



Waitakere Ranges
Protection Society Inc

news

PO Box 15-668, New Lynn, Waitakere City 0640

www.waitakereranges.org.nz

Issue 144 February 2010

Your President's Report



On behalf of the committee I would like to wish you all a happy new year. It has been a great summer so far. Ann and I were thrilled when a small flock of kaka visited Karekare for a few hours at Christmas. They were very noisy in competing with mynahs, tui and kereru for the tops of various large pohutukawa in the lower Lone Kauri Valley. This is the first sighting that we personally have had of kaka at Karekare and I hope it won't be the last.

The long hot summer goes on and the bush is drying out rapidly, and fire bans are in place throughout the ranges. The increased fire risk was recently demonstrated when a marine flare let off on New Year's Eve burned about 10 hectares of native bush at Piha (see article below).

The Auckland Regional Council opened the Hillary Trail in January on the second anniversary of Sir Edmund's death. This four-day walk from Arataki via Titirangi to Huia and along the coast to Te Henga and Swanson uses existing tracks, camping areas and shelters. Walkers need to obtain a permit if they use the camping sites. The Society supports the Council's intention that the walk is non-commercial and we are concerned at the increase in visitors that the national and international promotion of the walk will undoubtedly attract. We will be watching carefully to ensure that the development of the tracks and the walk do not have adverse effects on the environment.

This will be a year of unprecedented change as the local councils amalgamate in what appears to be a rushed and undemocratic process which has left the voices of the communities largely unheard. There is already a feeling of powerlessness and this does not bode well for the transition. Planning is well underway for a progressive ticket to contest the elections in October and the Society will be working to ensure that the conservation and protection of the ranges has strong support.

Kauri collar rot disease continues to spread at an alarming rate in the Ranges, and I have recently had reports of outbreaks in suburban gardens in west Auckland where ngaio and puka have died. At present there is no cure, and we are

relying on containment and management to halt the spread of the disease.

We thank you for your continued support and look forward to working together over the next year.

John Edgar
President

2010 Subscription Renewal Notice

The 2010 subscription renewal notice has been sent to all members in the last month. If you haven't renewed your subscription yet, could we urge you to do so as soon as possible. If you aren't sure whether or not you have renewed your sub, feel free to email me at kemsdale@ihug.co.nz to check. I'd rather that you did that than pay twice. If you've lost/mislaidd your invoice, we'd be pleased to send you another.

Sandra Jones
Treasurer



WRPS Annual General Meeting 7 pm Monday 29th March, 2010 Arataki Visitors Centre Scenic Drive

Followed by our guest speaker

Dr Nick Waipara, Auckland Regional Council,
who will speak on
Phytophthora 'taxon Agathis' (PTA),
the Kauri Collar Rot disease
that is spreading through the Ranges and
killing trees of all ages.

Dr Waipara is a biosecurity researcher and planner with Auckland Regional Council. He is an environmental microbiologist, who has worked over the past 14 years for the Crown Research Institutes Landcare Research (Auckland) and AgResearch (Ruakura & Lincoln). His expertise is on plant diseases in native and agricultural ecosystems, as well as human health issues related to mould, such as the toxic black fungus (*Stachybotrys chartarum*) in Auckland's leaky buildings. His current projects at ARC include kauri dieback, Hauraki Gulf Islands Biosecurity and development of a research programme for the multitude of emerging pest threats for the next Regional Pest Management Strategy process (RPMS, 2012-2017). Currently, Nick also contributes to the MAF Biosecurity New Zealand science & planning team who are developing long term management of kauri dieback.



Photo: Sandra Jones

***Pennantia corymbosa* (kaikamoko)** - juvenile leaves

This tree, with its duck foot juvenile leaves, occurs sporadically along the Waitakere Ranges. An easily-accessible colony of adult and juvenile plants is at the car park at the top end of the Goldie Bush track.

