

Report 14.341
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Committee Council
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Parks Network Plan Amendment

1. Purpose

To approve minor amendments to the Greater Wellington Regional Council Parks Network Plan 2011.

2. Background

GWRC has tendered its 60 year forestry cutting rights of its Wairarapa and Metro forestry blocks. The winning tender, Resource Management Service LLC was announced on 15 May 2014. The new management of exotic forest on GWRC land needs to be recognised in the GWRC Parks Network Plan (PNP).

The report also considers how areas of exotic trees that are no longer considered viable to harvest (and therefore not included in the forestry cutting rights contract) are to be managed.

Activities ancillary to forestry are also considered, particularly quarrying, and how this is best managed through the PNP.

3. Consideration by Committee

The Strategy and Policy Committee considered the proposed amendments (**Report 14.296** refers) at its meeting on 17 June 2014 and recommended the proposed Parks Network Plan amendments to Council for approval.

4. Current provision for forestry in the Parks Network Plan

The PNP guides the use and development of GWRC park network. It refers to farming and plantation forestry in the guiding principles and is provided for in general policies for land management as well as specific park policies.

Principle 3 states that forestry will be undertaken where it contributes to integrated catchment management, maintains landscape settings, provides access for recreational activities and follows best practice principles. This is further detailed in Policy 36 and 38. It also notes that the method to achieve the outcomes and policies is through a sustainable forestry management plan.

Within the Akatarawa Forest chapter, it is noted that the PNP does not prescribe forestry operations or harvesting as these are covered by operational plans for Greater Wellington's production forestry (pg. 35).

4.1 Forestry cutting rights

The sale of forestry cutting rights means the responsibility for managing the effects of harvesting will be with the contractor rather than the landowner (Greater Wellington). Within the forestry cutting rights contract it states that the contractor must carry out their operations in accordance with plantation forestry best environmental practice and take reasonable steps to conserve and protect fish and wildlife in accordance with standard forest industry practice in NZ and the PNP.

The forestry cutting rights require the contractor to prepare operation and harvest plans and reports (which include a 5 year harvest plan, annual cutting plan and annual report). These effectively replace the GWRC forestry operational plans. GWRC has the right to review the contractors operations though the approval of the 5 year harvest plans and annual cutting plan.

The right to review provides an opportunity to assess the contractor's compliance with their obligations, pursuant to the cutting rights. This is also the vehicle to ensure that the PNP outcomes and policies for forestry are being met.

It is therefore recommended that the PNP is updated to correctly reference the new plantation forestry management framework.

4.2 Ancillary activities associated with forestry

The PNP notes that the methods to achieve the principles and policies related to forestry are contained in the sustainable forestry management plan (and actioned through operational forestry plans). In the current wording of the PNP it is not clear if the provision for established plantation forestry as an activity includes ancillary activities such as roads, skids (i.e. a log path created to remove trees from a hilly forest) and quarries.

In practice these ancillary activities are a necessary part of any forestry harvest operation. To allow for the cutting of trees but no associated roading or roading maintenance (by using rock from quarries) would be incongruous – and render forestry inoperable. The new forestry cutting rights contract allows the holder to carry out ancillary activities as reasonably required to exercise their forestry cutting rights.

It is therefore recommended that the PNP be updated to clarify that ancillary activities are included within forestry operations. This would include removing references to outdated operational plans and providing an explanation of the appropriate ancillary activities.

3.3 Mining and Quarries

Access roads and skid sites are necessary forestry harvest infrastructure. Once established, forestry roads are maintained for forestry, firefighting and recreation purposes. Construction and maintenance of these roads requires rock

or gravel and where this material is available on-site (from a borrow pit or quarry) it is desirable for contractors to utilise this and avoid the costs, time and disturbance involved in carting material from off-site.

