

Report to the Landcare and Rural Services and Wairarapa Committees
from Graham Laws, Landscape Architect, Regional Parks (Strategy & Marketing)
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Rewanui Bush

1. Purpose

To inform the Committees of the regional values of Rewanui Bush and outline possible protection methods.

2. Rewanui Suggested as a Regional Reserve

On 29 September 1999, Councillor Buchanan informed the Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee of an opportunity to purchase Rewanui Farm for a Regional Reserve (Report PE-99.556).

The Committee agreed that staff should:

- review the regional values associated with the proposed Rewanui Reserve;
- investigate the Regional Parks Land Purchase Reserve as a source of funds to purchase Rewanui; and
- report back to the Landcare and Rural Services and Wairarapa Committees.

3. Protecting Ecological Values on Private Land

Over the last year the Council has considered a number of requests to purchase land or assist with protecting ecological values on private land. Also, a 1999/2000 Annual Plan submission by the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust sought Council contributions to protect areas of bush covered by open space covenants.

The Regional Policy Statement identifies lowland forests as one of the ecosystems under threat, particularly in the Eastern Wairarapa Ecological District. Improving the protection of forest remnants would contribute to the active protection of some of the Region's ecosystems (Ecosystems Objective 5) and to the maintenance of regional biodiversity (Ecosystems Objective 4).

Approximately 40 percent of Key Native Ecosystems (KNE's) in the Wellington Region are on private land. These areas can play an important role in "halting the decline" of New Zealand's biodiversity; the goal in the Government's Biodiversity Strategy.

As a result of these reports and submissions the Council has indicated, through the Long-term Financial Strategy process, a desire to become involved in protecting areas of significant ecological value on private land. (Colin Wright's Divisional Manager's Report to Special Wairarapa and Rural Services Committee, February 2000).

4. **Opportunity to Protect Rewanui Bush**

Rewanui is one of the 49 Category One Recommended Areas for Protection identified by the Department of Conservation (DOC) in the Eastern Wairarapa.

Other forest remnants and wetland areas, equally deserving of protection, can be found throughout the Region.

Report PE-99.556 notes:

On a number of occasions in the past, staff had approached the Trusteesto gauge interest in the protection of some 60 hectares of remnant indigenous forest. The Trust farms the 280 hectare property, Rewanui, located at the junction of the Castlepoint and Riversdale Roads. A number of conditions relating to public access were unacceptable to the Trustees and the area is still subject to ongoing stock grazing.

Preliminary discussions indicated that the property might be available for purchase.

5. **Values of Rewanui**

Report PE-99.556 states that:

Rewanui Bush is a Category One area and is described as one of the best remaining examples of lowland forest in the ecological district with high species diversity, substantial numbers of kereru, and occupying a wide altitudinal range. The forested hillslopes present an impressive scenic aspect to a portion of the Masterton - Castlepoint Road.

Rewanui is ideally situated between Masterton and Castlepoint and offers considerable potential as a Regional Reserve. Adjacent to the farm is 3.6 hectares of Masterton District Council land. The site therefore has additional potential to develop picnic areas, bush walkways, and educational and recreational opportunities.

The balance of the farm contains a diversity of landforms that could either be sold to offset purchase costs, or alternatively developed for a range of uses such as an arboretum, soil conservation reserve or forestry demonstration site.

Any development of the area should involve joint discussions with Masterton District Council. Other key stakeholders are adjoining landowners, the Department of Conservation, and the Royal Forest and Bird Society.

5.1 Signature Values

Landcare and Wairarapa officers visited Rewanui Farm and undertook a *Signature* values assessment using information provided by Department of Conservation.

Staff use standard criteria to assess the regional **recreation, environmental and heritage** values of an area. This *Signature* identifies the area's character and significance and helps to determine the relative merits of different areas. *Signatures* are a broad classification only and not a substitute for detailed assessment of ecological, historical and other values for each land area; *Signatures* are "snap-shots in time" and do not define full future potential.

Rewanui Bush rates moderate for environmental values but only low for recreation and heritage¹. In the Wairarapa, the rivers, coastal areas, Haurangi, Rimutaka and Tararua Forest Parks offer greater recreation opportunities. The Rewanui *Signature* values are summarised in Table 1 (See Attachment 1).

Officers were surprised at the apparent discrepancy between the Department of Conservation assessment of the area and the *Signature*. However, the DOC Protected Natural Areas Programme surveys only focus on the environmental values of vegetation, animals and landscapes, whereas the environmental *Signature* assesses the local, regional or national significance of vegetation, water, animals, geology and landforms. Therefore, the environmental segment of the *Signature* covers a wider range of values, and it is in these additional areas that Rewanui did not score as well.