Fire Risk to the Ranges

At around midnight on New Years Eve, 31 Dec 2009, a marine flare was launched from private land at the end of Garden Road in Piha. Witnesses report the flare soared into the sky then plummeted into the Parkland. The bush ignited instantly and the fire spread quickly up the steep flank of the ridge, pushed by an onshore wind, crossed the ridgeline and began spreading down into the next valley. The Piha volunteer fire crew were on deck quickly and are understood to have requested a helicopter with monsoon bucket straight away. However it took the Waitakere Rural Fire Service around 2 hours to have one on site.

The Society believes this is because the Fire Service depends on private helicopters, which were being used to transport guests to private parties at the time. The fire was under control within a couple of hours of the helicopter arriving and it returned the next day to damp down hot spots. The fire was so severe Park Rangers were still dealing with embers two days later.

Thankfully, due to the wind direction, no homes were damaged or people injured. However, the outstanding bush backdrop to Piha is now scarred with a 10ha area of burned off forest. The site is almost vertical and very hard to access. The bush will regrow in time but meanwhile there is a significant risk of windblown weeds, such as pampas and agapanthus, infesting the area.

The Police have been interviewing bach owners and residents at Garden Road and are understood to be considering charging the culprit with costs.

There was also a small fire outbreak on Lion Rock at Piha during January.

There have been 10 fires in the last 15 years in the parkland in the Piha area. Fireworks (or the substitution of flares) are the most common cause, followed by arson and power lines.

The ARC already has a bylaw banning fireworks and fires in the park. The NY Eve flare was lit outside the Park and so covered by WCC bylaws that do not ban fireworks.

WRPS would like to see:

- The Waitakere Rural Fire Service equipped to fight forest fires promptly at any time.
- Waitakere City Council improve its control of fireworks on private and public land outside the Regional Park.
- Better promotion and enforcement of fire-ban controls generally.
- A programme of undergrounding of power cables in the Heritage Area to reduce fire risk from that source - and

to remove the need for and cost of tree trimming around power lines in future.

Heritage Area Coordinator's Report

Nov 2009 – Feb 2010

Things were totally crazy before Christmas but I took a well-earned break for the whole of January and the pace has started to pick up again now. I think 2010 will be a very busy year however!

Submissions / Advocacy:

Auckland Governance

The Local Government Commission announced the draft boundaries for the wards and boards and we made another written submission to them before Christmas. Although we were pleased to see that the Heritage Area was kept together within one ward, it did not have a ward of its own and was included with Henderson and Massey so that urban issues will still dominate the rural voice. We also strongly disagreed with the sub-division of the Waitakere Local Board area for voting because it split off a large part of the Heritage Area (Titirangi, Laingholm, Huia and Cornwallis). We also argued strongly that the Ranges area needed a lot more than 1 board member to adequately represent such a large area with so many diverse communities. The final decision will be released in March.

The Third Super City Bill was also released for before Christmas with submissions due in February. Cynics like me might suggest that was a good way to minimise public input. However that didn't prevent us from writing a submission and encouraging many others to do so too. This became especially important when we realised that the power of the Heritage Area Act and the public ownership of the Regional Park were both at risk due to proposals to repeal other Acts in the Bill. The Government has since claimed that this was due to "drafting errors" but we are yet to be convinced and are waiting to see a commitment to redrafting Schedule 3 to address the issues raised.

RMA Changes – Tree Protection

Despite all the intense lobbying to keep blanket tree protection in the RMA the Government decided to dump it. So we are faced with the reality that after January 2012 there will be no protection for any native trees on urban sections (smaller than 4000sqm with reticulated sewage and a dwelling) unless they are "individually identified in a District Plan". On rural sections and public land the protection status remains the same as now. Waitakere City Council have invited nominations for individual or groups of trees to be scheduled and listed in the District Plan. It's not too late but almost, so if there are trees in your neighbourhood that you want to see protected please contact the Council with the details immediately.

In the meantime, Waitakere City Council is seeking a judicial ruling from the Environment Court on whether the "Managed Natural Area" maps that are currently in the District Plan and cover Titirangi and Laingholm, count as "individually identified groups of trees in a District Plan". If the ruling says that they are (we live in hope) then all these trees will retain their current blanket protection. If not we are in deep trouble.

