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**Report 02.42**

11 January 2002

File: R/2/10/2

Report to the Landcare Committee  
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## **Akatarawa Forest Motorised Recreational User Guidelines and Track Map**

### **1. Purpose**

To advise the Committee:

- (1) on progress made with the Akatarawa Recreation Access Committee (ARAC) clarifying specific tracks in the Akatarawa Forest available for motorised recreational use; and
- (2) that the track map will be used on an interim basis for motorised recreational use in the Akatarawa Forest until it has been subject to public consultation and possible amendment and subsequent adoption through the Forest Lands Management Plan review.

### **2. Akatarawa Forest Motorised Recreational User Code and Management Guidelines 1997**

Some roads in the Akatarawa Forest have been used for motorised recreation since the days of the Regional Water Board. Motorised recreation is a legitimate use in the Forest, although some other users and environmental groups often do not like it, therefore other users can be displaced.

In December 1997, the Council adopted the Akatarawa Forest Motorised Recreational User Code and Management Guidelines (refer Report 97.435). The Guidelines came about after Council officers temporarily closed part of the Forest (on the recommendation of the Occupational Safety and Health Unit of the Department of Labour) following large scale damage to roads which left some sections of road in an unsafe/dangerous condition. The closure generated a response from the motorised users leading to ARAC being formed. ARAC has subsequently worked with us to prepare the Guidelines, which set out:

- a code of practice for motorised activities in the Forest;
- zones where motorised recreation can occur (refer section 3 for details);
- types of activities permitted and under what terms, (e.g., 4 wheel drives are only allowed during approved club events with authorised trip leaders; motorbikes and quads have casual access but need a permit, etc.);
- safety provisions;
- basis for closure of tracks or Forest areas; and
- management of events and concessions.

Since the Guidelines were developed, we have met regularly with ARAC and have a good working relationship. This enables most issues to be sorted out before they become problems.

### 3. **Need to Identify Specific Tracks Available for Motorised Use**

The Guidelines adopted by the Council included a zoning map which identified parts of the Forest where:

- motorised recreation can occur on existing designated tracks;
- events can occur with specific permits, (e.g., plantation forestry areas); and
- motorised recreation is not permitted.

However, some members of ARAC have argued that the zoning allows them to use all tracks within the motorised recreation zones. The zoning is being interpreted differently and leads to differences of opinion as to what is an existing track available for motorised recreation and what is not, (e.g., can they use all tracks and overgrown tramways existing within the zone or all tracks they were using at the time when the Guidelines were adopted). The variation in interpretation makes it difficult for the Ranger to manage the activity, its impacts and forest road/track maintenance. To rectify these problems we need to remove the zones and identify specific tracks available for motorised recreation on a map.

### 4. **Process for Identifying Specific Tracks Available for Motorised Use**

Over the last few months we have been working with ARAC to develop a process for clarifying the specific tracks available for motorised use (refer **Attachment 1**). We have completed steps 1 to 3 and are part way through step 4. We have reached the stage where we have a detailed map of the tracks available for motorised recreation (the map will be presented at the meeting). However, other Forest users or interest groups, (e.g., environmental groups) have not been consulted about the Guidelines or the new track map. Therefore, we consider that the tracks identified on the map should be available for use in the interim, but may be changed following public consultation through the Forest Lands Management Plan Review.

In developing the map we assessed the recreational, environmental and heritage values of all the tracks ARAC identified for motorised use; and we considered the management implications of allowing the use. We have decided not to allow motorised recreation on some of the tracks proposed by ARAC, as the activity impacts on other core values, (e.g.,

historic tramways or key native ecosystems) and one track is causing us management problems (see below). These tracks will not be available for motorised recreation.

We have applied conditions to the use of some other tracks that should minimise user impacts; noting that if the conditions are not complied with, motorised use will no longer be allowed. We will need to work through with ARAC how to maintain the tracks not traditionally available for motorised activities, as current budgets do not provide sufficient funds to maintain them given the proposed motorised use.

