

1. Public research

1.1 Objectives

To determine from residents of the greater Wellington Region:

- What experience they want from the regional parks now and in the future
- Reactions to suggested improvements and potential changes
- Their broad priorities and parameters for park enhancement and development

1.2 Stage 1 (qualitative - around 40 face to face interviews)

- Explored attitudes in greater detail than possible in Stage 2
- Identified issues from park user and non-user perspective
- Presented new concepts and possible development ideas and explored these in-depth
- Elicited comment on preferred direction for the future

1.3 Stage 2 (quantitative - n = 1,000, structured telephone interviews)

Aims to:

- Gauge the public's priorities regarding parks of the future
- Test parameters of future development
- Gain feedback on concepts likely to feature in the future but not necessarily mentioned by participants in stage 1, e.g., economic value of parks

**PETER GLEN
RESEARCH**

Market Research You Can Action



Ph. (04) 564 4525
Fax. (04) 564 4528
Mobile. (0274) 914 330
peter.glen@xtra.co.nz
www.peterglenresearch.co.nz
P.O. Box 31-397
Lower Hutt

**RESEARCH TO ASSIST THE STRATEGIC REVIEW
OF REGIONAL PARKS & FORESTS IN THE
GREATER WELLINGTON REGION**

- STAGE ONE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH -

*Research report prepared for
the Greater Wellington Regional Council*

*Murray Waititi
Amanda Cox*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) is in the process of preparing a long-term plan for the management and development of the major regional parks and forests, which include:

- Battle Hill Farm Forest Park
- Belmont Regional Park
- East Harbour Regional Park
- The Hutt River Trail
- Akatarawa Forest
- Kaitoke Regional Park
- Queen Elizabeth Park
- Pakuratahi Forest

To assist with the preparation of the plan, it is important that the GWRC obtains input from members of the public, who are users and potential users of the parks, to determine their needs and wishes for the future.

Peter Glen Research has, accordingly, been commissioned to conduct a research project that will specifically address the information needs of the GWRC. This document presents the results of the stage one qualitative investigation.

2. OBJECTIVES

The overall purpose of the research is to determine what residents of the greater Wellington region want from the major regional parks and forests over the next twenty years.

Specific objectives are to determine:

- (a) What experience residents want from the parks now and in the future
- (b) What residents perceive to be the current strengths/weaknesses of the major regional parks
- (c) Their suggestions for improving the parks and reactions to potential changes
- (d) The broad parameters for park enhancement and development (e.g. what would be acceptable/not acceptable? To what extent can the parks include any degree of commercialisation?)

3. TARGET GROUP FOR THE RESEARCH

The research was undertaken among a broad cross-section of users and potential users of the major regional parks and forests in the Greater Wellington Region.

Previous research has revealed that users comprise two important groups: frequent users, who visit one or more parks at least monthly; and occasional users, who visit the parks less frequently.

The prime potential users of the major regional parks and forests are current non-users, but are physically active and visit other parks and green areas at least once every three or four weeks.

Other non-users tend to be older, less active residents, many of whom have health and mobility issues. They are, therefore, less likely to be potential users of the major regional parks in the future.

4. METHOD

In order to gain a thorough insight to the needs and attitudes of park users and non-users, it was recommended that a two-stage research programme be used:

- Stage 1: An in-depth qualitative review, to explore and understand the public's attitudes, identify issues and gain direction for the full-scale survey.

- Stage 2: A full-scale quantitative survey, to measure the extent to which attitudes are held by a broader cross-section of the target population and further assess issues and opportunities that may be relevant to future planning.

5. THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

5.1. PURPOSE

The in-depth qualitative study was initially recommended to enable:

- (a) Attitudes to be explored in greater detail than would be possible in a more structured quantitative survey.
- (b) Issues to be identified from a park user and non-user perspective, not simply from the client and researcher's point-of-view.
- (c) New concepts and possible development ideas to be fully presented and explored in-depth.
- (d) The questionnaire for the quantitative survey to be developed more efficiently (e.g. using pre-coded responses and rating scales) and thoroughly (e.g. by including all issues of importance that emerge).
- (e) Early feedback on the attitudes that exist, so that questioning can be included in the full-scale survey that will assist client decision-making.

5.2. METHOD

Forty-six residents were recruited for this in-depth study, covering the following three park usership groups:

USERSHIP GROUPS	No. of Respondents
1. Frequent users of the major regional parks and forests (i.e. visit one or more parks at least monthly)	16
2. Occasional users of the major regional parks and forests (i.e. less frequent visitors to one or more parks)	17
3. Prime potential users of the major regional parks and forests (i.e. are current non-users, but are physically active and visit other parks and green areas at least once every 3 or 4 weeks)	13
TOTAL RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS	46

A mix of focus group discussion and individual (or, in some cases, paired) interviews were conducted, with approximately half the respondents participating in each. The focus groups were to enable participants to debate issues and build on the thoughts and ideas of others. The individual interviews helped provide a broader spread of opinion.

The first two usership groups listed above, were recruited by representatives of Peter Glen Research, primarily from within the parks. This initially involved only a short interview and provision of information, with subsequent follow-up, by appointment, for the extended interview. Recruitment from within the parks helped ensure that the frequent and occasional users were contributing their thoughts and ideas based on recent experience.

Note that at client's request, the parks from which the frequent and occasional users were recruited were;

- Queen Elizabeth Park
- Battle Hill Farm Forest Park
- Belmont Regional Park
- Kaitoke Regional Park
- Rimutaka Rail Trail (Pakuratahi)
- East Harbour Regional Park
- plus Whiteria (as a potential park under GWRC management)

The third usership group (the prime potential users) were recruited via random telephone calls to residents in the greater Wellington area, coupled with some park intercept interviews.