Tree trimming for Surf Championships at Piha

On Christmas Eve it came to our attention that Council was planning to prune trees on the Piha Road to enable double-decker buses to ferry competitors for the Junior World Surf Championships from Sky City to Piha in mid-January. Since this would include many fantastic, iconic and incredibly old pohutukawa, which were fully in flower at the time and home to nesting native birds, we objected strongly along with many Piha locals. WRPS also felt there were safety issues in using these buses on the Piha Hill and that Council should not be undertaking tree trimming for commercial reasons driven by the bus company's desire to save money by doing less trips. After a great deal of intensive lobbying over the Christmas and New Year period the situation was finally resolved by locals talking to the Surf Champs organisers who cancelled the buses, as it turned out most competitors were staying locally anyway. WRPS feels that WCC needs to improve communications and forward planning of events such as these when the impacts have not been fully identified, as these were not.

ARC Parks Management Plan

I wrote a detailed submission for WRPS and met with ARC staff before Christmas to discuss it. In general we were supportive of the proposed Plan, especially the strong stance taken by the ARC not to allow commercial concessions to operate on the Hillary Trail. However WCC took a different view and submitted strongly to allow them, so we encouraged people to make submissions to support the ARC's stance. The final plan has yet to be released and we will give an oral submission to the ARC in March.

ARC Land Transport Strategy

Greg Presland wrote an excellent submission on the proposed strategy on WRPS' behalf (thanks Greg!) and I made

comments on his draft.

Youth Advocacy

I agreed to continue working with the EcoMatters Trust to encourage more young people to get involved in looking after their environment. Jo is organising another event at the end of March that I will be involved in.

We have doubled the membership of our Facebook Group to 100 members! You can join here:

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/group.php?gid=156550153926&ref=ts>

EcoDay 2010

I've been organising the WRPS stall at this year's EcoDay, which is at Olympic Park in New Lynn on Sunday 28th February from 10am-4pm. Please come along and say hello. We will have a petition and postcards for you to sign and send to the Government to encourage them to change the "drafting errors" affecting the Ranges that we picked up in the 3rd Super City Bill.

Consultation:

Kauri PTA

The bad news about the spread of PTA continues, however the Joint Agencies were successful with their bid to the Government for funding of over \$4 million. However this is just a drop in the ocean of what is required and will have to last 4 years. In contrast around \$80 million was spent on the Painted Apple Moth campaign, so it's clear that saving New Zealand's most iconic tree is not really getting the investment it deserves. WRPS obtained the business case supporting the bid for funding from MAF under an Official Information Act request and we were shocked to find that the cost benefit analysis was based entirely on the logged value of kauri – not on its tourism value, ecological value, or iconic value as part of the New Zealand brand. We believe there is therefore plenty of scope to significantly increase the funding that could be justified and will be looking into this further.

I also met with WCC staff and Dr Nick Waipara from ARC to discuss Waitakere City Council's approach to PTA. We agreed that consent conditions needed to be tightened and enforced for all earthworks to ensure that soil disturbance does not contribute to the spread of the disease. We also encouraged better signage and boot washing stations on WCC owned land and tracks, particularly in Titirangi and Laingholm where foot traffic is very high and the disease is rampant.

LAPs and District Plan Changes

Council have just released three draft changes to the District Plan for consultation. Submissions close on 12th March and we encourage you all to make a submission. The plan changes will introduce the result of the LAP consultation for Oratia and Waiatarua into the District Plan, as well as introducing "economic development" opportunities into the foothills. We have grave concerns about the merits of this proposal. Also there is a plan change proposed specifically for Titirangi Village, which suggests permitting three storey buildings, even after the "Village Meeting" attended by 200 locals clearly indicated that this was unacceptable. We are currently reviewing the proposals and will be in touch shortly via email with advice on the issues to raise in your submission.

Are you on our email list? If not please email Mels on mels@waitakereranges.org.nz to be updated on taking action and important issues affecting the Ranges.

