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Committee Landcare
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Policy

Environmental asset management plan performance indicator

1. Purpose

To report to the Committee on progress on the Environmental Asset Management Plan (EAMP) during the 2006/07 financial year in order to meet the performance indicator requirements of the Annual Plan.

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. Annual Plan performance indicator

The 2006/07 Annual Plan contains the following performance indicator:

Environmental assets and settings within the regional parks and forests will be managed in accordance with the Parks and Forests Environmental Asset Management Plan service levels, within a budget of \$1,066,000.

A report on compliance with the standards in the Environmental Asset Management Plan will be approved by Council.

The performance indicator was **achieved** this year at a cost of **\$860,000**.

4. Progress of the environmental asset management plan

Ecosystem health in the parks and forests has continued to improve. All indicators are now showing that the Environmental Asset Management Plan has been successful in raising the ecological health of these areas. The continued application of pest control has meant that pest numbers have fallen and the monitoring results are showing increases in indigenous seedling abundance and native fauna. Tree health has also improved and reports from

aerial surveys of the forests indicate that the canopies are in very good condition. Possums, goats, pigs, rabbits, deer, and pest plants have been controlled according to the highest priority needs identified through monitoring work. Rat numbers have been lowered in the two mainland island sites and these areas are making a major contribution to the biodiversity gains on Council land.

Monitoring work and surveys have continued to provide useful information for the environmental management of Council lands and about the success of control operations. Water Group provides funding for the environmental programme through a contract with Parks. All Water Group contract specifications have been met. The permanent plot re-measurements were audited by Landcare Research, who assessed the work to have been completed to a high standard. Pest plants are controlled on Council land according to the pest plant priorities identified through weed mapping and strategic analysis – many pest plant infestations have now been completely removed from Council lands. Maintaining environmental health is an ongoing project, but improvements have been achieved.

5. Key aspects of the work programme achieved

The following is a summary of the key aspects of the work programme that were achieved during the year.

5.1 Monitoring

- Post-operational possum monitoring was completed in Korokoro Valley in Belmont Regional Park;
- Pre-operational possum monitoring was completed in Dry Creek in Belmont Regional Park and in Akatarawa West in the Akatarawa Forest;
- An aerial survey for introduced insects and fungi was undertaken for the Hutt and Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Areas, as well as Akatarawa and Pakuratahi Forest and East Harbour Regional Park;
- Permanent vegetation plots were re-measured in the Hutt Water Collection Area, Belmont Regional Park and Battle Hill Farm Forest Park;
- Bird transect surveys were completed in the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area, Kaitoke Regional Park, Queen Elizabeth Park, Battle Hill Farm Forest Park, Belmont Regional Park and the Hutt Water Collection Area;
- Hinau fruitfall plots were measured in the Hutt and Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Areas;
- Tawa fruitfall plots were measured in the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area and East Harbour Regional Park;
- Kereru counts were completed in Kaitoke Regional Park;
- Members of the *Ornithological Society of New Zealand* have continued to complete monthly bird monitoring in the Lakes Block of East Harbour Regional Park;

- *MIRO* volunteers completed their annual bird monitoring in the Northern Block of East Harbour Regional Park;
- Photo-points were re-photographed and assessed in the Hutt and Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Areas;
- Rodent and mustelid numbers were monitored in the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area, the Northern Block in East Harbour Regional Park, Battle Hill Farm Forest Park remnant and the dunes of Queen Elizabeth Park;
- Ungulate browse plots were re-measured in Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area;
- Monthly flowering and fruiting recording was completed in selected parks;
- Fish research projects were continued in Queen Elizabeth Park and East Harbour Regional Park;
- A *Rhadbothamnus solandri* (rare plant) survey was completed in Battle Hill Farm Forest Park;
- Wetlands on Council land were monitored as part of a national wetland project.

