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**RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES REVIEW
IN THE WELLINGTON CONSERVANCY**

- STAGE 1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH -

*Report prepared for the
Wellington Conservancy,
Department of Conservation*

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1. INTRODUCTION

DOC's Wellington Conservancy is currently planning a review of the recreational needs and opportunities relating to public conservation land under its jurisdiction, in order to guide the management of these facilities in the future.

The Wellington Conservancy covers the Kapiti, Wairarapa and Poneke areas. Major parks included in these areas are the Tararua Forest Park, Rimutaka Forest Park and Aorangi Forest Park, as well as smaller pockets of reserves that are spread throughout the region.

Also covered by the Wellington Conservancy are the Chatham Islands. However, it has been decided that they will not be included in the research, as client will run a separate process there.

Since 2004, recreation based management decisions in the Wellington Conservancy have largely been driven by the Recreation Opportunities Review (ROR) outcomes. The ROR process focused on management decisions around the network of existing visitor assets. Since that time there have been a number of significant changes in the Department's direction in this area (both nationally and at a Conservancy level), as well as in the wider recreation field.

These changes have included:

1. A new Strategic Direction for the Department, which includes:
 - “The overarching purpose of the Department is to increase the value that New Zealanders attribute to conservation. This leads to enhanced care of New Zealand's unique heritage for people to enjoy and benefit from”.
 - “The Department will actively promote outdoor recreation for New Zealanders, especially through fostering recreation, use, and enjoyment on conservation land”.
 - Supporting documentation suggests that the Department will re-examine how the recreation, use and enjoyment opportunities it provides meet the needs of different communities within New Zealand. This includes considering the values that families, youth and aging New Zealanders attach to outdoor experiences, the values and expectations of Maori and learning more about the recreation preferences of other communities in New Zealand.
2. Development of a new Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) for Wellington Conservancy, which could potentially affect recreation management direction due to public feedback and submissions received during the consultation process.

3. Changes in the type of outdoor-based recreation activities and demand for more access and new tracks, for example mountain biking, horse riding, 4 x 4, etc.
4. There is a shift in importance to the Department of (international) tourism.
5. There is an increase in population in the Wellington region and it is uncertain whether this has caused changes in demand for recreation activities.

As part of the review, client has decided to commission a research project among a cross-section of residents in the greater Wellington region, in order to assess the public's needs and wants with regard to recreation in public conservation land.

Peter Glen Research has, accordingly, been commissioned to undertake a two-stage research project, involving preliminary qualitative research, followed by a full-scale survey to identify the public's needs with regard to recreation in the parks and areas of public conservation land covered by the Wellington Conservancy. This report presents the results of the Stage 1 Qualitative Research.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

These were defined as follows:

- (a) To identify the type of active and passive activities people undertake in public conservation land and to identify people's requirements and the types of recreation facilities they desire.
- (b) To determine what the public perceive to be the strengths/weaknesses of public conservation land, with specific reference to recreational activity and the consideration of any changes in trends and opportunities.

3. TARGET GROUP FOR THE RESEARCH

It was decided that the research would be undertaken among a broad cross-section of users and potential users of the public conservation land that falls under the jurisdiction of DOC's Wellington Conservancy.

Previous research (conducted for Greater Wellington Regional Council) has revealed that users comprise two important groups: frequent users, who visit one or more parks/reserves at least monthly; and occasional users, who visit the parks/reserves less frequently.

The potential users of the parks and reserves are current non-users, who are either physically active and are likely to have visited other parks and green areas at least once a month, or who are not physically active and enjoy passive recreation like camping. Other non-users tend to be older, less active residents, many of whom have health and mobility issues.

4. METHOD

In order to gain a thorough insight to the needs and attitudes of park users and non-users, it was recommended that a two-stage research programme be used:

Stage 1: An in-depth qualitative review

Stage 2: A full-scale quantitative survey.

5. THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

5.1. PURPOSE

The in-depth qualitative study has been undertaken to enable:

- (a) The public's attitudes and needs/wants to be explored in greater detail than would be possible in a more structured quantitative survey.
- (b) Issues to be identified from a parks and reserves user and non-user perspective, not simply from the client and researcher's point-of-view.
- (c) Any possible new development ideas that emerge to be explored in-depth.
- (d) The questionnaire for the quantitative survey to be developed more efficiently (e.g. using pre-coded responses and rating scales) and thoroughly (e.g. by including all issues of importance that emerge).
- (e) Early feedback on the results that emerge, so that questioning can be included in the full-scale survey that will assist client decision-making.

5.2. METHOD

A total of 44 residents were recruited for this in-depth study, covering the following two park usership groups:

1. Frequent users of the public conservation land (i.e. visit one or more parks/reserves at least monthly) and occasional users of the public conservation land.
2. Potential users of the public conservation land (lapsed users for active and passive recreation activities, or never visited to undertake any type of activity).

A mix of focus group discussion and individual (or paired) interviews was recommended, with approximately half the respondents participating in each. The role of the focus groups was to enable participants to debate issues and build on the thoughts and ideas of others. The individual interviews have provided a broader spread of opinion.

Members of the first usership group listed above, were recruited by representatives of Peter Glen Research, from within public conservation land. A spread of entry/exit points were selected for the recruitment in discussion with client.

This initially involved only a short interview and provision of information, with subsequent follow-up, by appointment, for the extended interview. Recruitment from within the public conservation land has ensured that the frequent and occasional users were contributing their thoughts and ideas based on recent experience.

The second usership group (the potential users) were recruited via random telephone calls to residents in the greater Wellington area.

6. INFORMATION OBTAINED

A Discussion Guide was developed in consultation with DOC Wellington Conservancy. A copy of this document is attached in Section 10 of the report.

7. TIMING

Fieldwork for the Stage 1 Qualitative Research was undertaken from 25 April to 1 June 2009.

8. THE RESEARCH RESULTS

8.1. PARKS AND RESERVES VISITED IN THE GREATER WELLINGTON AREA

The users of public conservation land, who participated in the research, had visited a wide range of different areas during the past twelve months. Most had visited several parks and reserves, rather than concentrate their activity into one particular area.

The respondents' usage of parks covered both "*back country*" visitation, which is generally '*planned for*', as well as "*front country*" visitation of regional and local parks. Respondents indicated that decisions for "*front country*" visitation are made within a shorter timeframe, often on the day of visit.

The parks and reserves that these participants recalled having visited in the past twelve months included:

- Holdsworth
- Tararuas
- Waiohine Gorge
- Otaki Forks
- Otaki Flats
- Catchpool
- Colonial Knob
- Waikanae Estuary
- Kaitoke
- Rimutaka Forest Park
- Rimutakas
- The Orongorongos
- Belmont Regional Park
- Eastern Harbour
- Southern Walkway
- Battle Hill
- Whitireia
- Tunnel Gully
- The Akatarawas
- Rimutaka Incline
- Karapoti
- Haurangi Forest Park
- Lake Wairarapa
- Pirinoa
- Ngawihi
- Red Rocks
- Pencarrow
- Pukerua Bay
- Queen Elizabeth Park
- The Hutt River Trail
- Percy's Reserve
- Trentham Memorial Walk
- Various urban and city parks

The potential or non-users of public conservation land varied in their park experience. A number of them had visited one or more of the regional parks at some stage in the past, but not recently. Others were mainly users of the local city parks and green areas. Few of these research participants had ever had a "*back country*" experience; for those that had, the experience was a long time ago, and for some it was a childhood experience with a parent.

8.2. REASONS FOR VISITING/NOT VISITING PARKS AND RESERVES

The users of public conservation land did not identify particular areas that they favoured or avoided, stating that their visits depended on what they had planned, who they were going with, etc. However, they did reveal a number of factors that can influence where they choose to visit. These included:

SEASONALITY

e.g. *“We try to avoid river crossings, or at least too many river crossings, in bad weather and during the winter months.”*

“At certain times of the year you need protection from the wind. So we try to avoid areas where there are exposed ridges and long sections of exposure.”

