**Review of Regional Parks Management Plan**

**Issues to consider by Sandra Coney, 12 October 2020**

The Regional Parks Management Plan (RPMP)

<https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/plans-projects-policies-reports-bylaws/our-plans-strategies/topic-based-plans-strategies/parks-sports-outdoor-plans/Documents/regional-parks-management-plan.pdf>

is being reviewed and the public and stakeholders are being consulted. The RPMP is a statutory plan developed under the Reserves Act 1977. The current plan was adopted by the Auckland Regional Council in 2010 and then passed on to Auckland Council.

In the first stage of the review, the Council is asking for feedback on what is important for the RPMP to cover. Once this is received, they will draft a plan which will go out for a second round of submissions.

**The deadline for comments on this phase is 26 October 2020.**

A draft RPMP will be released for comment in July/August 2021.

Sandra Coney chaired the last review and has provided a commentary to guide people taking part in this review. What you are reading is a condensed version with just the recommendations. For the full version contact Sandra at s\_coney@xtra.co.nz.

Feel free to lift recommendations and use them in your own submissions. This commentary is written with the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park in mind. As the largest regional park (17,000 ha), the oldest regional park, the foundational park of the regional parks’ network, and as it is close to the most populated part of the Auckland region, the Waitakere Ranges parkland deserves special attention and faces particular challenges from kauri dieback and over-use.

The existing RPMP sections on the Waitakere Ranges followed extensive consultation about the future of the Ranges. It is critical that the new RPMP does not deviate significantly from the values and management focus that were established in the existing plan which set a benchmark of public interest and ownership, environmental and landscape protection, and did not promote tourism/commercialisation.

The review of the RPMP also raises issues to consider such as climate change, new forms of recreation and expanding commercial activity. There is a discussion document and a survey. These can be read in detail here:

<https://akhaveyoursay.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/regional-parks-management-plan>

**Recommendations**

**Kauri dieback**

* The review of the RPMP should revisit the direction of works to protect kauri in the park.
* The track upgrading should be embedded in a policy context that seeks to protect the values of the park, the natural features within it and the visitor experience.
* Any proposals to close tracks permanently should be reviewed as part of this RPMP review.
* The heritage and history of individual tracks should be part of such a review.

**Climate change**

* Replanting in regional parks should continue at the current pace, with specific areas kept in pasture for recreational purposes and to protect landscapes and cultural features. Replanting should only be in indigenous species, not exotics.
* Emissions can also be reduced by developing travel demand management so that people can access parks on public transport or shuttle buses.
* The policy of “pack in, pack out” for waste should be continued.

**Free parks**

* There should be no charge to enter regional parks. They should be free for informal use. They are owned by the public of Auckland.
* Revenue-generating activities should not be expanded in the Waitakere Ranges Regional Parkland to respect its heritage, and to not attract additional visitors because of existing pressures on use. Such activities should be located in under-used parks.

**Other new issues**

* E bikes and drones should not be allowed in the Waitakere Ranges Regional Parkland as it experiences high rainfall, the terrain would be damaged, and there would be conflicts with other users. Both the existing RPMP and the Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area Act emphasise protecting the naturalness of the Ranges and, specifically, the quiet.
* There is sufficient mobile phone connectivity for safety reasons and no extension of connectivity is necessary. In addition, there is value in having areas where the trappings of modern urban life are absent and people can connect directly with nature, not mediated through technology.

**RPMP visions etc**

* The regional parks network’s visions, park values, pressures and challenges and management principles should be retained in the revised RPMP.
* Regional parks should continue to be grouped according to the class system and managed according to that class.
* The entire Waitakere Ranges to remain a Class 1 park with the emphasis on wilderness and low-key appropriate recreation and minimal infrastructure.
* The Auckland Council will implement strategies to control visitor numbers in the Waitakeres and to disperse visitation. In particular, it will not market the Waitakere Ranges parkland, will hold concessions at current numbers, and will not develop specific visitor destination ‘skite sites’ such as selfie lookouts or bridges.
* The RPMP will retain the existing range of management tools, in particular running the parks by a ranger service.
* The naturalness of the Waitakere Ranges will be the priority for protection and management programmes will be directed to this end.
* A Farming Business Unit will be reinstated within the Regional Parks management.

