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Committee       Landcare  
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## Visitor monitoring framework - update

### 1. Purpose

To update the Committee on progress with implementing the model for counting park visits as part of the Visitor Monitoring Framework.

### 2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report **do not** trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

### 3. Background

Over the past year we have been reviewing the way that we collect information about people who use our parks, how often, and why. (See Report 05.456 (**Attachment 1**) for further background).

This project in Belmont Regional Park was the first stage in implementing the “calibration” section of the Visitor Monitoring Framework where we recalibrate the counter data to more accurately reflect the number of visits.

To more accurately estimate visitor numbers, the project will identify which entrances capture 75% of the visits to the park. These visitor counts are then extrapolated by a calibration factor to estimate total park usage.

We also piloted the Visitor Satisfaction Survey (VSS) through interviewing 100 visitors to the park.

The Visitor Satisfaction Survey helps us develop a more accurate picture of the people visiting the park by interviewing users at point of use about the aspects of the park that most appeal to them and the benefits they get from visiting this park. This is a departure from our traditional methods of phone surveys or self administered surveys which don't directly target general park users.

### **3.1 What happened?**

Temporary staff manned all entrances (except Horokiwi Rd) to Belmont Regional Park over selected weekdays and weekends from January 28 to 18 March. They counted vehicles, cyclists, horseback riders and pedestrians entering the park, so that these could be compared to the vehicle (road) or pedestrian (beam) counters installed at each entrance. In this way we could work out a multiplication factor for each of the counters that would result in a more accurate estimate of visits than had previously been available.

We surveyed 12 park entrances during the survey period, with three days on “major” entrances and two days on what we believed were “minor” entrances. However we reduced coverage at Sweetacres Reserve, Belmont Road and Rahui Grove due to lack of people entering the park at these locations. Instead we increased activity at Stratton Street and Hill Road to get a better idea of traffic levels there.

Surveyors also observed visitor activity within five minutes of park users entering the park, and interviewed visitors to ascertain visitor satisfaction.

The information gathered included:

- Number of visitors at each entrance
- Visitor activity
- Visitor characteristics (how they reached the park, who they visited with, how long they spent there)
- Visitor satisfaction with various aspects of the park e.g. facilities, space, behaviour of others; and those most valued by the visitor
- Benefits of visiting the park to the visitor
- Demographic profile

### **3.2 Findings**

According to the visitor counts the four most visited entrances were the ones contributing 77% of the visitors to the park. These were (in order) Oakleigh Street, Cornish Street, Dry Creek and Stratton Street. Hill Road was the fifth most visited entrance.

Oakleigh Street’s location within Maungaraki and its numerous facilities place it easily first in the popularity stakes. The easy access to Cornish Street (and its proximity to Wellington City) and Dry Creek from the highway are the main reasons for their high usage.

Stratton Street gives good access to Belmont trig and offers facilities for groups, families and mountain bike riders. Hill Road gives the easiest access to the high points and views of the park, one of the most valued aspects amongst visitors.

The two Porirua entrances - Takapu Road and Cannons Creek - ranked the lowest of all the entrances covered, averaging about 6 visits per surveyed day.

Modes of transport varied significantly over the different entrances. The most popular means of visiting the park's **four most well used** entrances were by the car (64%) followed by pedestrians (25%), cycle (11%) and horseback (1%).

### 3.3 Calibrations

Currently the vehicle counter figures at Oakleigh Street and Stratton Street are halved (to account for exiting vehicles) then multiplied by a factor of 3.55 (summer) or 3.5 (winter) to estimate the number of visitors to the park.

During the survey period, average visits to the park were apportioned amongst the various entrances as per the following chart.

Calculating the number of people visiting the park means applying a multiplication factor to the counts for the top four entrances which together account for 77% of the visits to the park. The totals are then divided by 0.77 to reach a combined total for the park.

Entrance	Average visits per day	Share of visits	Proposed multiplication factor <i>(converts numbers of cars to people using all modes of transport)</i>
Oakleigh Street	<b>100</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>2</b>
Cornish St	<b>69</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>1</b>
Dry Creek	<b>60</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>1.25</b>
Stratton St	<b>37</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>1</b>
Hill Rd	32	9%	
Kaitangata Cres	23	7%	
Old Coach Rd	18	5%	
Takapu Rd	6	2%	
Cannons Creek	5	1%	

*The proposed multiplication factor for Oakleigh St, Dry Creek and Stratton St was derived by:*

- a) dividing the vehicle counter figures on the surveyed days in half to account for exiting traffic*
- b) dividing the total visits on each day by the adjusted vehicle count and*
- c) averaging the resulting figures over the surveyed days.*