5.2 Pest Animal and Pest Plant Control

5.2.1 East Harbour Regional Park

- Bait stations in the 300ha “mainland island” grid were refilled on a two-monthly basis. Small extensions to the area were also made. Monitoring has shown that rat numbers have been falling over time;
- *MIRO* volunteers have continued to maintain possum control in the Northern Block. Possum monitoring has shown that possum numbers are at 2% residual trap catch (RTC), well below the 5% RTC target. This is a great effort on the part of the volunteers;
- Twenty goats were culled from the Lakes Block. Four pigs were shot in the Northern Block;
- Two deer were shot during the “Roar” balloted hunt;
- Major control programmes for climbing asparagus and wilding pines were continued in the Northern Block. Other pest plant infestations targeted were; old man’s beard, banana passionfruit, wild ginger, Japanese honeysuckle, bomarea, ivy and smaller infestations of seven other species. Checks were made of infestation sites of five species that have now been controlled

5.2.2 Belmont Regional Park

- In Korokoroko Valley, a November post-operational possum monitor showed numbers to be at 9.7% RTC. Bait stations were re-filled at three-monthly intervals in this ongoing possum control operation;

- Bait stations have also been re-filled every three months in the ongoing possum control operation in Speedy's Reserve;
- A bait station network was established at Dry Creek and work is well underway to lower the possums from the 13.3% RTC, as monitored in November. These bait stations will be maintained on an ongoing basis as for the other areas once the initial operation is completed;
- Volunteers from the *Friends of Maara Roa* group have continued to maintain bait stations in Cannon's Creek bush remnant in Belmont Regional Park;
- Old man's beard, German ivy, hops, Japanese honeysuckle, cathedral bells, periwinkle, flowering cherry and brush wattle were controlled in Korokoro Valley. Checks were made of past sites of seven species that have now been eradicated;
- Pest plants controlled in Speedy's Reserve were old man's beard, holly, wild ginger and Japanese honeysuckle. Very little re-infestation of climbing asparagus was found following the control of this species by the pest plant team last year;
- Tradescantia, old man's beard, Japanese honeysuckle and German ivy infestations were controlled at Dry Creek. Checks were made of infestation sites of eight species that have now been controlled;
- In Cannon's Creek, control of old man's beard, Japanese honeysuckle and Japanese wineberry was completed.

5.2.3 Kaitoke Regional Park

- Sixteen goats and one pig were culled in a professional hunting operation, making use of the Judas goats present in the area;
- Hawthorn, broom, sycamore, blackberry, jasmine and Himalayan honeysuckle were controlled in the Te Marua bush remnants. At Pakuratahi Forks, checks were made of past sites where species have been controlled in the past.

5.2.4 Battle Hill Farm Forest Park

- New baits were trialled in the existing bait stations in the bush remnant, as part of the ongoing possum and mustelid control;
- Major holly control work was completed by the pest plant team, while tradescantia, club moss, German ivy and convolvulus infestations were also controlled in the bush remnant.

5.2.5 Queen Elizabeth Park

- Possum control operations were continued in both the bush remnant and the dune remnants;
- Rabbits were controlled by night shooting. Fumigating of burrows was also trialled as a control method;

- Workers in the park remained vigilant in scouting for any seedlings of boneseed, Italian buckthorn and boxthorn infestations that have now been removed from the dunes. Continuing control of pampas, gorse, karo, elderberry, Cape ivy, tradescantia and German ivy infestations was completed;
- Blackberry, willow and Japanese honeysuckle infestations were controlled in the Poplar Avenue wetland.

5.2.6 Akatarawa Forest

- Preparation for the 1080 possum control operation planned for the whole Akatarawa block in July 2007 was completed. A great deal of effort went into preparing for this operation. The pre-operational monitor for Akatarawa showed numbers to be at 10.4%RTC;
- A ground control possum control operation was initiated in the Cannon Point area in order to keep the boundary of the 1080 operation away from suburban properties;
- A major goat control operation in Akatarawa Forest resulted in the culling of 113 goats, seven pigs and one deer;
- Old man's beard, hydrangea, buddleia, Japanese honeysuckle, cotoneaster, hops, club moss, Montpellier broom, tradescantia, Darwin's barberry, sycamore, and elaeagnus infestations were controlled. Checks were made of infestation sites of nine species that have now been controlled in this forest.

5.2.7 Pakuratahi Forest

- An intensive goat hunt was completed in Pakuratahi. A total of 128 goats, one deer and eight pigs were culled;
- Volunteers are maintaining a trap network that was established in Tunnel Gully to keep possums at low levels in this important ecological area;
- Pest plant infestations targeted were; holly, ivy, Mexican daisy, eleagnus, periwinkle, buddleia, wilding pine and old man's beard. Checks were made of infestations of 12 species previously controlled.