6. Mechanisms for Protecting Ecological Values

There are several ways that the Regional Council can help protect ecological values:

- **purchase** - for Regional Park, Soil Conservation, or Flood Protection;
- **covenants** - Crown or Queen Elizabeth II National Trust; or
- **partnerships** - with Territorial Authorities, Department of Conservation, or other agencies such as the Royal Forest and Bird Society or the New Zealand Native Forests Restoration Trust.

¹ [Officers are not aware of significant iwi values or issues at Rewanui. Iwi representatives have been contacted but have not yet reported back or identified any concerns.]

6.1 **Purchase for Regional Park**

There is currently no Regional Park in the Wairarapa. Rewanui would potentially offer a similar experience to Battle Hill Farm Forest Park, but it is accessible to Wairarapa residents and contains a different lowland forest type. Rewanui is located on the major route to Wairarapa beaches at Castlepoint and Riversdale.

Rewanui is predominantly of local interest although the environmental values have moderate regional significance. While it has a good example of lowland forest, Rewanui lacks other significant visitor attractions and does not have the wider values of a Regional Park. (Battle Hill, for example, has New Zealand Wars history and links to other Council land for recreation opportunities).

Officers consider Rewanui would not meet the criteria in the Local Government Act for purchasing land for a Regional Park. (See Attachment 1.)

6.2 **Purchase for Soil Conservation**

Rewanui has one of the best remaining examples of lowland forest in the ecological district and contains a diversity of landforms that could be developed for a range of uses such as an arboretum, soil conservation reserve or forestry demonstration site. However, the land has only moderate soil erosion potential and would not rank high for soil conservation objectives.

6.3 **Purchase for Flood Protection**

Rewanui is not located near a major river and does not have significant value for riparian planting or flood protection purposes.

6.4 **Covenanteeing**

Officers from the Environment and Wairarapa Divisions are considering the issue of Council funding for ecological enhancements on private land, and assisting landowners with the costs of covenanteeing, as a way of implementing the ecosystem policies of the Regional Policy Statement. This has been discussed with Councillors through the Long-term Financial Strategy deliberations.

The forest remnant at Rewanui is worthy of protection by open space covenant through the Department of Conservation (Crown) or Queen Elizabeth II National Trust. Although past approaches by staff indicated that the current owners did not favour this option, it is an appropriate protection mechanism for Rewanui Bush and could be pursued further.

6.5 **Partnerships**

Rewanui's location between Masterton and Castlepoint and proximity to Masterton District Council land offers potential for development as a jointly managed reserve with picnic areas, bush walkways, and educational and recreational opportunities. Rewanui has values predominantly of local significance although the environmental values have moderate regional significance. Therefore, it would be appropriate for the Masterton District Council or the Regional Council to administer the area.

Development of the area would require discussions with potential stakeholders: Masterton District Council, iwi, adjoining landowners, the Department of Conservation, New Zealand Native Forests Restoration Trust, and the Royal Forest and Bird Society. Ongoing funding issues would also need discussion between all parties.

There may be local interest to develop volunteer programmes, (e.g., for pest plant control and revegetation of gullies), tapping into the adjacent community to assist in the management and maintenance of the area.

There may also be potential to develop education programmes (environmental studies or forestry) at the farm, as it is easily accessible from Masterton. However, this would need to be considered within the wider development of the Environmental Education and Communication Strategy, which is still in its early implementation phases. Also, other existing education facilities would need to be considered to avoid duplication. The proposed Wairarapa Wetland Park, at Lake Wairarapa, is likely to provide greater (although different) environmental education opportunities to meet Council's objectives in this area.

7. **Regional Parks Land Purchase Reserve Fund**

The Regional Parks Land Purchase Reserve Fund was identified as a possible means of acquiring the property. Although the Fund could be used for land purchase outside the regional parks, the local authorities that contributed to the Fund would need to be consulted. Officers consider that Rewanui does not have high enough values to be considered for Regional Park status. The Fund was originally for purchases within the contributing constituent authorities' areas (Wellington Metropolitan), so it is unlikely they would support this type of purchase in Wairarapa.

8. **Conclusions**

The assessment of values indicates that Rewanui Bush does not meet the criteria for Regional Park status. It appears that the options of covenanting or partnerships have merit in light of the Council's desire to protect significant areas of lowland forest for biodiversity reasons. The Environment and Wairarapa Divisions are currently developing a policy to enable this to occur. Rewanui should be re-considered through this policy in the new financial year.

9. **Communications**

There are no communications/public relations opportunities resulting from this report.

10. **Recommendations**

That the Committees:

- (1) *Receive the report and note the recreation, environmental and heritage Signature Values of Rewanui Bush.*

- (2) *Agree that the Regional Parks Land Purchase Reserve Fund should not be used to acquire the property.*
- (3) *Ask officers from the Wairarapa and Environment Divisions to investigate alternative options, such as covenanting or partnerships, to protect the environmental values of the bush on the Rewanui property.*

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Attachment 1: Supplementary Information on Rewanui Bush

