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Committee Regional Sustainability  
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## Visitor monitoring framework - update 5

### 1. Purpose

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

- Better understanding visitor perceptions and use of the Rimutaka Rail Trail from both the Department of Conservation's (DoC) Cross Creek and Greater Wellington Regional Council's (GWRC) Kaitoke entrances
- Reviewing the accuracy of vehicle counters in the Pakuratahi Forest
- Reviewing perceptions and use of the main Akatarawa Forest entrances and the Wainuiomata Recreation Area

### 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

This summer saw the fifth year of visitor surveying in the regional parks network. It was a project that involved us working closely with DoC to redesign our survey form and alter surveying arrangements to address issues with data quality that we had experienced in previous years. We also worked with Upper Hutt City Council (UHCC) to provide work experience for Community Max participants through this project.

Through this exercise we wanted to better understand:

- How often they visit the area, what they do there and for how long
- How people find out about these parks and their preferred source of information
- What they like most about the area and any feedback they have

- Demographic information, e.g., where they live, how old they are, who they are visiting with, their income and ethnicity

This information supplements that which we receive via our telephone surveys, management plan submissions and other feedback. It also allows us to appreciate how the different areas are used and is useful material to feed into park planning and decision making.

## 4. Comment

### 4.1 What happened

Three temporary staff were engaged directly and 5 more via UHCC. The surveying period ran from 20 January until 27 February, with most work being carried out on weekends. Three postponements were required because of bad weather. Eight days of surveying was carried out on the Rail Trail and the Akatarawa Forest (to provide a comparison). Three days of surveying were conducted at the Tunnel Gully and Maymorn entrances, and the Wainuiomata Recreation Area.

Each day consisted of six hours of surveying people leaving the respective areas. Traffic entering and exiting the Rail Trail and Tunnel Gully was counted, to assess the accuracy of the vehicle counters.

Basic data was collected for all visitors during the survey period and included information on group size, male/female split, transport mode and whether dogs were present.

### 4.2 Summary of activity

Location	Surveys completed	% male/female	Average group size	Most popular activity
Rail Trail (Kaitoke)	167	58/42	3	Mountain biking
Rail Trail (Cross Creek)	63	53/47	3.1	1= Walking and mountain biking
Tunnel Gully	75	48/52	2.6	Walking
Maymorn	18	45/55	2	Walking
Karapoti	63	73/27	2.1	Mountain biking
Maungakotukutuku	67	55/45	2.9	Motorcycling
Wainuiomata Recreation Area	80	51/49	2.9	Walking

### 4.3 Key results

#### 4.3.1 Rimutaka Rail Trail (Cross Creek and Pakuratahi)

The survey feedback indicated significant visitor cross over from DoC to GWRC managed land and vice versa. More than half the respondents exiting at Cross Creek had come from the Pakuratahi or Tunnel Gully entrances. Another 13 percent had been through the Summit tunnel to points beyond and back again. Around 40 percent of those exiting at Pakuratahi had been onto DoC land before retracing their steps to their start point. Co-operation between DoC and GWRC relating to management of the area has delivered excellent outcomes in the past and remains essential for the future.

Respondents exiting at Cross Creek were mostly from the Wairarapa (29 percent), elsewhere in New Zealand or overseas (28 percent) or from Wellington (25 percent). All age groups were represented, including children, teens and age 70 plus. By comparison, most of those leaving via Pakuratahi were from Wellington (38 percent), Upper Hutt (24 percent) or elsewhere (New Zealand/overseas - 16 percent). Most were aged 0-15, followed by ages 30-49, illustrating the predominance of family groups.

Visitors enjoy many aspects of the Trail, including the scenery, historic features and information, peace and quiet, lack of vehicle traffic, easy terrain, good maintenance, and suitability for a range of people, especially families. Many want it left as is, with agencies to *keep up the good work*. It is important to respondents that the area remains freely accessible.