5.2.8 Wainuiomata/Orongorongo Water Collection Area

- Thirty-nine goats, three deer and 11 pigs were culled in professional vertebrate control operations. The Judas goat control programme has continued to work well here, but there is ongoing re-infestation in the Orongorongo catchment from the eastern and southern boundaries;
- Three deer, two goats and four pigs were culled during the "Roar" recreational hunting ballot;

- Buddleia plants have been removed from the Wainuiomata catchment;
- Further progress was made in the control of pest plants in the Wainuiomata Recreation Area. Ivy, holly, buddleia, Japanese honeysuckle, barberry, sycamore and tradescantia were targeted, while checks were made on eight species and 2 dumpsite areas previously controlled.

5.2.9 Hutt Water collection Area

- Thirteen goats, two pigs and six deer were culled professionally in the Western Hutt and Judas goats placed in the area.

5.3 Mainland Island Projects

The Wainuiomata Mainland Island is going well. The yearly operational plan, as developed from the strategic plan was completed for 2006/2007. The work involved:

- boundary bait station/trap servicing every month;
- mainland island core bait station/trap checks every two months;
- rodent/mustelid monitoring every four months;
- a major ungulate control operation and two Judas goat checks, with winter pig hunting;
- stoat trapping on boundary and main ridges;
- buddleia control;
- bird monitoring and fruitfall plot measurements

Possum numbers have been kept low (1.7%RTC, as measured in September), while rats varied between 2 and 19% tracking rate in the intensive control area. Thirty one pigs and ten deer were culled within the core site. Bird count assessments did not show any differences between the mainland island site and the non-treatment site as yet. Other Council staff including the Water Group, Biosecurity and Environment are also involved in this project. Biosecurity provides staff time and technical expertise.

In East Harbour Regional Park, the 300ha intensive control site has been underway since June 2006. Greater Wellington are working on this project in cooperation with the care-group *MIRO*. Eight bait fills were completed during the year and rodent/mustelid tracking was monitored on a quarterly basis. Rat numbers have been slowly falling. *MIRO* are hoping to release robins in the area in 2009.

5.4 Other Environmental Work

A restoration plan for the Lakes Block in East Harbour Regional Park was completed. This plan has identified planting areas and species to be used to aid the indigenous recovery of the area.

The vegetation mapping project of plant communities on Council land that began last year was continued. The Queen Elizabeth Park vegetation map was completed and digitised onto GIS. The vegetation mapping will take a number

of years to complete, but will greatly assist our knowledge of the ecosystems we manage.

Assessments of ecological areas within the parks and forests were also completed. The Waitangirua Farm bush remnants were mapped, while assessments were also made in Pakuratahi and Akatarawa Forests as a result of development proposals.

5.5 Permits

Twenty-one natural use permits were processed for the parks and forests. Seventeen of these were low impact, e.g. research permits or small amounts of material being collected, while four were high impact, e.g. collection permits for nurseries. There were 318 hunting permits were issued during the financial year. These permits covered recreational hunting in the Hutt Water Collection Area, Kaitoke Regional Park and Akatarawa and Pakuratahi Forests.

5.6 Fire Protection

One of the predominant threats to a balanced native vegetative cover is fire. Any fire will probably result in the destruction of vegetation cover over the burnt area.

Staff were not required to attend any fires this year. The fire risk in the Hutt Valley and the Kapiti Coast was low until January, but was ranked as 'high' from February onwards. Fire training exercises have been held during the year, so that we maintain a team who have met the minimum requirements needed to fight fires and are ready to assist the Rural Fire Authority with its fire fighting commitments.

6. Where to from here?

During the 2007/08 year, we will continue to implement the EAMP by:

- Completing programmed pest control operations using the most effective techniques;
- Continuing to work towards an integrated program of pest control in high ecological value areas on Council land;
- Implementing the Mainland Island pest control programs in selected sites in East Harbour and Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water collection area;
- Exchanging knowledge and ideas with other agencies, such as the Department of Conservation, Territorial Authorities, Landcare Research and the Coastal Dune Vegetation Network;
- Continuing to work with the community;

7. Communication

This report is part of the verification process for meeting Annual Plan performance indicators.

8. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. *receives the report.*
2. *notes the contents of the report.*

Report prepared by:

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