WCC are also proposing a change to the order in which the LAPs are prepared in the Heritage Area. The saga of the Swanson Structure Plan continues in the Environment Court and is still unresolved, so wisely Council is deferring the LAP for this area. Instead they propose accelerating the LAP for Anzac Valley and Te Henga and have agreed to begin work on it immediately. WRPS and a number of locals have protested about this, saying that the issues surrounding subdivision in the area have just been settled and it would be unwise to re-open the debate, but it fell on deaf ears.

ARC Weed Strategy for Piha

Before Christmas I attended a meeting in Piha with locals and ARC staff to agree the weed strategy for the area for this year. The target weed is going to be climbing asparagus and there will be a campaign to educate and encourage people to remove it. I also wrote an article for the Piha Newsletter about this.

DoC Freshwater Lakes in the Auckland Region

The Department of Conservation have given a number of freshwater lakes in the Auckland Region special conservation status and banned recreational fishing from them. This includes several in the Waitakere Ranges (Wainamu, Kawaupaku and Whatipu). I wrote to DoC expressing the Society's support for their proposals and to request that we are kept informed of the results of the protective measures they implement to better protect them.

Consents / Legal Issues:

Lopdell House Redevelopment

The Society wrote a submission objecting to the proposals on the basis of the vegetation removal and effects on remaining vegetation.

Smillie, Oratia

The Society wrote a submission objecting to this sub-division, which goes beyond the provisions allowed for in the Oratia Structure Plan and could have significant downstream effects on flooding. I attended the Council Hearing, made a presentation and submitted further evidence. Unfortunately the Council Commissioners decided to grant consent. The Society is currently considering whether to appeal to the Environment Court.

Rotondo development, Titirangi

The Society considered whether to join the Environment Court appeal on the development proposal for Titirangi Village, but decided not to on the grounds that it is an urban design issue.

82 Laingholm Drive

The Society wrote letters to Waitakere City Council to request that this consent application be publicly notified. The development proposed is adjacent to the Dorothy Road Reserve, uses the Reserve access road to access the property (even though there is a separate access on its own land) and will have visual impacts. Some of the development is proposed to be built on road reserve (public land). However Council decided not to notify the consent.

District Plan Change 26

I attended the Council Hearing on this Plan Change, which will have significant effects on the area of a section that can be built on within the Heritage Area.

Auckland Regional Policy Statement Appeal to Environment Court

I attended the Environment Court mediation on this appeal with Douglas Allen. There is yet to be a final resolution.

Hobsonville Land Company Notification

I reviewed the documentation provided by Council with this public notification. WRPS will not be getting involved.

Research:

Oral History

I have been attending the oral history interviews with the people who were instrumental in the early days of the Society, and acting as sound technician using our new digital recorder. This has given a fascinating insight into the challenges they faced, the successful strategies they developed and the campaigns they fought. It is amazing how much, and how little, has changed in over 35 years!

Enquiry

We had an enquiry from a geography teacher wanting to bring her class on a field trip to Muriwai. I put her in touch with a number of people with specialist knowledge who will be able to talk to her students and support their visit.

Training:

I attended the Environmental Defence Society Workshop on the changes to the RMA, which was excellent and extremely useful for my work. It was great to meet other community practitioners and the EDS lawyers that I have been liaising with over our cases.

Fundraising:

I've been trying to raise a few more funds for the Society, with mixed results. I made an application to the Tindall Foundation's Working Together More Fund, but this was unsuccessful. However our application to the Council's Heritage Fund looks like it will be at least partly successful and we will be able to conduct more oral history interviews as a result.

I've also supported other groups who were applying for funding for work in the Heritage Area by writing letters of support for the Weedfree Trust and the Titirangi Ratepayers and Residents Association.

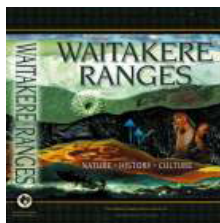
Mels Barton



February 2010

The Friends of Whatipu

invite WRPS members to a
Walk and Talk
with
Auckland Museum Botanist Ewen Cameron
an expert on
the Plants of the Whatipu Scientific Reserve,
Wetland and Sands
Where: Whatipu Car Park
When: 10 am 28th March 2010



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**Committee meetings are held on the
second Wednesday of the month**

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