Quota enrolment also ensured a mix of respondents from the various areas by gender, age (young, mid, older) and ethnicity.

5.3. INFORMATION OBTAINED

A Discussion Guide was developed in consultation with client, to focus the areas of investigation. A copy of this document is attached in Section 8 of this report.

6. TIMING

Fieldwork (i.e. recruitment and interviewing) for the qualitative research was conducted from 8 November to 9 December 2008.

7. THE RESEARCH RESULTS

7.1. USAGE OF PARKS

The forty-six people who participated in the research collectively named well in excess of 100 different parks and green areas that they had visited in the past twelve months around the greater Wellington region. An examination of park visitation by the three user segments reveals some very interesting findings.

AVERAGE NUMBER OF PARKS VISITED IN PAST TWELVE MONTHS	FREQUENT USERS OF MAJOR REGIONAL PARKS	OCCASIONAL USERS	NON/POTENTIAL USERS
	No.	No.	No.
Major regional parks (managed by GWRC)	2.9	2.8	-
Other parks and green areas	1.9	3.3	7.6
TOTAL PARKS VISITED IN PAST TWELVE MONTHS	4.8	6.1	7.6

The above results indicate that the frequent users of the major regional parks (i.e. those that visit one or more regional parks at least monthly) tend to concentrate their usage to a smaller number of parks overall. Occasional users and current non-users are more inclined to spread their activity over a greater number of parks in total.

The results also reveal that this qualitative research project has attracted a greater proportion of regular park visitors, rather than the very infrequent or occasional users. This is evidenced by the fact that the current users of the major regional parks had visited an average 2.8 such parks in the past year, compared to an average of only 1.8 parks among the general population, as measured in the annual Regional Parks and Forests Survey conducted by Peter Glen Research.

Park users visit these facilities for a wide variety of activities and experiences. The activities that the research participants indicated they had undertaken during the past twelve months included the following:

- Walking
- Walking the dog
- Cycling
- Family outings/recreation
- Camping
- Canoeing
- Hunting/fishing
- Learning to drive
- Participating in multi-sport events
- Painting/art work
- Researching local history
- Outings with organised groups
- Running/jogging
- Mountain biking
- Picnics/barbeques
- Tramping
- Swimming
- Horse riding
- Driving/off-roading
- Playing sport
- Photography
- Nature study e.g. visits to the seals, farm experience, studying fish and birds
- Hosting overseas/out-of-town visitors
- Meeting with friends

It is apparent that parks are required to cater for a wide variety of interests and activities.

7.2. REASONS FOR USE/NON-USE OF REGIONAL PARKS AND FORESTS

The research participants were questioned as to the reasons why they currently visit or do not visit the regional parks and forests in the greater Wellington area.

7.2.1. REASONS FOR USE

The two most frequently mentioned reasons for visiting the regional parks were:

(a) Regional parks are a relaxing, peaceful place to go

e.g. *“It provides respite away from the city.”*

“Parks are a place to escape – from people, cars, the pressure of everyday life.”

“It provides me with an outlet to recharge my batteries, away from the stresses and strains of a busy working week.”

“The regional parks provide an opportunity for relaxation, peace and quiet. I retune my mind and senses.”

“Parks provide fresh air and a feeling of well-being. You can get away and not worry about work, the kids and so on. Then you can go back to your everyday life, with a better mindset to face it.”

(b) Regional parks provide a good physical workout

e.g. *“I use the regional parks to get exercise – to raise the heartbeat, lower the cholesterol and all that.”*

“It is an opportunity for me to improve my health (lung capacity) and get fitter.”

“I find that some of the regional parks can really test your fitness. Some are steep and provide you with a real challenge. They provide a chance to improve your fitness, but there is also the mental challenge to see whether you are up to it.”

“I find that the regional parks provide challenge and variety, especially for mountain biking. Some parks provide a good easy ride in pleasant surroundings, but others challenge you more. They challenge your fitness and mental capacity to cope.”

“Going for a good long walk or tramp in a regional park is a good way to improve your fitness level. I would far sooner do that than go to the gym. I am an outdoorsy type of person.”

Other reasons for visiting the major regional parks included:

(c) Time and convenience

e.g. *“I have easy access to the regional park. It is virtually on my doorstep, so it is easy to get to on a regular basis.”*

“I find the regional parks handy and convenient. There are plenty of them around the Wellington area and you don’t have to travel far to get to them.”

“It is timing thing. I visit the closest ones more often. It just depends how much time I have, as to which parks I visit.”

“The park is nearby and I don’t have to travel far to get there. It is time efficient for me and it meets all the outdoor activities I get involved with (biking, running, tramping).”

(d) The major regional parks offer variety and specialised attractions

e.g. *“The major parks provide plenty of variety. For example, Red Rocks has the seals, Queen Elizabeth has pro-active involvement in the environment, East Harbour has the creek and good rest areas which make it worth the drive, and the Hutt River Trail is good is you have a non-able bodied person to cater for.”*

“There is plenty of variety depending on what you are doing. Some parks have good easy walks, others are more challenging. Some cater well for cyclists and mountain bikers. Others are great for camping.”

“I go to Battle Hill regularly, to give my children a weekly farm experience. I grew up on a farm and I think it’s important for children to experience the outdoors and nature.”

(e) I find the regional parks good for the family/are family orientated

e.g. *“I go to the areas that suit our needs as a family and the needs of the children. In particular, I like to find areas with rivers, bush and no mountain bikes.”*

“I find the regional parks are a good place to visit with the grandchildren. There are open spaces, bush walks and play areas. It doesn’t cost you anything and it is a good family environment.”

“The regional parks I visit are great for the family. There is fresh air and open spaces and there are good safe areas for the children to play.”