“There are areas that you have to avoid at certain times of the year. For example, during lambing season, at Belmont and Battle Hill.”

“I would probably do more of the back country adventures in the summer, when you are less likely to get caught out by the weather. So during the winter months, I still walk, but it involves shorter walks closer to home.”

VARIETY OF WALKS

e.g. *“We have a trip list that we do three months in advance. We think about where we want to go, what we want to do, and what we want to see. Variety is important to us.”*

“It is a great way to get exercise and enjoy nature and the outdoors. It always provides plenty of variety, with different things to see and experience. Variety is the key.”

“We like to move around and visit different areas. That way you never get bored. There is always something new and different to do and see.”

PLANNED ACTIVITY

e.g. *“It depends what you want to do. Some areas are flatter and have easier tracks. If you just want a short hour or two walk, you can head off in ordinary shoes and enjoy the stroll. For that type of walk, we would choose an area that appeals closer to home. But if you want to go tramping, you would choose somewhere different.”*

“Where you go is dictated somewhat by what you want to do. Some parks and areas are more suited to bike riding, for example, but other areas are good for an easy walk or a challenging walk. And they all offer different scenery.”

WHO YOU HAVE WITH YOU

- e.g. *“It depends on who you have with you and what they want to do. I rarely go into the back country on my own. So we jointly plan where we want to head, what we want to see, etc.”*

“Some areas are more suitable for less experienced walkers or trampers. You may have a mix of abilities in a larger group, so you can group people according to their abilities. In a smaller group, these factors can become even more important.”

THE VIEWS

- e.g. *“The views are the goals for adventure. We often choose where we go according to the views we want to see. You can get a real sense of satisfaction from reaching those goals and saying we did it.”*

“Different areas offer different sights, sounds, smells and nature to experience. It is good to move around different areas and experience their particular high points.”

THE CHALLENGE/SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT

- e.g. *“Challenge is a big thing for me. I am doing walks now that I wouldn’t have contemplated even 18 months ago. The big walks are the things you build up to. I guess it shows that you have willpower and the ability to succeed.”*

“We choose new areas for the challenge. I guess it is the challenge of getting to the top. As fitness improves, the level of challenge increases also.”

THE SENSE OF ADVENTURE

- e.g. *“I find that with the great variety of parks and reserves that we have around the Wellington region, there is always the opportunity to go and find something different. It is the sense of adventure, knowing that you will probably find something different, but you are not sure what when you head off.”*

“I like to go exploring, so I tend to go to different areas over time. I think it is the sense of adventure that was instilled in me in childhood.”

ACCESS

- e.g. *“Access is an issue. If you head off into the bush, sooner or later you will come up against the problem of access to private land. We have had situations where we have had to plan a trip around these access issues and, in some cases, choose a different area to visit.”*

I HUNT IN AREAS WHERE I HAVE ACCESS

e.g. *“When I go hunting, I often just set out going for a look. There are several areas I have used over time. It varies according to who owns the land and where DOC has been doing the 1080 poison drops. You get to know which areas are good for deer, pigs, the odd goat, rabbits, depending on what you want to get.”*

“I mainly have access for hunting through a farm in Pirinoa. It is getting more difficult to get access these days, so I go back to where I think there might be a chance for some decent shooting.”

TIME AVAILABILITY

The users of public conservation land also identified time availability as a factor that can influence where they choose to visit. However, as their parks and reserves usage was more planned than the potential users, this appeared to be less of an issue for them.

e.g. *“The long walks we do are set in advance, so we plan for them. But if we just want a quick walk for a couple of hours, we would do that closer to home.”*

The potential or non-users of public conservation land identified a different range of factors that influences their behaviour. Their reasons for not visiting the public conservation land in the greater Wellington area included:

LACK OF AWARENESS/KNOWLEDGE OF THE PARKS AND RESERVES

e.g. *“I don’t know enough about them or what is available. You would need to give me a reason to go to those areas before I would do so.”*

“I have never seriously thought about it. A park is a park to me. I would describe the land you are talking about as the bush and big expanses of park in the region. I use parks to get away and enjoy the fresh air and outdoors. I can do that in the park down the road, without taking the weekend out to go bush.”

