

## **Report 99.383**

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Report to the Landcare Committee  
from Geoff Cameron, Manager, Natural Forestry

### **Environmental Asset Plan**

#### **1. Purpose**

For the Committee to note the process to change from producing a Forest Working Plan to an Environmental Asset Plan, thereby bringing management of WRC environmental assets into line with the management of other assets.

#### **2. A Key Divisional Plank : Enhanced Asset Management**

As part of the Landcare Division's move towards enhanced asset management, the Regional Parks and Natural Forestry Asset Management Plan started last year. Phase I was reported in June 1998 (Report 98.237). It contained an Improvement Plan which guided subsequent work. During 1999 the process of defining environmental assets and charting their management history began.

An asset management plan has a number of advantages over a Forest Working Plan. In particular, the Asset Management Plan:

- defines each component of the park and forest environment as an asset.
- is specific about the level of service and a statement on the condition for each asset.
- links service levels, asset conditions and agreed management goals with approved budgets.
- includes a time commitment for each project as part of a performance indicator.
- enables a clear link between management processes and the management of
- places, in this case ecosystems.
- links to LTFS for the "priority" process.

Also, the Asset Management Plan has a clear timeframe that covers short-term activities and long-term goals. Thus it is a modern tool, compared with the outdated Forest Working Plan.

### 3. **A Forest Working Plan is not Required for Natural Forest**

A Forest Working Plan is required under Section 49 of the Waterboard Act 1972 for “forest operations” in areas set aside as “forestry areas”. Accordingly, a plantation-only forest working plan was prepared and sent to the Ministry of Forestry in July 1996.

To clarify the position for natural forests, Oakley Moran provided a legal opinion. This stated that because the Council’s natural forests

- (a) have no active “forestry operations”, either current or planned, and
- (b) the land in question has not been designated for “forestry purposes”

then a Forest Working Plan under the Waterboard Act is not required for those natural forests.

The view is now that the Council’s environmental assets would be better managed under an Asset Management Plan.

### 4. **Implementing the Regional Policy Statement**

The Environment Asset Plan will give effect to the Council’s commitment, written in the Ecosystems Chapter of the Regional Policy Statement, to manage its own lands in accordance those objectives and policies. The operations that flow from those policies are:

- animal pest control, particularly against possums, to restore or enhance ecosystems.
- the forest health programme, especially the formal forest health survey, derives from the policy to actively protect indigenous ecosystems.
- the forest assessment programme is to give an objective basis for the policies on improving the management of protected ecosystems, and also to enable the WRC to prioritise ecosystems for restoration and protection.
- the identification of special and rare ecosystems through the KNE assessment programme, and protected through pest management and forest health programmes.

The Environmental Asset Plan is viewed by Environment Division staff as an essential tool for implementing the Council’s own commitments to high quality ecosystem management under the Regional Policy Statement.

## 5. Current Levels of Service

The concept of stated and formal “levels of service” for particular assets is a new one in the management of environmental assets. The Environmental Asset Plan will have levels of service which define current activities in four areas:

- **Forest Protection.** Fire protection is defined through a Rural Fire Management Code of Practice. The systems in place against biological agent attack are defined in the Forest Disease Contingency Plan (Ministry of Forestry 1996). There is also an annual, formal forest health survey, backed up by informal surveys by staff.
- **Animal Pests.** Possum densities for Key Native Ecosystems and for other areas are prescribed in the *Council Lands Animal Pest Management Strategy* (1998). Permissible numbers for deer, goats or any other animal pest have not yet been defined.
- **Plant Pests.** The *Regional Plant Pest Strategy* describes the five pest plant categories and the plant species in each. This has not been converted into a Council Lands Strategy, so service levels are ill-defined. In fact, as knowledge of pest plants increases, there is a realisation that levels of service in many environmental assets have declined as the area of pest plant infestation has increased.
- **Ecosystems.** This currently relates to assessment work with formal 20m x 20m plots installed under the Natural Vegetation Survey system, administered by Landcare Research Limited. There are no service levels for revegetation, nor for levels of informal ecosystem monitoring and analysis.

## 6. Future Options

Options to do with the Biodiversity Strategy, Environmental Education and Communication Strategy, or changing the levels of service can all be discussed and costed through the LFTS process.

As the Natural Forestry department monitoring programme becomes more defined and sophisticated, a number of options, especially those to do with animal and plant pest control, will become apparent. The development of community relationships and volunteer activities do have the potential to reduce the cost implications of some of these options.

## 7. Next Steps

The delay in producing a plan was caused by evolving discussions on what the most appropriate format was, and how it would fit with plans for other assets.

The next step in the process is for Phase II of the draft Asset Management Plan, including the Environmental Asset Plan, to go through a senior management review, be submitted to Audit NZ, and then presented to the Committee in August.

## 8. **Communication**

This report is on reaching a stage mid-way through a process. There are no immediate impacts on the regional community. Accordingly there are no communication issues worthy of additional comment.

## 9. **Recommendations**

- (1) *That the report be received and its contents noted.*
- (2) *That the Committee note that the proposed Environmental Asset Plan will form Volume 4 of the Regional Parks and Natural Forests Asset Management Plan, which will be presented to the Committee in August.*

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