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Report to the Landcare Committee
from Anne Manley, Parks Planner- Policy, Regional Parks (Strategy and Marketing)

Regional Parks Visitor Satisfaction Survey

1. Purpose

To report on the 1998/99 Regional Parks performance indicator for visitor satisfaction monitoring.

2. Performance Indicator

In respect of short-term (1998/99) performance indicators for Regional Parks, *Facing the Future* states, inter alia, that:

Park satisfaction will be monitored through a visitor satisfaction recording programme.

To meet this requirement, Regional Parks (Strategy & Marketing) undertook to survey visitor satisfaction within the parks and key recreation areas, and report back to the Landcare Committee by 30 June 1999.

3. About the Survey

The survey was conducted from 6 March through to 22 March 1999. Poor weather meant that the survey had to be extended over a number of weeks to obtain a sufficient sample.

The Survey, (the second annual survey using the current format) involved the placement of 18 survey installations at strategic points within four Regional Parks (Battle Hill, Belmont, Kaitoke and Queen Elizabeth) and two key recreation areas (Rimutaka Incline/Tunnel Gully). It was a self administering exit survey of visitors aged 15 and over, and addressed the following questions:

- (1) **How do visitors rate the quality of the Park's facilities and services?**
- (2) **How do visitors rate the quality of the Park environment?**
- (3) **What are visitors' levels of overall satisfaction with their visit?**

Respondents rated each of these factors on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 was very poor (or very unhappy) and 10 was excellent (or very happy). They were also invited to explain the reasons for answers to the three principal questions to elicit both the positive and negative influences on their experience. Comments were collated and a summary of key issues for each park is presented below. Visitors were also asked to indicate their main activity, gender and age.

4. Summary of Results

Table 1 : Key Results

	Battle Hill Farm Forest Park	Belmont Regional Park	Kaitoke Regional Park	Queen Elizabeth Park	Rimutaka Incline and Tunnel Gully	All parks average	1998 parks average
Facilities & services	8.4	8.1	8.4	7.3	7.9	8.05	7.95
Environment	8.1	8.1	8.8	7.5	7.9	8.12	8.13
Satisfaction	8.9	9.0	9.0	8.6	8.6	8.89	8.82
Average score	8.5	8.4	8.7	7.8	8.1	8.35	8.30

The average ratings for the Park Network in 1998 and 1999 are illustrated in the graph below:

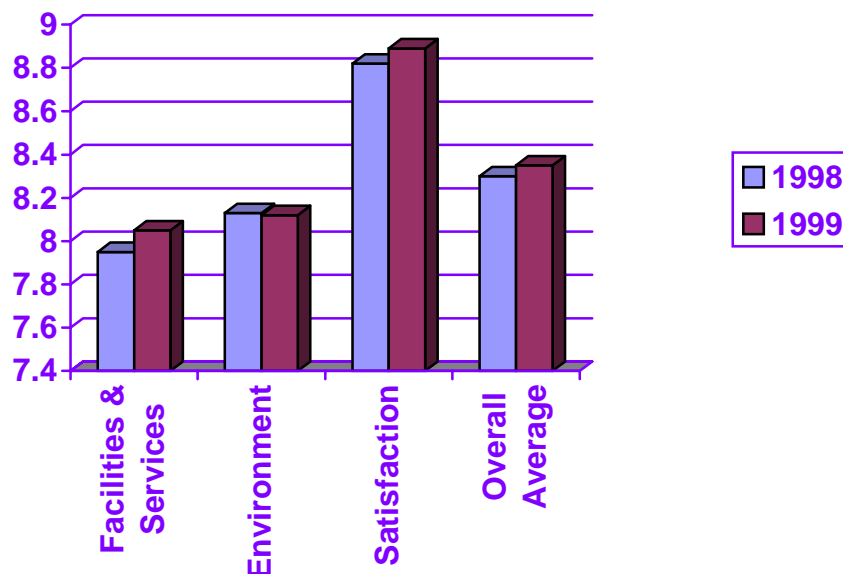


Table 2 : Summary of Comments

	What Visitors Like Most	What Else They Would Like to See
Battle Hill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good signposting with well kept tracks • Well maintained facilities • Helpful Ranger • Pasture areas (farming focus) • Attractive bush walks • Events (e.g. National Downhill) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More tracks (walking and mountain biking) • Multi-use issues addressed (e.g. mountain-bike and horse riders and walkers) • More picnic tables and seats; permanent shelters in different locations; showers; gas BBQ's • Further improvements to signage e.g. track times • More native plantings • Better pest plant control e.g. blackberry; convolvulus; tradescantia • More visible Maori historical sites • No motorway
Belmont	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undeveloped & uncluttered character (birds, hills, trees) • Well maintained Park & facilities • Good tracks • Committed Ranger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved signage • Multi-use issues addressed (e.g. mountain-bike riders and walkers); better dog control • Track enhancement (e.g. more horse riding tracks); also more maintenance - boardwalks and resurfacing • Better pest plant control e.g. blackberry, nettles
Kaitoke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The beauty of the natural environment • Excellent camping and picnicking facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubbish bins (take home policy currently applies) • More tracks • Better signage and information in some areas (particularly Te Marua end) • Showers for campers
QEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements to tracks • Undeveloped, natural state • Clean & tidy facilities (despite age) • Work by Ranger • Good general layout 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubbish bins (also comment re: more education on "take home" policy) • More seating; new toilets • Improved signage • Multi-use issues addressed (e.g. conflicts between horse riders, dog walkers, mountain bike riders) • Track enhancement • Better pest plant control; remove debris from streams; more native plantings; programme to deal with destabilisation of sand-dunes
Rimutaka Incline/Tunnel Gully Recreation Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good tracks in a quiet forested setting • Well maintained picnic areas & facilities; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More carparking • Sealed entry road (Rimutaka Incline) • More sensitivity when logging, particularly in stream areas & on edges of tracks • More seats & tables; new toilets at Tunnel Gully • More/better signposting at forks/intersections • Track enhancement • Multi-use issues addressed

5. What Do the Results Mean?

5.1 General Observations

The results of the survey reflect good general performance in most areas. The average rating for facilities and services rose slightly on last year; average ratings for environment and overall satisfaction remain largely the same as in 1998. However, while the averages across Parks were generally unchanged, averages within Parks, were not. (Significant variances are discussed below in 5.2).

The pattern of results generally fit with expectations and reflect the time and effort that has gone into many areas over the last ten years, as compared with areas (such as Queen Elizabeth Park), where, despite recent capital injections, significant work is still to be done.

Although all ratings decreased at Kaitoke, this Park retained the highest average rating overall (8.7 compared to 8.9 in 1998); Queen Elizabeth Park the lowest (7.8, virtually unchanged on the previous year).

Ratings for satisfaction are once again significantly higher than ratings for facilities and services, and the environment. (The Park Network average for facilities and services was 8.0; environment: 8.1; while the average rating for satisfaction was 8.8.) This is consistent with the view that a visitor's personal experience (and therefore satisfaction) is not solely dependent upon the quality of the environment and/or facilities provided. Mood, weather, and the actual activity undertaken (such as walking or cycling in the fresh air) may also influence this.

Key issues emerging across the Park Network include:

- The conflict between mountain bike riders and other users;
- The need for further education on the "take home" policy for rubbish; and
- The need for improved signage (e.g. showing track times) in many areas.

Feedback on Council staff was positive.

Through respondents' comments, the survey also provided useful suggestions on ways of improving these results (e.g. by providing more picnic tables, new toilets, clearing blackberry).

Results relating to specific parks are addressed below.

5.2 Park by Park Breakdown

(1) *Battle Hill Farm Forest Park*

All ratings increased at Battle Hill, most notably for facilities and services. The focus of staff in recent times has been on making the Park tidier and this may account for this increase, e.g. additional fencing, improving tree surrounds, providing pitching-posts for horses, and new seats. The satisfaction rating also increased significantly.

(2) ***Belmont Regional Park***

This year there was a marked increase in the environment rating at Belmont. At the time of the survey last year, there was considerable disruption at Cornish Street due to the construction of the Rahui Reservoir, which may have resulted in a lower than normal score. This year, Belmont achieved a satisfaction rating of 9 for the first time. The rating for facilities and services increased marginally.

(3) ***Kaitoke Regional Park***

As with last year, it appears that the “take home policy” for rubbish at Kaitoke needs to be better explained as a significant number of respondents continued to complain about the lack of rubbish bins. Although still rating highly, as noted, there was a drop in all ratings for Kaitoke. We consider this to be largely due to a new survey installation being placed at the Te Marua end of the Park, where there are few facilities and services provided, and the environment is less impressive than at the Kaitoke end. (Analysis has shown that the average ratings for facilities and services and the environment at Kaitoke are 2 –3% higher when results from the Te Marua end are excluded.) Plans for the Te Marua end have been prepared in the past but little development has taken place. Further work in this area may warrant consideration in the future.