“I don’t know what the bigger parks have to offer. Perhaps DOC could have an open day, or something along those lines, to encourage us to go and see what these parks have available. Right now, I don’t have the need or inclination to go and find out. We all lead busy lives these days.”

“I wouldn’t really know how to get these bigger areas of public land. I know they are there, but I don’t know much about them. They sound like hard work to me. I would prefer to go somewhere I know, just down the road, and get my exercise there.”

PERCEPTION OF TRAMPING VERSUS WALKING

e.g. *“I use the parks to walk and recharge my batteries. I have the impression that the larger areas of public land are more for the serious trampers. I am not in that league, I just want to walk in the fresh air.”*

“I prefer short walks of a half an hour to an hour. I am not into hiking or tramping.”

TIMING

e.g. *“Time pressures are a factor of modern day living. I find it difficult to fit in everything I have to do in a day now, without taking a whole day out to visit one of the regional parks. It might be okay once in a while, but it does not really fit with my commitments and lifestyle.”*

“The local parks are more convenient to get to. I don’t have a lot of time and can fit a short walk in, but would struggle to get to the larger parks. It is not just the time you spend in the parks, but it is also the time it takes to get there and back.”

SAFETY IS AN ISSUE

e.g. *“Safety is an important consideration. I haven’t thought too much about visiting the major parks or back country, but I would be worried about me or my family getting caught out in bad weather. I have not had the training or experience to cope in a tramping environment.”*

“It might be okay if you have someone to go with, but I often walk or exercise by myself. I would be a little concerned about going into the larger park areas unaccompanied. You can’t be too careful these days.”

MY INTERESTS AND RECREATION ARE MORE CITY BASED

e.g. *“I would not describe myself as an outdoors type of person. I find I get all the exercise I need at the gym and with the indoor sports I play. I go for the odd stroll to the local parks on a good day, but that is about it.”*

“I play sport every weekend, which I enjoy. I don’t really have time to go and visit the bush or other parks in the region.”

8.3. ACTIVITIES CURRENTLY UNDERTAKEN

The users of public conservation land indicated that they undertake a wide range of activities in the parks and reserves around the greater Wellington area. Whilst ‘walking’ and ‘tramping’ were the most frequently mentioned responses to “back country” activity, these park users also indicated that they use the more locally accessible parks for a variety of activities.

The full range of activities mentioned by the users of public conservation land, who participated in the research, included:

- Walking/bush walking
- Tramping
- Cycling
- Mountain biking
- Walking/running with the dog
- Camping
- Hunting
- Fishing
- Family outings/picnics
- Swimming
- Photography
- Getting inspiration for painting, writing, poetry
- Hosting out-of-town visitors

The potential or non-users of public conservation land mainly indicated that they use the local parks they visit for:

- Walking
- Cycling/mountain biking
- Walking/running with the dog
- Family fun, games, activities

Many respondents freely mentioned that the outdoor experience provides an important sense of ‘respite’ or ‘relief’ from the pressures of urban living. They considered this as important as the physical activities that they undertake.

In one of the current user group discussions, the participants attempted to define the difference between ‘walking and tramping’. The definition that emerged was:

“Walking is done on flatter and easier tracks. It takes up to a couple of hours. People can go in ordinary shoes and take a stroller. You may average 3 to 4 kms per hour. Tramping requires proper boots and takes longer (3 to 8 hours). You may average perhaps 1 km per hour.”

8.4. OTHER ACTIVITIES PEOPLE WOULD LIKE TO DO

The research participants were questioned as to whether there are any activities that they would like to do in the parks and reserves around the greater Wellington region, but are currently unable to do so.

Very few respondents mentioned anything in response to this line of questioning. However, at a later stage of the interview, a number of respondents raised ideas for enhancing the park experience. These are covered in Section 8.7 of this report.

8.5. TRENDS IN PARK USAGE

Respondents were asked to identify any trends that they had noticed in park usage in general in recent years.