(f) I visit the regional parks for the natural environment

e.g. *“Regional parks offer an environment that you don’t find in the more built up areas and city parks. There is uniqueness about them and they are all different in some way. I like to enjoy the native bush, the bird-life and the natural environment they have to offer.”*

“I enjoy the landscape in the regional parks. It is very different to the city. There are the large green areas, the rivers, the ocean. I find it very tranquil and inspiring. It is a natural force to motivate my artwork and creative writing.”

“I like to visit regional parks, because these areas share the critical lesson that celebrating nature (by replanting trees to attract native pollinators, i.e. insects, birds, and ongoing restoration projects) is the key to our survival as humans. It is the beauty and tranquillity of the green areas that inspires me to be more eco-friendly in my life, growing vegetables, recycling, taking the bus, composting, etc.”

(g) Other reasons

e.g. *“The regional parks provide a good opportunity to meet people. Going camping or tramping is a great way to get to know people better, without modern technology like cell-phones and computers intruding.”*

“The regional parks are a good place to learn – about local history, fish life, bird life, ecology and nature generally.”

Several of the research participants also alluded to another factor that attracts them to the regional parks. They indicated that there is a strong underlying sense of adventure that they get from their park visits.

e.g. *“I find the regional parks provide me with somewhere new to go and they often renew old memories. For instance, I recently saw some people rafting down the river and that brought back memories of a lot of fun times for me. There are areas that are not currently developed in parks, which could be made more accessible. I like to explore the unknown.”*

“The regional parks are more random in area and interest. You never know what you might see. They provide a sense of adventure. We go to different parks and take different routes, so that we can explore new areas and gain new experiences.”

“It is all about exploring the area for our family. We haven’t lived here that long and it is fun to get out and about and see what really exists around Wellington. You can get in the car and drive around the city and after a few weekends you have explored suburbia, but there is much more to see in the parks. And you are never quite sure what you are going to see until you get there.”

“I love exploring. The regional parks let me do this. Some walks I did as a boy and it is fun to redo them and explore things I missed or was not interested in my younger days.”

This could be an important consideration for the future planning and development of the major regional parks. New trails, activities and areas of interest may need to be progressively highlighted over time, to appeal to people’s sense of adventure and retain ongoing interest in what the parks have to offer.

7.2.1. REASONS FOR NON -USE

The research participants who do not currently visit the major regional parks gave a variety of reasons for their non-use. These included:

(a) Time and transport issues

e.g. *“The regional parks are so far away that I don’t seriously consider them. The ones I know about are on the outskirts of Wellington city. Petrol cost and travelling time makes it too ridiculous for me to even consider them.”*

“I don’t own a car so they are not easy to get to. I would consider using the regional parks if there were designated bus tours or buses routed out to the park entrances.”

“The local parks are more convenient to get to. I can just walk down the road and get the outdoor experience I am seeking. I just use them for exercise and getting some fresh air away from the house.”

(b) Lack of awareness/knowledge of the regional parks

e.g. *“I have no idea about the regional parks and where they are.”*

“What is a regional park? All the parks around the city are the same to me. There might be the bigger ones in the hills but they are still just parks.”

“I would turn the question around and say why should I go to a regional park? I don’t know much about them and I don’t know what they have to offer. If I knew, I might be tempted to try them.”

(c) I prefer short walks

e.g. *“I’m busy, which is why I prefer short (half hour to two hour) walks, rather than a half to full day tramp.”*

“I am not a fan of walking long distances, going on day treks, hiking and that sort of thing. I would also find the uneven tracks a problem.”

“I get the impression that the regional parks are more for the serious hiker or tramper. I just like to exercise locally.”

(d) My interests and exercise routines are more city-based

e.g. *“I have better things to do in my spare time than go to a regional park. I work out at the gym regularly. I like to socialise with my friends, go to cafes and movies, etc. I prefer that to exploring the outdoors.”*

“I am not an outdoor sort of person. I exercise at the gym, play indoor sports and I can do that all year round.”

“I am very busy utilising the many sporting parks in and around the city, to have any time left over to use the non-sport focused parks.”

(e) I am uncertain about the degree of difficulty the regional parks present

e.g. *“I guess I am just not sure what difficulty the regional parks present and whether I would be able to cope with them.”*

“I find the local parks provide me with exercise without over exertion. I have heard that the regional parks can be very steep in places and the condition of the tracks can vary widely.”

(d) Safety is an issue

e.g. *“Safety is also an issue for me, especially as I often exercise alone. I am not paranoid about it, but feel that you are likely to be more vulnerable in the remote areas like the regional parks.”*

7.3. THE ROLE OF THE PARKS IN GENERAL

The great majority of respondents viewed the role of parks, in general, to be one of providing ‘escape’ or ‘respite’ from the city and the pressures of everyday life. They described this in various ways. The following comments are typical of their view.

e.g. *“Parks to me are a place of escape – a sanctuary, both in and around the city.”*

“Parks play an important role in a busy urban environment. They provide the ability to be able to slip away in a relatively short time and find yourself in wide open spaces.”

“Parks are a place to get away from cars and suburbia.”

“Parks are an escape from city life – they are a place for people to go to refresh their mind and rejuvenate themselves, away from the pressures of work, family, study.”

“Parks are a respite from the rigours of modern day living. They offer a peaceful, natural environment that everyone can potentially enjoy.”

“Parks are a sanctuary. They are a place to enjoy the outdoors, to have fun and relax. You can use them for walking, running, biking, playing sport, whatever takes your fancy.”

Parks are also seen as important facilities for the public to fulfil their needs with regard to:

- Experiencing and enjoying the outdoors
- Recreation
- Fitness and exercise
- Keeping in touch with nature
- Family activities

The role of parks is seen to embrace a broad cross-section of the community. They are important to people of all ages, of different interests and at different stages in life.

