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Committee Council
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Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area Public Access Plan review and update

1. Purpose

To review the current access provisions for the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area and to update the access plan for the area.

2. Consideration by Committee

The matters raised in this report were considered by the Parks, Forests and Utilities Committee at its meeting on 19 June 2008 (Report No. 08.389 refers). The recommendations contained in this report have been endorsed by the Committee for the Council's consideration and decision.

3. 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*.

4. Background

Council approved managed public access in the Wainuiomata and Orongorongo Catchments in 2000 (Report No. 00.665). Since this time the management of public access in the water collection areas has been phased in on a three step process.

Phase 1 provided for guided tours for organised groups by Greater Wellington Regional Council (GRWC) rangers and permitted hunting during the Roar (April/May).

Phase 2 doubled visitor numbers (from 20 to 40 per "trip-day"), and began a programme for training volunteer interpreters to assist the rangers as tour guides.

Phase 3 expanded the programme further by providing for tours in the Orongorongo Catchment (as well as the Wainuiomata Catchment) and the full implementation of the Volunteer Interpreters' Programme.

While these phases were being implemented, regular review meetings took place between the then Water Group and the Landcare Division to assess the programme, and monitor progress and control. During the three phases the number of visitors permitted into the water collection area increased from 320 per year in 2000 to close to 1,000 people per year in 2007.

Council last considered the issue of public access into the catchments in 2005 (Report No. 05.347). Council at that time was comfortable with the programme as it stood and no changes were made. The details of the outcome of that review follow.

Public access arrangement in the Wainuiomata Catchment would be limited to public walking tours only, consisting of:

- 12 trips of 60 people
- Guiding ratio of 1:15
- Six “group tours” and six “individual tours”

Public access arrangements in the Orongorongo Catchment would be limited to walking tours for registered tramping clubs consisting of:

- 6 tours of 15 people
- Guiding ratio of 2:15 (one of the guides must be a staff member)

It was also agreed to continue to operate by way of a ballot system a public “Roar hunt.”

Phase 3 has now been successfully implemented. GWRC staff members involved in the programme have now identified a small number of changes to the access provisions, recognising that there is a need to introduce greater flexibility within the programme. Officers are comfortable with a maximum of 1,200 people entering the water collection area and with less rigidity around the number of tours, provided access continues to be managed appropriately by the ranging staff.

The current access plan (2000) also is in need of revision to take into account access arrangements in the catchments from this point onwards.

Proposed changes and comments have been included in the revised public access plan (see **Attachment 1**) indicating the recommended changes. The revised plan is based on the policies of the current access plan and provides direction for the future management of the catchment, as set out in Recommendations 3 to 8.

Further recommendations have been made regarding the format for the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area access provisions in future.

5. Access

5.1 General Access Policies

The vehicles, security and control measures, areas off limits and biosecurity

sections of the access plan have been reworded to ensure that obligations on staff and contractors (in terms of their operational movements) have also been included.

The provisions remind staff and contractors of the following obligations:

- Health and safety obligations
- Biosecurity obligations, such as ensuring people entering the mainland island have clean boots, etc.
- The requirement for all vehicles entering the catchment from other sites outside of the water catchment to have a clean chassis and wheels and ensure there are no fuel or oil leaks

It is the responsibility of the Ranger to inform all visitors, contractors and staff of these obligations in the first instance.

5.2 Public walking tours

5.2.1 Current Access

Access is currently provided in the Wainuiomata Catchment for a maximum of 12 public walking tours per year. It is a fairly easy but long walk and is suitable for prams. Each tour has a maximum of 60 participants (a total of 720 visitors per year). The current guiding ratio is 1:15.

Access into the more isolated Orongorongo Catchment is provided for through up to six tramping group tours a year, with a guiding ratio of 2:15 (maximum of 90 places offered). These tours have been restricted to members of tramping clubs, reflecting the more difficult terrain and higher level of fitness required in the Orongorongo Catchment area.

5.2.2 Access statistics

The number of visitors taking part in the guided walking tours has steadily increased. In the 2005/6 period there were 326 visitors (fill rate of 45 percent). From June 2006 to March 2007 a total of 425 visitors entered the water catchment (a fill rate of 59 percent). From October 2007 through to June 2008 (bookings to date) a total of 591 people had either visited or booked to take part in the public walking tours (a fill rate of 82 percent).