While the feedback was generally positive, there are clearly some low cost improvements GWRC can make that will better inform visitors about what to expect, distances to particular features and appropriate conduct on a one lane gravel track with sometimes limited visibility.

The vehicle counter at the Pakuratahi entrance to the Rail Trail was reading very accurately, although it does not take account of cyclists. A minor adjustment to the raw data is recommended.

#### 4.3.2 Tunnel Gully/ Maymorn

Located on either side of a ridge at the head of the Mangaroa Valley near Upper Hutt, these entrances to the Pakuratahi Forest were mostly visited by Upper Hutt residents. Walking, picnicking, biking and horse riding are the most popular activities, with visitors particularly liking the *tracks, bush, calmness, fresh air and birds*. With its easy walking, the area was particularly used by young families and those aged 50-69. Just over a third of groups had dogs with them. Locals appreciate the provision made for horse riding as managed by the GWRC Upper Hutt Depot.

With over a quarter of respondents visiting Tunnel Gully for the first time, there were some suggestions for improved way finding signage.

The vehicle counter at Tunnel Gully was overreading vehicles by an average of 9 percent so its placement and calibration will be reviewed.

#### 4.3.3 Akatarawa Forest – Maungakotukutuku and Karapoti entrances

The space and freedom of the large Akatarawa Forest attracts a different type of user than the Pakuratahi Forest. *Wild nature of the place, ride without any grief, native flora and fauna, freedom from rules and regs* were some of the aspects most liked by respondents.

Most respondents at the Maungakotukutuku entrance were from the Kapiti Coast (56 percent), with 19 percent from Wellington City and fewer from other centres. None were visiting for the first time. However, they were from all age groups and carried out a wide range of activities - tramping, trail biking, mountain biking, picnicking, hunting, 4WD - as they visited many different areas in the forest.

Upper Hutt (51 percent) and Lower Hutt (29 percent) visitors were most frequently seen at Karapoti. Usage at the Karapoti entrance was dominated by mountain bikers, many of whom were training for the Karapoti Classic event in early March. This is a “feature” event for the forest and motorcyclists have been observed to “ease off” at this time of year, as they are aware of people doing their training rides. Respondents were mostly male aged 20-49, with many fewer children than in the Pakuratahi Forest.

Respondents’ comments frequently noted the *good work* and regular maintenance. Some made requests for more signage and clearer links with other public lands. Some feedback illustrates tension amongst non-motorised users towards motorcyclists in particular. There are requests for track separation, environmental damage prevention and measures to curb “boy racers”.

Management tools such as permits (with no limit on numbers) and prescribing locations for permitted 4WD trips help limit the effects of motorised recreation on the area and other users. Keeping other parks non-motorised also helps maintain a balance between the needs and impacts of the various user groups. However, this feedback demonstrates some of the issues to be faced when considering the options for any further public facility for motorised recreation in the Region.

#### 4.3.4 Wainuiomata Recreation Area

While there were a high number of refusals to complete the visitor survey at this location, there was some useful input. Despite the proximity of a bus stop to the entrance, most people used cars to visit. Dogs accompanied nearly half of the groups, the highest proportion of all areas surveyed this summer. Several respondents commented on the range of tracks available and walking was the most popular activity. However, swimming and picnicking were ranked second and third, with the area attracting people from a wide range of ages, including teens and young adults, typically more difficult age groups to attract to parks. Eighty-five percent of respondents had a household income below \$70,000 and the ethnic profile was the most diverse of all areas surveyed. The great majority of people were from Lower Hutt; with most local to Wainuiomata.

Recent work to improve access to the Truss Bridge and proposals to open the area up to the Lower Dam to the public will enhance accessibility and attractiveness of the area. Its relatively easy terrain and traffic free sealed road during weekends presents good opportunities to provide for less able people and/or families with younger children.

## 5. Communication

Results of the survey work are of interest to Parks’ staff, local councils, the District Health Board, Sport Wellington and other agencies, and communication will be focused on these audiences.

## **6. Recommendations**

*That the Committee:*

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

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