7.4. THE ROLE OF A REGIONAL PARK

Respondents reiterated that the primary role of regional parks is to provide people with an ‘*escape*’ or ‘*respite*’ from the city and the pressures of everyday life.

Many of the research participants differentiated the regional parks from city parks and green spaces, by describing the regional parks as ‘*larger*’ or ‘*more expansive*’. The respondents also tended to characterise the regional parks by specific qualities or attributes that they expected from the parks, rather than the role. In this regard, they described the regional parks as providing the public with:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ▪ Open spaces | ▪ Green spaces |
| ▪ A natural environment (e.g. where there are no fumes or man-made pollutants) | ▪ A peaceful, quiet, tranquil setting |
| ▪ Beautiful surroundings/a place of natural beauty | ▪ Areas for play/recreation |
| ▪ The conservation of our natural environment, including our native flora and fauna | ▪ A variety of facilities for different needs (e.g. easy to challenging terrain, specific tracks/trails for walking, cycling, horse riding, etc) |
| ▪ Easy access to the outdoors | ▪ An environment that families and individuals can enjoy |

Several research participants stressed the importance of the ‘*conservation*’ role of regional parks. They expressed this along the following lines:

“The regional parks have an important role in the conservation of what used to be here.”

“A regional park is a place where we conserve what is already there, as well as restore what we have destroyed. It is all about creating a legacy for our children and grandchildren.”

“One of the roles is sustaining our natural environment in an up kept, purposeful way. It is an area of land that has been restored and where they have stopped the degradation.”

“The role of the regional parks is extremely important. Forests, plants and nature have and always will play a big part in my life, and hopefully the lives of most people. For me, the environment is not only something that is full of joy, peace, sanctuary and openness, it is also something that needs to be protected, cultivated and cherished.”

“I see regional parks as specific environmental areas that grow, preserve and nurture the development of native plants and bird life.”

The role of the parks in providing ‘*education*’ was also deemed important to many park users.

e.g. *“Regional parks have an important educational role. They expose families to outdoor activities, wildlife, and even farm life in the case of Battle Hill. It is where kids can learn about nature and the fun you can have outdoors, away the urban environment.”*

“I see regional parks as providing education for kids (on school trips etc) about native flora and fauna that live in the park.”

“The regional parks are educational for me. It is where I can study and learn about plant life, bird life and the natural environment.”

“An important role of regional parks is to educate the public and to expose them to the natural beauty of our environment in safe conditions.”

7.5. THE EXPERIENCE SOUGHT FROM THE REGIONAL PARKS AND FORESTS

Approximately one-third of the current regional park users freely stated that the experience they are seeking is already being met. Hence, their comments centred on keeping things as they are now in the parks. Typical examples of the comments made were:

e.g. *“I feel the parks have got it right now. I am quite happy with the experience I get now. The question is more one of how do you conserve what we already have?”*

“I want to continue to have the experience I have now. I want to keep the parks much the same as they are, in their natural state, without too much development.”

“I am happy with the experience I am getting. I have that experience to you in the earlier questions.”

“The regional parks deliver the experience I am seeking now. They provide a relaxing, peaceful environment, with lots of natural beauty to enjoy. I want to keep it that way.”

Other research participants expanded on their desired experience, by commenting on the natural environment that is, and should be, provided as follows:

e.g. *“The experience I want is that of a nature reserve, no man-made pollutants such as cars, fumes, noise, etc.”*

“I want to experience more of the raw beauty of nature – more rugged trails, trees that are left to grow uncontrolled like nature intended. Less man-made, man altered tracks, although I understand the need for safety. Sure, there should be areas that are completely hand-railed and gravelled, but there should also be areas that have tree roots blocking the paths and only tree branches for climbing support.”

“I want a natural experience – a park that is not tampered with by humans.”

“I want a park that is easy to (metaphorically) lose yourself in. I want to feel like I am back in the old days, discovering native New Zealand for the first time, like a new European settler, or an old school Maori.”

“I want an experience where I can take the kids and grandkids to experience nature, as nature intended.”

Several respondents commented that whilst they are satisfied with the experience they get now from the regional parks, they would like to see the GWRC take a greater role in providing education to enhance their experience. This was expressed in comments such as those below:

e.g. *“I am happy with the experience I get now, but I think there is an opportunity for them to take a greater role in educating the public. I would like to see them get across the sense and feel of New Zealand before towns and cities evolved. This could be done by way of talks, presentations and visual displays, perhaps coupled with organised walks and guided tours.”*

“The current experience could be improved through the provision of education. I’d like to be challenged in the parks, not just physically but mentally.”

“Perhaps the existing park experience could extend to public education. I think this happens now to some extent with the schools, but it would be good for all park users to be offered talks and information on the history and nature within the parks and conservation programmes, etc.”

“I think the park experience of the future could include a little more focus on education. Bring in botanists and different experts to talk about the features of the park.”

Many of the other research participants had difficulty describing the specific experience that they sought from the regional parks. However, they could describe the attributes and features they wanted in a park, to deliver their “ideal” experience. These included:

- Solitude/a quiet relaxing environment
- Places to sit, relax, unwind, picnic and enjoy the natural environment
- A variety of experiences, as provided by the various parks
- Different tracks and terrain, for varying fitness levels
- Places for various types of recreation
- A natural environment for exercise
- Safety; I want to know I am going to be safe in the parks
- Retain the contrast from the city – keep it natural
- Good signage
- Well maintained bridges
- Adequate supply of rubbish bins
- An adequate number of clean toilets
- Tracks that are well maintained
- Preservation of free access to the parks

7.6. CHOOSING WHICH PARK TO VISIT

Many of the park users who participated in this research freely acknowledged that the regional parks they are familiar with are different in many ways and offer a wide variety of experiences to the public. Some of the comments that illustrate this include:

e.g. *“The Hutt River Trail has flat terrain and is pleasant for walking our old dog. East Harbour has a challenging loop walk and good picnic facilities. Queen Elizabeth has an active restoration group on re-establishing the wetlands and coastal dunes. And they have their own unique scenery to enjoy.”*

“Belmont Regional Park seems to have a different group of users. It gets less populated and attracts people who ride bikes and horses. The other parks provide different terrain, scenery and features, so there is plenty of variety to choose from.”