The trends identified by the users of public conservation land can be summarised as follows:

- More people camping/camping along riversides these days
 - e.g. *“There were over a hundred people camping at Kaitoke around Easter.”*
 - “I think there is a trend back to camping and doing things locally. The recession probably has a lot to do with it.”*
- Families/bigger groups of people in the parks
 - e.g. *“There seems to be more families and bigger groups of people in the parks these days. I am talking more about the regional parks than the back country.”*
- Fewer people in the more remote areas
 - e.g. *“There seems to be fewer people in the more remote parts these days. By the more remote areas, I am talking three hours plus. I get the impression that people are too busy to go to the back country and hills.”*
- Usage is closer to the urban environments
 - e.g. *“While I agree that there seems to be fewer people in the remote areas of public conservation land, use of the parks closer to the urban environment, seem to be growing. For example, there are a lot more people using areas such as the Hutt River Trail and Queen Elizabeth Park than there were a few years ago.”*

- A lot more mountain biking
 - e.g. *“The obvious one is a lot more mountain biking, especially in areas like Belmont and Tunnel Gully.”*
- Motor bikes
 - e.g. *“The problem of motor bikes has become more prominent. You notice it at places like Karapoti and the Rimutaka Incline, but also in parks around town. They are dangerous to other park users.”*
- More environmentally aware people using the land. This was mentioned in a positive light:
 - e.g. *“It is good to see more people using the parks these days, who are environmentally aware and care about conservation matters. I think the public is a little more green than it used to be, even if there is a long way to go before we have a fully educated community on environmental matters.”*
- and also in a negative light:
 - e.g. *There are a lot more tree hugger, greeny types walking the tracks these days, which makes it difficult for me as a hunter. They are disgusted that you are there with a gun, especially if they are walking with their family. The Five-Mile Track is renowned for them. But I have as much right to be there as they do.”*
- Use of 1080 poison
 - e.g. *“As a hunter, I am concerned about the mass use of 1080 poison. It is limiting our opportunities to hunt, but it is also destroying the environment. For example, if you go to Featherston and around the left hand side of the lake the hunting is getting really bad. They have done 1080 to death, for the fourth or fifth time, and it looks like they are doing it again. The bush is getting higher and uglier every time they do the stuff.”*
- Changing animal life and environment
 - e.g. *“If there is any damage done in the bush, it has been done by goats. They do more damage than possums. Since they have knocked back deer numbers, the bush is a lot worse now than when I was younger. Where there was grass, a few trees grew. All the small stuff is grown up, topsoil has washed away and the grass has dried. You are left with shingle faces that lead to erosion. All the feed is going out of the bush, so it is encouraging the animals to eat the trees.”*

Some of the potential or non-users of the public conservation land were also aware of trends in park usage in general. These covered four main areas:

- More usage of parks

e.g. *“I think there are more people using parks these days.”*

“It is good to see more people using the parks. There is a need for people to exercise more, as we have more sedentary lifestyles brought about by modern living.”

“I have noticed more people are using the parks with their families. That is good, because it makes the parks safer for more people to use.”

- More bikes/mountain bikes

e.g. *“At one time you would see people walking in the parks, but now they are cycling there as well. It is probably because the roads are less safe for cyclists. That is a trend I have noticed.”*

“People go to the bush to mountain bike these days. That is a trend that has emerged over the last ten years or so I would say.”

- More organised activities

e.g. *“I have noticed that there are more organised activities that use our parks and natural resources. At certain times of the year, you see signs up advertising multi-sport events. That is what comes to mind for me.”*

- A trend back to camping and picnicking

e.g. *“In the tight economic environment we are facing, I have heard that there is a trend back to camping and picnicking. When times are tough, people make their own fun and use the resources that are on their doorstep, rather than travel further afield.”*

Respondents were next asked to identify what they thought would be the important trends and considerations, with regard to parks and reserves in the future. The main ideas that were mentioned covered the following:

- More people camping and tramping, as a result of three factors:

- The economic recession
- A growing awareness of the environment in general
- The need for a healthier nation.