As a result of this process we have also identified some additional tracks (not previously shown on the zoning map) that can be used for motorised recreation.

Generally, the members of ARAC have accepted our assessment of the values and the issues relating to the tracks. However, there is one main area of contention relating to a group of pylon servicing tracks generally referred to as 257, which are very popular for casual motorbike use. We have no disagreement in principle with motorcyclists using the 257 tracks. However, we have closed the tracks to casual use (but allow organised events) due to what we believe to be motorised recreational users (not necessarily members of ARAC) cutting down indigenous bush to extend the tracks. Apart from the environmental damage this causes and the damage to historic tramways, the activity means that motorbikes can now get casual access to non-motorised areas where they are not permitted (Battle Hill Farm Forest Park, neighbouring private land and the Council's Puketiro plantation forest).

Although some motorised users (and some trampers) believe it is okay to clear bush to open up tracks, it contravenes the Council bylaws and policies. Also changing attitudes and increased awareness of environmental and heritage values makes this behaviour unacceptable. We need to educate people and let them know that causing environmental and heritage damage, and accessing non-motorised areas, is not acceptable. The only place where we can physically stop motorbikes accessing the non-motorised areas is by placing a barrier at the start of 257. In the future we may reassess the use of this group of tracks with ARAC and may allow some form of casual motorbike access if our concerns can be addressed and subject to the outcome of public consultation through the management plan review.

## 5. **Communications**

We are working with ARAC on a communication strategy to advise motorised recreational users of the tracks now available for their use and will implement the strategy over the next few months. We will also begin sign-posting the tracks as budgets allow.

The track map will go out for public consultation through the Forest Lands Management Plan Review.

## 6. **Recommendations**

*That the Landcare Committee:*

- (1) ***note** the process for clarifying specific tracks available for motorised recreational use in the Akatarawa Forest.*

- (2) *note the progress made with the Akatarawa Recreation Access Committee (ARAC) identifying tracks in the Akatarawa Forest available for motorised recreational use.*
- (3) *note that the track map will be used on an interim basis for motorised recreational use in the Akatarawa Forest until it has been subject to public consultation and possible amendment and subsequent adoption through the Forest Lands Management Plan Review.*

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**Attachment 1** : Process for Clarifying Track Hierarchy and Use for Motorised Recreation

## Process for Clarifying Track Hierarchy and Use for Motorised Recreation

- Step 1:** ARAC to mark tracks they want to use on map.
- Step 2:** WRC to identify:
- (a) tracks that ARAC can use for motorised recreation during this process;
  - (b) tracks that ARAC cannot use, future use subject to the outcome of this process (including disputed tracks);
  - (c) tracks that definitely cannot be used for motorised recreation;
  - (d) (with ARAC) methodology for publication of tracks map.
- Step 3:** WRC to organise research on the tracks identified in Step 2 b relating to the potential impacts of allowing motorised recreational use on:
- (a) other recreational opportunities/uses;
  - (b) heritage values;
  - (c) environmental values;
  - (d) water supply considerations;
  - (e) other relevant considerations.
- The research will also consider the *Signature Values* and assessment criteria.
- Step 4:** ARAC and WRC to work through the implications of the findings and come up with recommendations on whether the tracks researched in Step 3 should be available for motorised recreation for inclusion in the draft management plan for the Akatarawa Forest. Also investigate mitigation methods and options for discouraging misuse and/or use of areas not available for motorised recreation.
- Step 5:** WRC to revise the zoning map showing the tracks proposed for motorised recreational use as identified in Step 4. Also, work with ARAC to develop grading system and maintenance standards for agreed tracks, and preferred usage, seasonal usage and funding options.
- Step 6:** WRC to incorporate the revised zoning/track map in the draft management plan (due to be completed in July 2002).
- Step 7:** WRC to call for public submissions on the draft management plan.
- Step 8:** WRC to finalise the management plan (due for completion in December 2002). Also, publication methodology for tracks.

Any future tracks to be considered on a case by case basis using this same process (including the *Signature Values* assessment criteria) and to go through a public consultation process to amend the management plan.