“Some parks are by the beach, some have a river as a feature. Some are better for gentle walks and some have more challenging terrain. Some are better for mountain bikers. Some are better for camping and tramping.”

“The different parks fulfil different needs. I have visited different parks for different reasons, including ease versus difficulty, the ability to cycle, etc. I am sure that there are people who enjoy the beauty of the forests, but hate to exercise, so the 4WD tracks are perfect for them. But parks shouldn't be about catering to every person; rather parks should utilise what they have.”

“The parks are unique in themselves. They have different scenery, geology, bird life, tree life, etc. Therefore, they do offer variety and different experiences to people.”

Accordingly, there are a number of factors that influence which park a person will visit and, indeed, whether it will be a regional park or a city park closer to home. The factors that were mentioned by respondents included:

- The time available (with due consideration to the time on the track, as well as the time getting to/from the park)
- The weather and weather outlook
- The fitness level/ability of people accompanying the park user
- The experience provided by the park, e.g. type of bush, the view, what you want to do there
- Wind strength/direction and the amount of shelter provided
- Ease of access/the proximity of the park to home (e.g. *“can I walk there versus the need to drive?”*)
- Fitness level and the demands of different parks/tracks
- The need for variety/challenge/adventure
- What is happening in the park, e.g. an organised walk or event)
- Knowledge to plan the visit (i.e. some parks you know, others are less certain)

7.7. MAJOR LIKES/DISLIKES OF PARKS

Respondents were asked to identify the major likes and dislikes that they have in relation to parks. These have been summarised as follows:

7.7.1. MAJOR LIKES

- Natural beauty/scenery/ environment/bush/ great views
- The variety of terrain and walking tracks, from gentle to challenging
- The variety of parks to choose from and/or the variety of experiences offered within the parks
- Access to the parks is free
- The ability to exercise in pleasant surroundings
- A general lack of graffiti and vandalism
- Shelter (bush cover) is great if it is windy
- Tunnel Gully is well set up
- The solitude/peace and quiet; no city noise/motor vehicles
- The easy access to major parks – they are close to the city/on our doorstep
- A lot of activities in which to participate – the GWRC offers a good summer programme
- The regional parks are well kept
- There is generally plenty/adequate parking
- Good toilets at some parks, e.g. Belmont
- I particularly like loop walks

7.7.2. MAJOR DISLIKES

- Vandalism/people misusing or abusing the park
- Lack of adequate signage/signage that is confusing/signage that gets lost in the mist
- Tracks that are too narrow
- Access ways that are not big enough for prams/bikes
- Lack of rubbish bins
- Lack of shelter
- Lack of security at some car-parks
- Lack of information about the intensity of the terrain (some are too demanding for me)
- QE Park has too many users. (“*It doesn’t feel like you are getting away*”)
- Broken bottles/littering
- Tracks that are not well maintained/have not been gravelled or wired for some time
- Lack of toilets
- Noise pollution of motorbikes
- Lack of seating
- Lack of parking
- Lack of information about the other tracks I am not familiar with
- Would like to see more 4WD help for people who “*fail*” on the organised walks
- Spreading of 1080 poison
- Toxic algae in the river (unsafe for dogs to swim/run free)

7.8. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Regional park users were asked to outline their ideas for improving, developing, or enhancing the park experience in the parks they visit. One-third of the respondents did *not* offer a suggestion, stating that they thought the parks were excellent just as they are.

The two-thirds of respondents that did express an idea, gave a variety of suggestions, which are outlined below:

(a) SIGNAGE

The most frequently mentioned suggestion was to ‘*improve the signage*’ at the regional parks. They believed that this could be achieved in a number of ways, including:

“Extend the signage to describe/outline the special features of the park.”

“Have signs/information boards to show what is going on in the park and, perhaps, ideas of what can be done in the parks.”

“Improve signage and more track markers in the park.”

“Improve signage so that it is less confusing. I have sometimes found arrows pointing the wrong way, or into ‘no mans land’, which is really not helpful if you are following a track for the first time.”

“Improve signage, especially at Belmont, where it is quite easy to miss some of them in the fog and mist.”

(b) TOILETS

Several park users requested:

“Upgraded toilet facilities are needed at many of the parks.”

“Some parks need toilets upgrading.”

“More toilets are needed in the parks, to help keep the parks clean and healthy for people to use.”

“Toilets should be provided at regular intervals.”

“More toilets are needed. Belmont and Kaitoke are good examples.”

(c) TRACK MAINTENANCE

Several park users suggested that tracks continue to be well maintained or, in some cases, improved.

“I would suggest continued maintenance of tracks, to retain a good walking experience.”

“The tracks at most parks are pretty well maintained, but they so critical to a good park experience that it is important to ensure this continues. At times the tracks can get a bit bare of gravel and this should be corrected promptly.”

“More gravelling of tracks is needed on a regular basis.”

“Track maintenance is essential – gravelling, trimming, etc.”

“Improve the tracks at Belmont. They are very slippery, to the point of dangerous, in winter.”

(d) CONTINUE THE REPLANTING PROGRAMME

“Continue the replanting programmes.”

“Plant more native trees in appropriate locations to attract the bird life.”

“We need the establishment of green corridors.”