- More pressure on parks and public land, resulting from the growth in population.
- This, in turn, will require careful management of the environment, to think about what we have before it is destroyed, what we need for the future and to protect land/the environment from developers.
- A more environmentally aware community that will need to be communicated with and consulted on a regular basis.
- More ‘*channelling*’ of activity, e.g. designated areas for specific activities and the balancing of pressure across parks, so that some do not become overused while others are under-utilised.
- Future activity in parks is likely to be ‘*closer to home*’, as greater numbers of people use the parks, but have limited time to enjoy them.
- A need to keep maintenance levels up to meet the expected growing demands of the future, e.g. hut and track maintenance, the need to keep rubbish out of the bush.
- Electronic locators for park users, especially those using the “*back country*,” so that they easier to find in an emergency.
- With more people in the bush, a need for safety standards, especially with regard to hunting.

8.6. LIKES/DISLIKES OF THE PARKS AND RESERVES, FROM A RECREATIONAL POINT OF VIEW

The research participants were asked to identify the major likes/dislikes they have of parks and reserves currently, especially from a recreational point of view.

The ‘likes’

The major likes identified by the users of public conservation land can be summarised as follows:

- The views/beauty of nature/the wild
- Flora/fauna (bird life, native plants, etc)
- The challenge/sense of achievement of reaching a target
- Companionship/meeting other likeminded people
- The sense of adventure
- The ability to pursue an outdoor activity you love and has been in your blood since childhood/for generations, e.g. with hunting, camping
- The fact that our parks are still relatively unpopulated, i.e. there are not many people in the hills; you can still find your own space
- The potential for community involvement, e.g. children/schools/volunteers getting involved with planting programmes

The potential or non-users of public conservation land were also able to identify some benefits of parks and reserves. The main 'likes' put forward by this group of respondents were:

- The views/beauty of the natural environment
- Flora/fauna (bird life, native plants)
- The fact that parks provide people with fresh air/respice from city living/the ability to recharge
- The accessibility of parks and reserves, large and small, in the region
- That parks preserve the natural environment for future generations
- That park access is free (i.e. does not incur a charge to enter)

The 'dislikes'

The major dislikes identified by respondents can be summarised as follows:

- Vandalism
- Rubbish in the bush
- Safety issues (especially cars being targeted by thieves and vandals)
- Lack of or poor signage
- Tracks in poor condition
- Lack of adequate toilet facilities
- Lack of shelter
- Cyclists without bells (and those who are discourteous)
- Multi-use walkways (in some areas, there can be too much volume on a narrow track or pathway)
- Mechanised vehicles (e.g. motor bikes, 4WD vehicles)
- The current use of 1080 poison (some park users believe that it needs to be used in more sensible manner, with proper consultation of affected parties)

8.7. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE RECREATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Respondents were asked for suggestions as to how their recreational experience in the parks and reserves around the greater Wellington region could be improved, developed, or enhanced.

The thoughts and ideas of the current users of public conservation land can be summarised as follows:

- Better promotion of features to enjoy, e.g. rivers, new areas to explore/visit.
- Highlight historical points of interest.
- People need information and choice as to whether to go “*front country*” or “*back country*.” We need a “*road head*” concept, which could be either physical or on paper, to channel people from near urban experiences through to wilderness. The same concept could promote some of the lesser parks, to take people away from the more popular parks and reserves, and maintain balance by shifting some of the load to other parks.
- Develop the “*front country*” more, to give more people and families the access/facilities they want. Leave the “*back country*” unspoilt and undeveloped for those that appreciate it.
- Do more DOC/GWRC type walks and visits into the bush, e.g. to find the eels, Moreporks, etc.
- Build on the Regional Council Summer Programme, which is a good basis for introducing people to different parks and park experiences.
- Guided walks with information about bird life, kiwis, etc.
- Evening walks (guided) with accommodation, e.g. in the Rimutaka Forest Park. (Note that in the group discussions, some of the research participants expressed a willingness to pay for this type of experience. This could be tested in the Stage 2 Quantitative Survey).
- Channel funding into building and maintaining ‘*basic huts*’. We want simple, comfortable accommodation, but we don’t want it to develop into small hotels.
- Ensure that there is shelter and windbreaks in key areas, e.g. on or near ridges.
- Extend tracks, so that there are new areas of access, e.g. in the Haurangis, Cook Strait/Red Rocks areas.

