

Draft Regional Parks Management Plan

Background and rationale for the draft submission written by Kay and Kim.

The draft plan

The draft plan is long (roughly 500 pages) and consists of two books and eight appendices. Book 1 outlines the proposed “vision, values, management framework, objectives and policies that pertain to all regional parks”. Book 2 contains a chapter for each of the 28 regional parks. The 8 appendices are varied in nature, with Appendix 4: Track development principles and assessment criteria, being of most relevance to WOPs.

In summary, the six key focus areas for management over the next ten years are:

- Commitment to Te Tiriti
- Adapting to climate change
- Mitigating climate change
- Protecting our biodiversity
- Adding value to the visitor experience
- Collaborating to achieve outcomes

Of importance within these focus areas and discussed in every chapter are issues such as:

- Engagement with mana whenua
- Conservation and heritage programmes
- Sustainability
- Visitor experience, recreation and facilities
- Ranger services
- Community programmes and partnerships

Writing the submission

The sheer scale and breadth of the draft plan was, at first, a little overwhelming. We initially wondered if it was even necessary to make a submission as we generally agreed with the focus areas, outcomes and details discussed and we felt we had insufficient knowledge to make informed comment about guardianship, governance and management issues.

We however agreed that as WOPs is a frequent user of the regional parks, a submission would show our awareness of and interest in the draft plan. We decided to concentrate the focus of the submission just on the areas of most immediate relevance to WOPs. These are mainly contained in Appendix 4.

So, the draft submission we have written relates to WOPs’ priorities when we go out for a walk/tramp in a regional park. We have also included a short section on the proposal to “investigate formally including regional parks that contribute to the coastal area of the Gulf into the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park”. From our reading and public feedback, it doesn’t seem a good idea.

WOPs submission

Draft Regional Parks Management Plan.

Feedback from Women's Outdoor Pursuits Inc.

- Women's Outdoor Pursuits (WOPs) is an Auckland-wide women's tramping group with approximately 140 members. We have many more names on our database, as we have been operating for 30 years. Tramps are held 3 times a week. They are up to 4 hours long and many are in regional parks, in particular the Waitakere and Hunua Ranges.
- Our tramps cater for a range of fitness levels, but we strongly identify with the 8% of users surveyed in 2021 who use the more challenging tracks and routes in the network and who feel that there are not enough of this grade of track. (Book 1, page 115 of the draft.) This is particularly so with the present closure of many tracks in the Waitakere Ranges.
- WOPs supports the draft plan's Track Development Principles and Assessment Criteria outlined in Appendix 4. We however strongly recommend that the following be given priority in the development plan:
 - the work programme planned for the Waitakeres and the Hunuas and delayed by Covid. This should get "back on track" and be accelerated as soon as possible.
 - an emphasis on the development and maintenance of longer linked or circular tracks.
- Tracks should:
 - have a length of about 4 hours, preferably made up of a circuit or linked tracks
 - provide a physical challenge with opportunities to improve fitness, balance, coordination, physical and mental wellbeing.
 - pass through a variety of terrains with "ups and downs" and a range of track surfaces to enhance the 'wilderness' experience. Notwithstanding, the inherent risk of tramping, tracks should be designed and maintained with safety in mind.
 - involve an element of adventure and not be "over sanitised". Where feasible, the need to use boardwalks and stairs should be limited and other options for ensuring necessary track drainage and maintenance should be employed.
 - include one or more of: native bush, views - either over water, ridges and valleys, or expansive, farmlands.
 - have safe and secure parking with toilets at their starting point.
 - include discreetly located long-drops near logical stopping points. This would most likely be at viewing points or lunch stops.
 - display track information and maps at the beginning of tracks. The latter should be able to be photographed for use during the tramp.
- WOPs is aware of the current debate regarding the proposal to "investigate formally including regional parks that contribute to the coastal area of the Gulf into the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park." (Item 45, Book 1 Section 7). We believe it is unnecessary to break up the present park network by separating off the 21 regional parks in question in order to best ensure a healthier coastline, so we are unable to support the proposal.
- WOPs is however very clear that any changes to guardianship, governance or management must ensure continued free access to parks and an ongoing high standard of development and maintenance of the track network. In addition, those who are responsible for guardianship, governance or management should be selected not only because of their skills but also their passion and commitment to the regional parks.

We do not wish to make a verbal submission.