“Continuing pest control, to give the bush a chance to regenerate, coupled with replanting of natives.”

(e) THE PROVISION OF SHELTER

“I would suggest more cover or shelter, particularly in areas of the parks that are exposed.”

“It would be great if we could have more shelter on some of the higher points and exposed areas in the parks. It probably means planting more bush and shelter belts.”

“I would suggest replanting for shelter. It is important, especially for long walks and when wet and windy weather can catch you out.”

(f) KEEP THE PARKS CLEAN/HAVE A REGULAR CLEANUP PROGRAMME

“Harness some litter troops to the clean up the parks. Get a band of park workers and volunteers together on a regular basis (at least once a month) and make it a fun thing to do.”

“Introduce a regular cleaning programme, to remove litter, broken bottles, etc from the parks. It is important to keep them clean for the enjoyment and safety of the public.”

“Clean up the Hutt River, so that it is not polluted with litter, algae, and disease.”

“Put more emphasis into the cleaning of the parks. Have more rubbish bins and encourage all park users to be responsible.”

(g) MORE PROMOTION OF THE PARKS

“I would like to see the parks promoted a little more, so that the people of Wellington can get out and enjoy the natural beauty that we have in the area.”

“One suggestion I would make is to tell people what the parks have to offer. Promote them a bit more and perhaps have special events or ‘fun day’ events to encourage them into the parks.”

“I think the parks could be promoted more, so that more people can enjoy them. However, it needs to be done responsibly, so I would see it coupled with education and information, to encourage them to look after the parks.”

(h) MORE SEATING

“I would like to see more benches at appropriate places, so that you can sit and admire the views and rest awhile.”

“More seating would be a good idea, especially for the elderly and less fit.”

“More seating and picnic tables, for family enjoyment.”

(i) OTHER SUGGESTIONS

“Have mountain biking on a separate, single track.”

“I would like to see more, and better, buggy access to parks.”

“Reduce the vandalism.”

“Provide more car parks.”

“Have more security in the car parks, perhaps regular patrols that the public and offenders know about.”

“I would like to see future progress include more variety of track and new tracks in areas of the park to explore.”

7.9. PARK USERS EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The research participants were asked to look forward to the year 2020 and to describe what they would like the regional park experience to be.

The majority of respondents stated that they would ideally like the parks to remain the same as they are now, with no degradation of the environment. They expressed this in a variety of ways, such as follows:

e.g. *“I like the parks the way they are. They should be nurtured, not over-developed. My major hope for 2020 is that more people will be utilising the amazing parks that we already have, but appreciating them and helping to preserve them.”*

“My vision for 2020 is that the parks would stay the same, but there is more promotion of the conservation theme.”

“My view would be for the present facilities not to deteriorate and that the parks are not commercialised.”

“In 20 years time the parks should be as they are today, so that our children and their children can enjoy what we see today.”

“The parks are to remain the same, undeveloped and haven’t been turned into real estate.”

“That the parks are still there, as they are today, free from commercial and suburban intrusion.”

“The parks shouldn’t become another man-altered commodity that try to entice people in with modern technologies. Otherwise, trees will have to be cut down to accommodate the attractions.”

“My view of the parks in 2020 is much the same as it is today. We have an excellent resource in our regional parks as they are now and we need to keep them that way. It would be a silly idea to try and develop them or change them.”

However, several of the research participants felt that by 2020 the existing parks should be extended. In other words, more land and greater expanses of the present boundaries should be established into regional parks. Examples of their comments included:

e.g. *“That the parks are extended, where practicable, with the gradual development of native bush and further green corridors for bird life.”*

“More native trees, less gorse, meaning the regional park concept is extended.”

“That the current regional parks become bigger, not smaller.”

“That the parks are extended, with new areas to walk and explore.”

“Maybe that some of the city central parks, like Otari-Wilton or Central Park in Brooklyn, are turned into regional parks. That the concept of regional parks is extended.”

“By 2020 I would hope that the planting and nourishing of our green areas, in order to tackle climate change and decrease our eco-footprint, would be fully underway and prospering. This means more trees in the parks, cleaner air and cleaner rivers, creeks and streams. I would also like to see the regional parks expanded and definitely not reduced.”

Some respondents considered that education would play a greater role in their “ideal” regional park of 2020.

e.g. *“I would like to see more education in the parks. Guided education tours, to make the public more aware of the parks and ensure the parks are protected into the future.”*

“More educational activity, e.g. conducted tours, lectures etc.”

“More promotion and education for the parks generally, to encourage more people to use them in a responsible way and to appreciate them.”

“It would be good if the regional park experience of 2020 could include an on-going educational programme. That is the way to ensure that the kids of today appreciate the parks and cherish them for the future. At the same time, there is a lot that we as adults can also learn about the parks and what they contain.”

Other respondents suggested that they would like to see the regional parks of 2020 become family orientated. This was expressed in comments such as:

e.g. *“It is important that the environment is not compromised, but families and children are catered for in some ways. Getting the young kids into the park is important and I also feel that parks and families go together. They are a healthy combination for building a healthy community.”*

“My dream would be that the parks become even more family orientated than they are now, so that families can really enjoy them. I am not sure how it would be done, but it probably involves play areas, picnic spots, areas for adventure and education.”

“More picnic facilities for family enjoyment of the parks.”

Finally, there were several other suggestions as to what might be incorporated into the regional parks of 2020. These included:

e.g. *“A bird corridor in each of the parks, linking with other areas.”*

“More bird life.”

“More control – from pests and vandals. Also protection from encroachment and commercial development such as wind farms and real estate.”

“Monitored car parks.”

“A bus service to take people to/from the park, so that we are less reliant on cars.”

“More seats, better signage, more rubbish bins, upgraded toilets.”

“All parks would allow dogs and have areas where dogs can be let off the lead.”