**Activities**

* Maintain the prohibition on any form of cycling in the Waitakere Ranges to prevent damage to tracks and vegetation, spread of kauri dieback and to avoid conflict with walkers.
* Continue to prohibit off road use of vehicles and access to beaches except for emergency use and launching boats in designated places.
* Continue to allow horse riding only in designated places.
* Continue to provide for overnight stays in designated campgrounds, baches, lodges and at designated sites and parking areas.
* Continue to prohibit freedom camping.
* Continue to provide bach escapes as an opportunity to cater for the public at reasonable cost, run by Auckland Council (not commercialised).
* Continue to manage all commercial activities, activities that require a permanent presence, and those set out in 13.5.1.2 in the existing plan, as discretionary activities requiring approval. Continue to allow for notification and set a benchmark for notification, such as number of people involved.
* Continue to facilitate filming in regional parks but develop the code of conduct or protocol as outlined in 13.5.3.3 of the existing RPMP. Also develop an environmental framework for filming in conjunction with the Waitakere Ranges Local Board.
* Avoid high-impact and adventure tourism such as bungie jumping or canyoning and avoid sites that are scheduled or part of an Outstanding Natural Feature or Outstanding Natural Landscape in the Unitary Plan.
* Retain the policy on plaques and memorials.
* Retain the policy on prohibited activities. In particular continue to prohibit recreational hunting and set netting in the Waitakere Ranges Regional Parkland.

**Infrastructure**

* Continue to keep infrastructure to a minimum and do not locate in prominent positions such as cliff edges or on the foreshore.
* Do not formalise roads or parking by sealing, marking out or curbing and channelling.
* Tracks should minimise structures such as steps, boardwalks, seats, signs, and safety barriers, can be of variable standard along the length, should direct water away from track surfaces and minimise vegetation clearance.
* Manage risk by putting signs at the carparks and beginnings of tracks rather than at the hazard.
* Provide for a range of selected tracks for people with mobility issues. Ensure these tracks are not those which already suffer from congestion and limited space.

**Individual parks – Waitakere Ranges Regional Park**

* Maintain the existing vision for the Waitakere Ranges Regional Parkland.
* Council will assess and document how decisions impact on the heritage features of the WRHA act.
* The areas within the Waitakere Ranges parkland listed in 17.19.3 will continue to be managed as Special Management Zones. Whether these should be extended to limit other activities (in addition to sporting activities) will be assessed.
* At Wai O Kahu (Piha Valley including Kitekite Falls) prohibit sporting events or gatherings of any kind of more that 50 people, except in open grassy spaces (Byers Track and Piha Mill Camp).
* Assess whether these limits should be also be applied to filming, or other types of gatherings, except for education groups, conservation groups, community gatherings and similar.

**Anawhata**

* Maintain Anawhata as remote location and address visitor pressures around parkland and private land.

**Arataki**

* Continue to plan for the provision of a café at Arataki.
* Institute a shuttle bus service which could be linked to Beveridge Track/Exhibition Drive, and outer beach areas such as Piha.

**Cornwallis**

* Remove pines on Puponga Point
* Address weed incursions on Puponga Point.
* Develop and implement a pest animal and plant management plan for Cornwallis. Support Petrel Head community group.

**Hillary Trail**

* Hillary Trail will not undermine the wilderness focus of the parkland and a precautionary approach will continue to apply.
* There will be no commercialisation, packaged tours or concessions except for groups of young people on a development programme or transport to and from the trail.
* The trail will use existing tracks and infrastructure and will not be upgraded to Great Walk standard.
* Develop an operational plan for the Trail.

**Kakamatua**

* Urgently assess the impact on Kakamatua of being a dog off-leash area on kauri, the riparian margins of the Kakamatua Stream, and the coastal and estuarine habitats.
* Improve signage about dog control at Kakamatua.
* Improve removal of dog faeces at Kakamatua.
* Work with dog control to improve surveillance of Kakamatua to ensure dog rules are adhered to.

**Karekare**

* Continue prohibition on dogs in Whatipu Scientific Reserve.
* Control lupins and restore dune systems at Karekare.
* Maintain intensive protection of dotterel habitat at Karekare.