The increase in numbers may be because of greater promotion of the public walking tours in the water catchment through the Regional Outdoors Programme that runs over the summer period.

A total of 40 participants took part in tramping tours into the Orongorongo Catchment during the 2005/6 period (fill rate of 44 percent). From June 2006 to March 2007 a total of 41 participants have taken part in these tours (fill rate of 46 percent). From October 2007 through to June 2008 (bookings to date) a total of 37 people took part in the public walking tours (fill rate of 65 percent).

5.2.3 Looking ahead

The present number of walking tour opportunities within the Wainuiomata

Catchment is meeting demand. However, the fill rate of these tours, even though increasing, has been reasonably low over the past few years and has never exceeded the number of places offered. Therefore, it is proposed to reduce the number of weekend tours, start operating mid-week tours and possibly increase the number of all day guided tramps (also mid-week). Many mid-week walking groups have expressed interest in for mid-week tours.

The tramping club groups are largely self-managed and require minimal supervision. An increase in the size of the groups from 15 to 25 is considered to be within the capacity of current staffing resources, health and safety requirements, and the carrying capacity of the catchment. This would change the ratio of guides from 2:15 to 2:25.

Many return visitors have also requested alternative routes. Opportunities have been identified for both the tramping and walking tours to visit the Mainland Island area. For smaller walking groups, a shorter walk to visit the Upper George Creek weir is also an option. More flexibility in the access provisions would enable these alternative routes to be explored with smaller numbers.

5.3 Conference Field Trips

Looking ahead

Conference field trips have been added to the Guided Walks, tramps section, as it is proposed that the conference field trips be included in the total number of visitors permitted into the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area each year.

There has been an increased demand from the public for the opportunity to undertake conference group field trips within the water catchment area. It is envisaged that these groups would be managed in the same way as the guided walks in the Wainuiomata Catchment. The only difference would be that these groups may be larger (a maximum of 100 people) and they are likely to be held mid-week.

5.4 Education or special interest groups

Looking ahead

Educational workshops or field trips being organised by the GWRC's *Take Action* programme already enter the Wainuiomata Recreation Area (access to this area is not restricted). It is proposed to give the policy the flexibility to allow students to become more familiar with the water treatment plant and water intakes in the water collection area if resources allow. These trips will only take place between the treatment plant and the water intakes (they will not enter the water collection area above the intakes) and the maximum number in the group will be 25.

The guiding ratio, using teachers and parents, should be 1:5 of adults to students, up to an age of 15. Other than this, the same criteria that apply to the walking groups will apply to the education tours.

Discussions with the Ranger and Water Supply staff have suggested that access to the Wainuiomata intake by passenger service vehicle could be considered for

special events. An additional provision has been proposed in the revised access plan with access in this capacity to be approved on application at the discretion of the Ranger with agreement from the Plant Supervisor, Wainuiomata/Waterloo. It is unlikely that restricted passenger vehicle access would result in more than minor effects to the roading infrastructure and water catchment. This provision is not considered to be in conflict with the catchment values, with such access being subject to the same conditions as all other groups/individuals.

To protect water quality and public health, all visitors must continue to adhere to the same entry criteria into the catchment, including the requirement to undertake a site induction, be informed of the catchment values and safety issues, and be made aware of and adhere to the biosecurity policies of the water catchment.

5.5 Hunting

5.5.1 Current

Recreational hunting is managed in the catchment through an annual “Roar hunt”, with a maximum of two hunters being permitted in each of the 10 hunting blocks at any one time. Hunters are permitted to bring their vehicles into the water collection area. A total of 80 permitted hunters have had the opportunity to hunt in the catchment every year to assist in keeping pest animal at low levels and to provide a recreational opportunity for hunters.

This balloted hunt has been popular in the past. However, as GWRC has continued to use professional hunters as part of the pest control programme to ensure pest animal numbers remain at low levels (especially in the Wainuiomata Mainland Island area), the numbers of animals culled by recreational hunters has continued to decline. The erection of the fence on the northern and western boundaries has also contributed to this decline in numbers. It may be necessary to postpone the annual roar hunt in future years. It is proposed that staff be granted discretion to review the ballot system each year based on the presence of animal pests in the water collection area.