“Park rangers would be more visible which would help safety and security.”

“There would continue to be free access to the parks. You wouldn’t incur a charge for going there.”

7.10. REACTION TO POTENTIAL CHANGES/IDEAS PUT FORWARD FOR CONSIDERATION

The research participants were next shown a list of potential changes or ideas that could be considered for enhancing the regional parks. The list of fifteen items can be found at the back of the discussion guide, attached as section 8 of this report.

Respondents were requested to consider each of the items and indicate whether it offered major appeal, minor appeal, or no appeal at all to them personally.

We have analysed this question into the three park user segments, which are now summarised below.

(a) CURRENT FREQUENT USERS OF THE MAJOR REGIONAL PARKS

The potential changes or ideas that held the strongest level of ‘*major appeal*’ to this group of park users were as follows:

- Trails for specific user groups, e.g. 4WD drive, mountain bikes, horse trails
- More “*volunteer days*” at the parks to work on environment or heritage restoration
- Fencing and retiring gullies and/or farmland to revert to forest
- Creating new ways to experience historical, geological, or environmental features of the parks, such as better access, information, or related structures

The frequent park users also expressed a ‘*moderate*’ level of interest in:

- Education facilities
- Visitor centres
- “*Bookable space*” for community groups
- Playgrounds that blend with the surroundings

(b) OCCASIONAL USERS OF THE MAJOR REGIONAL PARKS

The items holding ‘*major appeal*’ for this group of park users were:

- Trails for specific user groups, e.g. 4WD drive, mountain bikes, horse trails
- Visitor centres
- Education facilities
- Playgrounds that blend with the surroundings
- More “*volunteer days*” at the parks to work on environment or heritage restoration
- Fencing and retiring gullies and/or farmland to revert to forest
- Creating new ways to experience historical, geological, or environmental features of the parks, such as better access, information, or related structures

The occasional park users expressed a ‘*moderate*’ level of interest in:

- “*Bookable space*” for community groups
- Audio equipment (for personal walk/guided tours)
- Guided tours
- Hirers or retailers of associated outdoor equipment, e.g. bikes, tents or clothing

(c) CURRENT NON-USERS OF THE MAJOR REGIONAL PARKS

This group of park users were not strongly attracted by any of the items/ideas presented on the list. The concepts in which some non-users expressed a ‘*minor*’ interest were:

- Facilities for dispensing food and drink, e.g. cafes, coffee carts
- Playgrounds that blend with the surroundings
- Hirers or retailers of associated outdoor equipment, e.g. bikes, tents or clothing

7.11. IS THERE A ROLE FOR COMMERCIALISATION OF PARK FACILITIES?

The concept of commercialisation in the regional parks was generally rejected by the great majority of park users. It evoked strong feelings of being counter-productive to their hopes and expectations of what regional parks should be like in 2020. For example:

“There is no role for commercialisation. The point of going to the parks is to get away from commercialisation.”

“I am dead against commercialisation. If commercialisation starts in one park, they’ll all be swept up in trying to make money. That will be at odds with what I envisage for 2020 – a natural environment that remains untouched.”

“Parks are parks and that is all they should be. They are there for the public to enjoy and to get away and relax. They should not be encroached by commercial operations and there should be no charge for using them.”

“Parks should be able to be enjoyed by all, regardless of their economic demographic. I think we should be striving to retain and enhance our natural environment, not compromise it with commercial activity.”

However, when the concept was explored at length in the focus group discussions, a majority of the participants did concede that there may be merit in allowing some degree of commercialisation. For example, food kiosks, information centres, etc stationed near car parks signal that someone is around. Therefore, it can add to the perceived safety of the area, less vandalism, etc.

Approximately 20% of the total research participants felt that some degree of commercialisation might be acceptable. However, most comments implied only a limited degree of commercialisation, as follows:

“I might accept commercialisation if it provides support for that park only, not another park. And it must not be latched onto by treasury or the bean counters as a money-maker for them. As I see it, a small amount might be okay, to deter overcrowding and to help fund maintenance.”

“I appreciate running parks is expensive. A small amount of commercialisation might be okay, because it could keep costs down to park users and make a contribution to the upkeep and running costs of the parks, but that is all.”

“I understand the need to pay a minimal amount for the upkeep of camp sites and facilities, but for anything else – no!”

“I don’t see commercialisation as a problem, if it is on a small scale. For instance, I wouldn’t have a problem with them asking organised groups to pay if they want to use a park for an organised event.”

“There is possibly a role for commercialisation, but it would need to be strictly controlled. The important thing would be to ensure that they don’t start charging for access to the parks.”

“At the most, the hiring of bikes and equipment might be okay. Anything else would be going to far.”

“A small café or drinks place might be alright, but you would need to ensure people would use it. There would be no point in having one in East Harbour, for example, where shops are nearby. But it might be okay at other ones, where there is not a service outlet nearby.”

“Only if it helps people with what they are doing in the park. For example, equipment supplies might be okay.”

“Commercialisation raises the thought of tourism for me. I don’t really know how I feel about it, but it maybe acceptable if it doesn’t compromise the locals’ use and enjoyment of the park.”

“I personally don’t agree with parks making money by urbanising the green environment. How about just asking for a small gold coin donation from every user?”