*A beam counter at Cornish St counts individuals, so the count there simply needs to be divided in half (to account for people leaving the park).*

*The ranger and a number of residents pass through the Stratton St entrance, and the classroom is also regularly used by GW staff. The calibration factor is lower than the others to allow for this non-visitor traffic.*

### **3.4 Visitor Satisfaction Survey results**

Points of interest that came out of the survey include:

- Most people (51%) visit to walk, 8% (of the total) with dogs.
- Mountain biking and running are the second and third most popular activities.
- “Easy access” or “location” is the most cited reason for visiting, followed by “good tracks” and that it has become a “habit” for them.
- 75% of those surveyed were “very satisfied” with the park as a place to carry out their chosen activity. 23% were “satisfied”, mainly because they would like to see some improvements.
- 60% of people visit with others – and they stay longer in the park than those who visit by themselves.
- Half the park’s visitors say they go to the park at least once a week.
- Visitors to Belmont Regional Park are most likely to have visited the Hutt River Trail out of all GW’s recreational areas. Kaitoke Regional Park is the next most popular with Belmont visitors.
- The top three most important facilities are walking tracks, signs and toilets. There were good levels of satisfaction with tracks and bridges – not so with toilets, signs, roads and car parks, drinking water and rubbish bins. (The latter demonstrates a lack of understanding of GW’s “take home rubbish” policy.
- The park’s “space and place” (views and settings) is the aspect most valued and with which people are most satisfied (74%). If people were less satisfied with this aspect it generally meant they didn’t know what the park had to offer.
- Satisfaction levels with flora and fauna, the number and behaviour of people and the contribution of the park to protecting our natural and cultural heritage were lower, reflecting areas for improvement e.g. better pest management and/or better communication.
- Visitors feel they get a wide range of benefits from visiting the park. 90% appreciate the opportunities for exercise, fitness, training and general health. Along with these go factors such as:

- emotional (e.g. wellbeing, satisfaction, enjoyment, stress relief) – 63%
  - mental (time for self, sanity, meditation) – 30%
  - environmental (nature appreciation, outdoors, fresh air) – 21%
  - spiritual (in touch with nature, peacefulness) - 14% and
  - social benefits (family time, improve relationships, sense of history and community) – 16%
- 19% of visitors (the highest proportion) to the park would change nothing about it. The next most popular changes would be improvements to the tracks, more native bush and better parking at Cornish Street.
  - Most visitors (67%) were very satisfied with the park overall, with the other third satisfied but seeing a number of possible improvements. 91% were satisfied with the network of regional parks in Wellington
  - Visitors can be characterised as mostly :
    - Living in Hutt City (55%) or Wellington City (34%)
    - Male (65%)
    - Having an annual household income of over \$50,000
    - Aged 30-60 years
    - “New Zealanders” (58%). Only 10% were from other ethnic groups – 2% Maori; 8% other groups

#### **4. Comment**

For the sake of consistency we should look to apply the new calibration factors at the start of the 06/07 financial year.

Through the visitor satisfaction survey the significance of Belmont Regional Park has become much clearer. It has been used by many of the visitors for a long time and with great frequency. Some people said they had been going often to Belmont for over 20 years.

Visitor feedback is reasonably consistent with previous visitor satisfaction surveys conducted in the park and with feedback received through the Belmont Regional Park Management Plan process. Users appreciate the native bush and birdlife, views, conservation and heritage roles of the parks. Visitors are still predominantly male (65%) but the proportion visiting from Wellington City has doubled from the 2000 visitor satisfaction survey (34%). The benefits to visitors in terms of health and wellbeing were not covered in previous work so that is a new set of information that can be added to the wider body of knowledge.

For new or occasional visitors we know that they need to feel confident of where they are going. Signs are one of the most important “facilities” for these users. Toilets and drinking water remain valued facilities that could be improved at the park, particularly at the heavily used Cornish St entrance.

For the future we should note that the purchase of Waitangirua Farm and the greater expected use of that area, the usage dynamics will change. With regular reviews of the calibration count every five years, usage patterns can be analysed over time.

## 5. Communication

This first stage of the survey project presents some good opportunities to contribute to the knowledge base surrounding such research in the parks industry. A report will be prepared to the Values and Research Committee of the Australia based *Parks Forum* on the project and the findings.

## 6. Recommendations

*That the Committee:*

1. *Receives the report.*
2. *Notes the content of the report.*

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**Attachment 1: Report #05.456: Visitor monitoring framework**