At the time of tendering the forestry rights, on site quarries were present at Puketiro [Battle Hill], Pakuratahi and Valley View Forests [Akatarawa]. GWRC decommissioned the 'Woolshed Road' quarry prior to the rights being let and is acquiring retrospective resource consent for 'Barry's Quarry'. The forestry rights give the holder the right to quarry, remove and use material from established sources (subject to obtaining any required consent) for the sole purpose of construction and maintenance (clause 1.1.2). Provision is also made for GWRC to continue to win rock from the quarries for the roads not included in the forestry rights.

These established quarries are not recognised in the PNP. It provides for forestry activities but has a general prohibition on mining, which is not distinguished from quarrying. Quarrying has existed in the parks for many years, related to forestry and recreational activity and there was no intention in the PNP to prohibit this activity. This requires an amendment to the PNP to clarify that quarrying is a restricted activity (separate to mining), and that an application for a new quarry would be assessed on a case-by-case basis against the relevant principles and policies of the plan.

5. Pakuratahi Forest small blocks

Some plantation forestry blocks adjacent to the Rimutaka rail formation have not been included in the forestry rights contract because of access or logging difficulties.

The PNP management focus for Pakuratahi Forest is primarily to ensure a safe and healthy future water supply and secondly to protect native forests, preserve heritage features, manage production forestry and provide a range of recreational opportunities. Specific park policy for plantation blocks adjacent the Rimutaka rail formation (a registered historic area) is:

- when replanting exotic forestry to leave a 40m setback adjacent railway formation,
- to establish indigenous vegetation buffer zones along the rail trail; and
- for exotic trees to be retained where they are more effective at providing slope stability than indigenous vegetation (6.6.5(c)).

Guided by the principles, objectives and policies of the PNP, the remaining unviable production forestry would be retained where it provides another important function (e.g. erosion control), or replaced over time as is safe and practicable with indigenous vegetation. No amendment is necessary to the PNP.

6. Process

The bulk of GWRC Metro plantation forestry is on fee-simple land held for the purpose of water supply, forestry and recreation, and forms part of the overall parks network. The PNP is the current GWRC policy for the management of this land.

Review of the PNP may be initiated in response to new management issues, problems or activities that are not addressed in the plan but for which policy is required and is to follow the procedure set out in Section 41 of the Reserves Act 1977. This is referred to in Policy 100(b) and 101 of the PNP.

The Reserves Act 1977 requires the administering body to keep management plans under continuous review, adapting to changing circumstance and increased knowledge (sec 41(4)). If the administering body considers the change is not a comprehensive review, it may, if it thinks fit, chose to not publicly notify of the change (sec 41(9)).

The intent of the amendments outlined in this report is to recognise a new management regime for GWRC commercial forestry and to ensure alignment between forestry operations in regional parks and parks policy. This amendment ensures that Council retains the ability to consider options for the use and development within parks, and does not result in significant change to activities already established in the parks.

On this basis that these amendments are minor, officers consider that public notification would not be required. If the Council were to deem it necessary to publicly notify these proposed amendments then a notification period in which submissions could be received and a hearing would be required.

7. The decision-making process and significance

The matters requiring decision in this report have been considered by officers against the requirements of Part 6 of the Local Government Act 2002 (the Act).

7.1 Significance of the decision

Officers have considered the significance of the matter, taking into account the Council's significance policy and decision-making guidelines. Officers recommend that the matter be considered to have low significance.

The recommended amendments to the Greater Wellington Parks Network Plan are not considered significant to require public consultation under the Reserves Act 1977.

8. Communication

Amendments made to the Parks Network Plan will be updated on the GWRC website and the outcome of this decision, and sent to the relevant parties.

9. Recommendations

That the Council:

- 1. Receives the report.*
- 2. Notes the content of the report.*
- 3. Agrees the change does not involve a comprehensive review to the Parks Network Plan.*

4. *Resolves to amend the Parks Network Plan as set out in Attachment 1 to reflect the change in forestry cutting rights and to clarify the ancillary activities associated with forestry.*
5. *Notes that these amendments will be updated within the electronic version of the Parks Network Plan on the GWRC website and sent to interested parties.*

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Attachment 1: Recommended changes to the Parks Network Plan.