5.5.2 Access statistics

Table 1 is a summary of the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Catchment public Roar hunt animal kill rate statistics for the period 2000 to 2008

Table 1 - Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Catchment - public Roar hunt animal kill rates 2000 to 2008

Year	Animal type		
	Deer	Goat	Pig
2000	12	11	11
2001	10	11	10
2002	9	11	2
2003	8	7	6
2004	9	4	1
2005	13	3	9
2006	3	7	2
2007	3	2	4
2008	4	1	1

5.6 Research

5.6.1 Current research opportunities

Currently under the access plan, applications for research are restricted to *bona fide* organisations.

5.6.2 Current research opportunities

During the period 2005 to 2006 and 2006 to March 2007 two permits were issued to authorise the carrying out of research within the water catchment area for the following purposes:

- To collect moths for taxonomic research
- To collect fungi for taxonomic purposes

In addition, a moss and liverwort survey was undertaken in the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area,

5.6.3 Looking ahead

It is proposed that the opportunity for research should not necessarily be solely for “*bona fide*” organisations only, as this may be too restrictive. Minor rewording has been proposed to the access plan to accommodate this change, with applications for research being granted on their merit at the discretion of the Manager, Parks and Manager, Water Supply. All applications for research will continue to meet the criteria as set out in the current public access plan, whereby there is benefit to the catchment and/or the Wellington Region, for the purpose of greater botanical knowledge or general scientific research.

5.7 Other policies

No changes are being made to policies relating to access for Police/Search and Rescue exercises (one exercise per year) or camping (prohibited).

5.8 Concessions

5.8.1 General

Phase 3 of the public access plan in the water catchment areas included provision for concession applications, subject to consideration by the then Utility Services Committee and taking into account the *Greater Wellington Regional Council Parks and Forests Concessions Policy*. To date, no concessions have been granted in the water catchment area.

5.8.2 Looking ahead

It is proposed to remove reference to concessions/permits for cultural harvesting from the public access plan, as this is covered under a GWRC-wide permit system for anyone who wishes to collect any material and/or undertake research.

Application for concessions in the catchment will continue to be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Parks, Forests and Utilities Committee, taking into

account the *Greater Wellington Regional Council Parks and Forests Concessions Policy*.

6. Future reviews of the access plan

Public access within the Wainuiomata and Orongorongo Catchments has not met maximum allocations for access since the policy was implemented in 2000. It is the officers' conclusion that public access provision has reached an equilibrium where the security of the water supply is protected and the demand for public access is met. With this being the case, officers recommend that the access policy should be incorporated into the management plan for the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area and reviewed on a five year basis as the management plan is reviewed. Officers are confident that the reviewed policy is flexible enough to incorporate modest changes in access preferences that may occur between review periods.

7. Communication

If Council approves the proposal to update and revise the access plan, and agrees that the access plan will in future be reviewed through the management plan for the water collection areas, officers will begin implementation immediately. This will involve setting dates for public walking/interpretation tours, tramping club tours, and hunting ballot arrangements for 2009.

In addition, a press release will be written outlining Council's decision with information on continued recreational opportunities available within these areas.

8. Recommendations

That Council:

1. *Adopts the provisions of the revised access plan (2008).*
2. *Adopts the proposals for access as described within the revised Access Plan (2008) as follows:*
 - (1) *Increasing the number of visitors permitted within the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area from 900 per year to 1,200 per year.*
 - (2) *Changing the guiding ratios for the tramping tours into the Orongorongo Catchment from 2:15 to 2:25.*
 - (3) *Allowing conference field trips to be added to the public access trips into the water collection area, provided the overall number of visitors into the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection area does not exceed 1,200 per year*
 - (4) *Allowing the Ranger to determine the dates, numbers and routes for all public tours provided the number of visitors remain within the maximum number permitted each year*

- (5) *Allowing educational or special interest groups managed access into the area between the treatment plant and the water intakes, depending on staff capacity.*
5. ***Agrees** that the staff have discretion to review the ballot system each year based on the presence of animal pests in the water collection area.*
6. ***Agrees** to strengthen the biosecurity provisions as in the revised access plan (2008)*
7. ***Agrees** that applications for research are considered from all individuals and organisations on a case by case basis, with appropriate assessment criteria, and granted at the discretion of the Manager, Parks and Manager, Water Supply.*
8. ***Approves** the incorporation of the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area Access Plan into the Wainuiomata Water Collection Area Management Plan and any other publications on the Wainuiomata Water Collection Area.*

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Attachment 1

Revised draft *Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area Access Plan*