(4) ***Queen Elizabeth Park***

Queen Elizabeth Park is ranked well below the other parks on the quality of its facilities and services. This is consistent with the Regional Parks Group’s knowledge of this Park and the condition of its facilities, which are the oldest in the Network. Emphasis is needed on upgrading and replacing deteriorating facilities. A number of respondents to the 1999 Survey noted support for improvements made at Queen Elizabeth Park (e.g. blackberry control, bollards). There was also a view held that standards had improved in this Park under direct WRC administration. Many other comments related to the poor state of the toilet blocks. New toilets (a prototype that can be used in other locations) are now under construction at Whareroa Beach. However, all of the other toilet blocks in the Park are old, deteriorating rapidly, and due for replacement.

The adoption of the “take home policy” for rubbish at Queen Elizabeth Park has resulted in similar comments to those at Kaitoke, although one respondent did note the need for education on the policy rather than additional rubbish bins.

There were also a large number of comments on dune destabilisation, removing debris from the streams, and the need for better pest plant control. Stabilisation of the dune vegetation (said to be the best of its type in the Foxton Ecological District) and work on the wetlands/native forest remnant complex (south of Mackays Crossing) have been identified as priority environmental projects.

(5) ***Rimutaka Incline and Tunnel Gully Recreation Areas***

Rimutaka Incline/Tunnel Gully continues to have a low rating for its facilities and services. Comments from respondents included the need for a new toilet at Tunnel Gully, better signage (particularly at Tunnel Gully where there appears to be some confusion at track intersections), and sealing of the entry road at the Rimutaka Incline Recreation Area.

Ratings for the quality of the environment decreased markedly on those in 1998. As much of the feedback suggests, we assume this is largely due to the forestry logging activity underway in the area. Comments included the need for greater sensitivity when logging, especially near streams and at the edges of tracks. Despite the extensive signage and public notification provided on the use of 1080 poison, a number of respondents commented on its use.

The overall satisfaction rating for this area decreased significantly in 1999.

(6) *Activities, Gender, and Age*

Walking remains the most popular activity across the Park Network. As in previous years, the survey tends to show a reasonably even gender spread in most areas. In both the 1998 and 1999 surveys, the 30-39 and 40-49 age groups account for around 45% of visitors who responded to the surveys. However, this does not necessarily reflect the percentage of users in those age groups, as some age groups/users may be more inclined to respond to surveys than others.

6. **Future Action**

The more detailed report, with full results, will be analysed by managers and staff to determine appropriate actions in response to suggestions and concerns raised during the survey. In some cases work is already programmed and/or has commenced to deal with specific issues reflected in the comments (e.g. some toilet upgrades at Queen Elizabeth Park, noted above).

Any future capital works projects for the parks will need to be considered through the Long Term Financial Strategy and in relation to other work proposed in the Regional Parks area. The Council has a number of strategic opportunities within Regional Parks. These will no doubt be considered (along with the other items identified in the *Future Directions for Regional Parks* report [99.18] and the related "Porcupine Diagram") when setting service levels (i.e. "*bigger, better, different, the same or even less*") through the next full review of the Long Term Financial Strategy later this year.

In each park there are a number of minor matters raised that may be easily addressed without additional expenditure. The Manager, Regional Parks (Operations) will action these matters, together with Rangers.

The Survey has also provided useful insights for future marketing strategies (e.g., the current "community of interest" for the Parks; target age groups; identification of areas/activities which require greater publicity; information that needs to be better disseminated such as the "take home" rubbish policy or information on the use of 1080 poison).

The full report will be tabled at the Landcare Committee meeting on 8 June 1999. Councillors can obtain a copy of that report from the Regional Parks (Strategy & Marketing).

7. Communications

Regional Parks staff will prepare a press release and photo in conjunction with Corporate Communications to publicise the overall level of satisfaction with the Regional Parks Network.

8. Recommendation

That the report be received and the contents noted.

Report prepared by:

Approved for submission:



ANNE MANLEY
Parks Planner - Policy

SUSAN EDWARDS
Manager, Regional Parks (Strategy & Marketing)

ANDREW ANNAKIN
Divisional Manager, Landcare