- DOC could help with access to private land.
- More toilet facilities/adequate toilet facilities.
- Get groups more involved within the parks. We rely on DOC to clear the tracks, but there could be more community involvement. It needs to be promoted as a fun and beneficial thing to do.
- Locate motorbikes and 4WDs away to one area, where they will not disturb and endanger other park users.
- Foster better communication with the hunting community on matters of importance (e.g. the 1080 issue) and help by signalling where the animals are.
- Recognise and promote hunting as a valid sport. (*“There is a whole generation of youngsters out there who would love to have the opportunities and experiences that we had growing up.”*)

The potential or non-users of public conservation land expressed some interest in “back country” visits. However, a number of these interested respondents suggested that transport would need to be provided and it would be important to have guides, especially for their initial visits. It was not possible to accurately test their willingness to pay for such a service, although this could be checked in the next stage of the research.

Several of the potential or non-users suggested that there should be more organised events, to give people and families a reason to experience the parks and what they have to offer. This follows on from the earlier finding that many potential or non-users lack information on the larger parks and reserves in the greater Wellington area and have misperceptions of what they can expect.

Other members of this target group mentioned that it would be useful to have information/instruction on how to be safe in the bush. They felt that this information could be provided by way of brochures, DOC’s website, information evenings, or practical instruction in the parks, but it would need to be well promoted. A few respondents suggested that the practical instruction could involve introductory bushcraft walks, closer to home (e.g. for a half-day), in preparation for longer adventures with the family.

8.8. PARAMETERS FOR DEVELOPMENT

In order to obtain some feedback on the parameters around which it is acceptable to develop the recreational needs of park users, the research participants were shown a list presenting six roles of parks and reserves in general. These roles have been defined in earlier research undertaken for the Greater Wellington Regional Council and include:

SIX ROLES OF REGIONAL PARKS AND RESERVES

- (1) Parks help people keep healthy, by providing a place of recreation and exercise, away from the pressures of urban living
- (2) Parks protect and conserve our natural environment
- (3) Parks bring people together, as family groups and with community activities
- (4) Parks help build an informed and educated community, which is in touch with nature and our local history
- (5) Parks contribute to our economy, through employment of people, support of our recreational industry and through tourism
- (6) Parks conserve and protect the cultural heritage of early Maori and European settlement sites

The research participants were asked to comment on the relative importance of these roles and to assess what they mean for the development of the recreation need in future.

The general consensus was that the six roles are *all* important to consider with the regional parks and reserves of the future. Whilst the recreational need can be developed to enhance the experience of park users, it should not be at the expense of the fundamental aims of the overriding parks strategy.

Some respondents referred to the ‘road head’ concept that emerged in one of the group discussions. They suggested that it might be acceptable to develop some parks, or areas of parks, to a greater extent, while leaving other areas in a more natural or untouched state.

It is fair to say that the current users of public conservation land were more inclined to suggest that development could be focused on the “*front country*” areas, leaving the “*back country*” in its natural state.

8.9. TOURISM

The research participants were asked for their views on tourism in the parks and reserves in the greater Wellington region. Most people were fairly philosophical about it, recognising that it can make an important contribution to the economy, as long as it is well managed.

The predominant views are summarised in the following example verbatim comments:

“Tourism brings in revenue, so we have to face up to it. But it needs to be well managed. We don’t want it at the expense of our natural environment.”

“I think it can be accommodated. I would favour directing it to certain areas or activities of interest, rather than have an ‘open slather’ type approach. For example, I think some is done already around the Lord of the Rings site visits.”

“Tourism is something we have to live with. When we go overseas, we want to see what other countries and cultures have to offer, so we should reciprocate. The key is to ensure that it is well managed and does not erode our natural environment, or impede our ability to enjoy it.”