7.12. THINGS THAT GWRC SHOULD *NOT* DO WITH REGARD TO PARK DEVELOPMENT AND ENHANCEMENT

The majority of the research participants were able to identify something that they thought the GWRC should *not* do with regard to the management and development of the regional parks. In order of frequency of mention, these included:

- They should not introduce fees/charges for using the parks
- They should not allow motor bikes/cars/vehicles/petrol heads into the parks
- They should not become (too) commercialised/have commercial operations within the parks
- They should not become ‘*soft*’ on security and undesirable behaviour
- They should not cut down trees/move away from native flora
- They should not allow too much noise in the parks
- They should not let the parks get too overcrowded with visitors
- They should not reduce the maintenance/upkeep of the parks
- They should not install advertising hoardings
- They should not have tracks that are too PC or man-made. (“*We need safety, but don’t go too far. Otari-Wilton has made ramps for the disabled, which is great, but it is not for me.*”)

7.13. THE LEGACY THAT PEOPLE WANT TO LEAVE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

The research participants were asked to describe the legacy they want to leave for their children and grandchildren with regard to regional parks. Their replies were quite consistent and were made along the following lines:

e.g. *“The legacy I want to leave is one of no change to the natural environment that is there now.”*

“That future generations see what we see.”

“That future generations are able to enjoy the outdoors and have access in the same way I enjoy the parks now.”

“It is about leaving our environment in decent shape for our grandchildren – in pristine condition.”

“I want to leave a natural environment, with an historical reference point. In other words, the parks don’t change.”

“That our relatives of the future have the same experience that we have, plus improvement with the expansion of parks where possible.”

“The parks to be as natural as possible, with eradication of pests and the rejuvenation of bush and bird life.”

“A park that our children and grandchildren can enjoy for free, to get away from technology and stress.”

“That the parks still exist, free of charge, in the relatively unaltered state.”

“That kids can see in the future what we see today.”

“That the awesome range of parks remains. If anything is cut down, it needs to be replaced. We need to make sure to pick up litter etc. and cut back on the level of man-made footprint.”

“That the parks still exist and are still being maintained and preserved.”

“That future generations have the sort of resource we have enjoyed, with plans into the future. I hope that in 20 years, or even 100 years, we still leave wild places as wild places.”

7.14. CONCLUSION

The Stage One Qualitative Research has provided insight to the attitudes that park users in the greater Wellington region have toward their parks. In the main, users are satisfied with the current park experience and want to preserve what they have, for their own on-going use and for future generations.

The regional parks are used for a wide variety of activities, which need to be catered for in the on-going management of these resources.

Parks, in general, are seen to play an important role in the community and that is in providing '*escape*' or '*respite*' from city living and the pressures of everyday life.

The regional parks are differentiated from the city parks, in the minds of park users, as being '*larger*' or '*more expansive*', with important roles to play in the '*conservation*' of our natural environment and '*education*' of the public.

The Stage One project has provided a useful base for designing a more widespread survey (Stage Two). This can be used to quantify the public's attitudes and expectations among a broader base of the community, as well as to test possible options/directions that the GWRC may wish to consider.

Peter Glen Research's recommended approach to the Stage Two survey has been previously been outlined in the proposal document dated October 2008. The next task would be to develop the proposed questionnaire, in consultation with GWRC management, as well as agreeing sample size and target groups for the research.

8. THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

The following are the starting points for discussion:

1. What parks and green areas in the greater Wellington area have respondents visited in the past twelve months?
2. How frequently have they visited each park?
3. Why do they visit specific parks for specific activity/experiences?
4. Why do the research participants currently visit/not visit the regional parks and forests in the Greater Wellington area?
5. What role do parks (including regional and city parks) play in their lives?
6. How do they describe a regional park or forest? What is its role and function?
7. What experience do the research participants want from the regional parks and forests – now and in the future?
8. Do different parks fulfil different needs? Should they fulfil different needs in future?
9. How do they choose which park they will visit?
10. What are their major likes/dislikes of parks?
11. What suggestions do they have for improving, developing, or enhancing the park experience at the regional parks they visit?
12. Looking forward to the year 2020, what would they expect the regional park experience to be like? What are their hopes and dreams for the major regional parks? How would the parks of the future differ from today?
13. What do the research participants think of potential changes/ideas that the Greater Wellington Regional Council may put forward for consideration? (See list of initial ideas overleaf, to stimulate discussion). Would they have major appeal, minor appeal, or no appeal at all? And why?

14. How could these suggestions be improved or enhanced?
15. Is there a role for some commercialisation of park facilities? And how far should it be taken?
16. Does the size and “*mix*” of activity within a regional park influence the acceptance, or non-acceptance, of some commercialisation?
17. What should the Greater Wellington Regional Council *not* do with regard to park development and enhancement? What would deter residents of the greater Wellington region from using the regional parks?
18. Explore the concept of user conflicts and the relative importance of those you see versus those you hear about.
19. What legacy do people want to leave for their children and grandchildren, with regard to regional parks?
20. What is the *one* major change that the research participants would like to see made to the regional parks of the future?
21. Other relevant information that may emerge during the discussion.

POTENTIAL CHANGES/IDEAS FOR ENHANCING THE REGIONAL PARKS

Built facilities near park entrance, e.g.

- (a) Visitor Centres
- (b) Education Facilities, e.g. classrooms
- (c) Facilities for dispensing food and drink, e.g. cafes, coffee carts, seating
- (d) Accommodation

Recreational opportunities, e.g.

- (e) Golf Driving Ranges
- (f) Trails for specific user groups, e.g. 4wd, mountain bikes, horse trails
- (g) Playgrounds (that blend with the surroundings)
- (h) “*Bookable space*” for community groups to use, e.g. for picnics and events
- (i) Sports fields

Associated commercial services, e.g.

- (j) Guided tours
- (k) Audio equipment (for personal walk/guided tours)
- (l) Hirers or retailers of associated outdoor equipment, e.g. bikes, tents or clothing

Environment and/or heritage opportunities, e.g.

- (m) More “volunteer days” at the parks to work on environment or heritage restoration
- (n) Fencing and retiring gullies and/or farmland to revert to forest
- (o) Creating new ways to experience historical, geological, or environmental features of the parks, such as better access, information, or related structures