community.

## 6. Recommendations

*That the Committee:*

1. **Receives** the report.
2. **Notes** the content of the report.

Report prepared by:



**Amanda Cox**  
Manager, Marketing and Design

Report approved by:

**Murray Kennedy**  
Divisional Manager, Water Supply,  
Parks and Forests