“Only some, possibly few, tourists will end up in the back blocks. It needs to be well managed in the ‘front country’, so that we retain as much of our natural beauty as possible. After all, that is what tourists come to see. I wouldn’t want too many helicopters flying around though – that can be very annoying.”

“The important thing is that tourists get to enjoy on the same basis as us. I wouldn’t want it to be like the Milford Track, where locals have become second-class citizens.”

However, some of the respondents were opposed to the tourism concept. Examples of their views are as follows:

“Why do we want to promote tourism? We should recognise the natural resource we have now and do everything in our power to preserve it, not exploit it.”

“As soon as you bring tourism operators in, you spoil it for the locals. Access-ways get built, shops and kiosks spring up, and people have to pay to see the sights. I don’t want that outcome for our parks.”

“When I think of tourism, I think of a Disneyland type complex, with hotels, hotdogs, crowds and bright lights. That is too big a price to pay for our natural environment. I don’t agree with it.”

9. CONCLUSION

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The Stage One Qualitative Research has provided insight to the attitudes that users and potential users of public conservation land have toward the parks and reserves in the greater Wellington region, with regard to recreation.

In the main, users appear reasonably satisfied with the current experience, although they have made a number of suggestions for enhancement. The potential or non-users of public conservation land appear to lack information on the experience that the parks and reserves can provide and, to some extent, have misperceptions of what that experience might be.

The parks and reserves in the region are used for a wide variety of activities, which need to be catered for in the on-going management of these resources.

The research participants identified a number of trends that they have observed in park usage in recent years. These generally centre on the increasing use of “*front country*” areas, a changing profile of park users, greater environmental awareness and changes in pest control practices. It is envisaged that there will be further changes in future that will require active management and these are summarised in Section 8.5 of the report.

It was noted that the recreational experience in the region’s parks and reserves needs to be balanced against the other roles of these resources, such as conservation of the natural environment and cultural heritage, community education and involvement, and economic contribution.

The Stage One project has provided a useful base for designing a more widespread survey (Stage Two). This can be used to quantify the public’s attitudes and expectations among a broader base of the community, as well as to test possible options/directions that the Wellington Conservancy may wish to consider.

Peter Glen Research’s recommended approach to the Stage Two survey has previously been outlined in the proposal document dated March 2009. The next task would be to develop the proposed questionnaire, in consultation with the Wellington Conservancy, as well as finalising the sample/target groups for the research.

10. DISCUSSION GUIDE

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR WELLINGTON CONSERVANCY PROJECT

The following are starting points for discussion:

1. Which parks and reserves do the research participants visit in the greater Wellington area (including the Kapiti, Wairarapa and Ponake areas). It will also include all land managed by DOC, the GWRC and Councils in the region)?
2. What are their reasons for visiting/not visiting specific forest parks and reserves? Has their usage of any lapsed? If so, why?
3. What activities do the research participants currently undertake in the forest parks and reserves that they visit?
4. Are there other activities that they would like to do, but can't?
5. What trends have the research participants noticed in park usage in recent years?
6. What do they think will be important trends and considerations for the future?
7. What are the major likes/dislikes that the research participants have of the forest parks and reserves currently, from a recreational point of view?
8. What suggestions do they have for improving, developing, or enhancing the recreational experience in the parks and reserves?
9. How do the research participants view the parks' role in meeting "back country" recreational needs (such as tramping, hunting, climbing, 4wd) versus "front country" recreational needs (the activities that can be undertaken closer to home)? Where should future emphasis be placed and why?
10. Where does recreation fit, relative to the other roles of the parks? (Other roles include: conservation of the natural environment; a place to bring people together as family and community; education on nature and local history; employment of people; conservation of the cultural heritage of Maori and European settlement sites).
11. What are the parameters around which it is acceptable to develop the recreational need?
12. What should DOC *not* do with regard to park development and enhancement?
13. What are the research participants' attitudes to tourism in the parks and how should it be managed?
14. Other relevant information that may emerge in discussion with client and/or during the qualitative research.