**Lake Wainamu**

* With adjoining land owners and community control terrestrial and acquatic pests and restore Lake Wainamu.
* Continue to prohibit motorised vehicles and watercraft from land and lake.

**Lion Rock**

* Clarify if it is intended to provide access to the top of Lion Rock, and if not, reinstall barriers. No infrastructure should be installed on Lion Rock to enable access.

**Little Huia**

* Assess the future of Project K lodge (Little Huia) and investigate opportunities for community use.

**Log Race Road/Taitomo**

* Urgently develop a plan for the maintenance and protection of the scheduled radar site at the end of Log Race Road with input from heritage specialists.
* Take steps to prevent people parking on the grassed areas at Log Race Road while maintaining access for rangers and the Marine Dept, Police etc.
* Retain the full extent of the existing Mercer Bay Loop Track. Do not build any additional tracks to lookouts.
* Address the informal usage of the cliff edge on the track for launching of paragliders by ensuring this is safe and does not damage vegetation.
* Restore the fire area on Mercer Bay Loop Track.
* Ensure the existing lookouts are safe but unobtrusive. Do not build lookouts for people taking selfies.
* Deter people making their way into cliff areas and informal routes to Mercer Bay.
* Do not allow any concessions on this site.

**North Piha**

* Urgently install public toilets in a discrete place at North Piha.
* Protect and restore the dunes at North Piha.
* Protect seabirds and shorebirds by deterring people from going near caves, rocks and vegetated areas where birds are nesting.
* Formalise the arrangement with the North Piha Water Supply.
* Ensure vehicles cannot access the dunes or beach at N Piha.
* Install interp about why dogs are prohibited at N Piha and work with dog control to enforce these rules.

**Parau**

* Develop and implement a pest plant control programmes especially for the Manchester Unity Block
* Investigate park linkages through Manchester Unity Block.

**Taitomo**

* Implement the actions in the Taitomo variation of the RPMP.
* Develop a link in the Hillary Trail from Mercer Bay Loop Track to Tasman Lookout Track that avoids visibility on the Gentle Annie landscape. Consult on this design.
* Consistent with the plan, locate the proposed Taitomo Track between The Gap and the “tennis courts” away from the edge of the Blowhole and therefore avoid the need for a fence.
* Do not install steps into the Blowhole and thus respect the wahi tapu.
* Restore previously burned areas at Taitomo as a priority with suitable (low flammable) native plants.
* Do not widen or upgrade Tasman Look Out Track, but continue regular maintenance.
* Protect grey-faced petrels and other birds and avoid disturbance.
* With dog control, enforce prohibition on dogs on this track and at The Gap and install explanatory interp at the beginning of Tasman Lookout Track.
* Investigate discrete dogs prohibited signs near Pakiti Rock for people accessing The Gap along the beach.
* Complete the Tasman Lookout project by carrying out pest plant control, low replanting, and removing temporary fencing.
* Restore areas on Tasman Lookout Track and at The Gap damaged by fires.

**Wai O Kahu (Piha Valley/Glen Esk/Kitekite Falls)**

* Manage the high visitor numbers at Wai O Kahu (Piha Valley/Glen Esk/Kitekite Falls) at this destination by developing a management plan to hold and reduce visitor numbers and arrivals by car.
* Remove the fence across Piha Mill Camp site and remove the signs prohibiting access by the public.
* Do not proceed with any bridges across Glen Esk Stream including the “selfie bridge”.
* Provide signage that people who do not wish to cross the Glen Esk Stream on foot, proceed to the lookout on Knutzen Track and return the same way.
* Do not develop any further parking areas on the historic heritage site of Piha Mill Camp.
* Continue to investigate a track from Sir Algernon Thomas Green to the bush-covered area he donated.
* Take steps to interpret and protect the eels in Piha Stream at Piha Mill Camp.

**Whatipu**

* Implement the conservation plan for the Whatipu scientific reserve, controlling pest plant, including gorse and alligator weed.

**General**

* Continue recreational use of Waitakere Ranges as set in 2010 plan.
* There will be a Waitakere Terrestrial Monitoring Programme to meet requirements of the WRHA Act.
* The Council will also undertake baseline and long-term monitoring of the social and environmental impacts of recreational activity on the park and regular reporting on the range, number and cumulative impacts of activities on the park.