Submission on Greater Wellington Regional Council's Draft Toitū Te Whenua Parks Network Plan 2020-30

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Summary

This submission is in support of Toitū Te Whenua Parks Network Plan.

In particular, we support the following aspects:

- the inclusion of Porirua East in the restoration area priority one. This community will do much with that investment in their local environment
- the focus on the role our parks can play in responding to climate change, with it being one of the 6 core goals of the plan
- the aspirations around partnership and working collaboratively that the plan sets out
- setting out a plan for reforesting and regenerating our park environments

We would like to encourage Greater Wellington to explore how to support the following ideas:

- How do we use our parks infrastructure and resource to uplift communities' aspirations for their environment and also include skills building, education and jobs?
- Can we extend Belmont Regional Park north into Waitangirua so that the people in that community can also access and support the regional parks network?
- How can we support citizen science opportunities for locals to grow their knowledge and connection with their local environment?

We are also sharing in this submission an idea that is forming in Porirua East and would include the western side of Belmont Regional Park. This idea is called the Ngahere Korowai. The Parks Network draft plan is in line with this idea and would support it well.

Support

Wesley Community Action works with the community and other partners across the Wellington region. This submission is focused on our work in the Porirua community. Drawing on our decades years of work in Porirua, we are in support of the following parts of the draft parks network plan.

Inclusion of Porirua East in the restoration area priority one

The community in Porirua East report to us a strong desire for connection to te taiao but that they currently do not have easy access to high quality, large scale, nature spaces. We are starting to work with a coalition of groups and people who are building momentum around the idea of a ngahere korowai – a large scale reforestation and protection of the environment around Porirua East. This idea is described in more detail further in this submission. We have been pleased to have the support of Greater Wellington staff and councillors, local people, and Zealandia in the forming of this idea. By prioritising the reforesting of the parts of Belmont Regional Park that are in Porirua East, Greater Wellington can continue to support access to nature for this great community. The community will do much with that investment in their local environment.

Focus on the role our parks can play in responding to climate change, with it being one of the 6 core goals of the plan

Climate change impacts are already being felt in our communities across Aotearoa, and priority action on climate change is crucial. We support Greater Wellington making that explicit in the parks network plan.

Aspirations around partnership and working collaboratively that the plan sets out

The management of the park network is a massive job, that needs more that just Greater Wellington to achieve well. We have many groups, iwi, rōpū, individuals and organisations in the Wellignton region who have much to contribute. We often ask the question in our work, what can we do together that we can't do alone? We support Greater Wellington asking that question too by including aspirations around partnership in the plan.

Setting out a plan for reforesting and regenerating our park environments

We believe that it is not good enough to just manage things as status quo. We have a responsibility to future generations to enhance the world and communities that they will inherit.

Because of this, we support the focus of the parks network plan to invest in reforesting and regenerating our local ecosystems.

Expand

We would like to encourage Greater Wellington to explore how to further support three key questions.

How do we use our parks infrastructure and resource to uplift communities' aspirations for their environment and also include skills building, education and jobs?

Investment in our regional parks will provide a range of benefits. One potential benefit that often seems overlooked is that of achieving social outcomes with the investments we make. There is great potential for Greater Wellington to look at the way that it spends money and grants contracts to take into account the principles of social procurement. For example, Greater Wellington could include in its maintenance contracts that a certain number of local people need to be offered employment or training opportunities or that a certain number of Māori and Pasifika businesses should be included. The communities of Porirua East want a thriving natural environment, but they also want thriving employment opportunities. There are many people living locally who have great skills and experience to contribute but too often miss out on the opportunities.

Can we extend Belmont regional park north into Waitangirua so that the people in that community can also access and support the regional parks network?

Belmont Regional park boarders one edge of Porirua East. It is exciting to think that in future generations, the communities of Cannons Creek will have a thriving protected environment on their backdoor. The community just up the road in Waitangirua are also surrounded by bare hills. Is there a possibility of extending some protection of Belmont Regional park north so that the future communities of Waitangirua are also able to have ngahere out their back door? This would be gathered into the Ngahere Korowai idea outlined further in this document.

How can we support citizen science opportunities for locals to grow their knowledge and connection with their local environment?

Porirua has one of the youngest populations in Aotearoa. How can we use the resource of the regional parks to support their connection to the environment and knowledge and development into the science fields? Many schools already have activities to monitor and regenerate their local environments. We believe that the parks network plan should include consideration of how to support communities, especially young people, to have a strong role in learning and doing when it

comes to scientific monitoring of the ecosystems around them.

The Ngahere Korowai idea

There is a collective of us asking **how might the community lead the transformation of the hills around Porirua East into a Ngahere Korowai?**



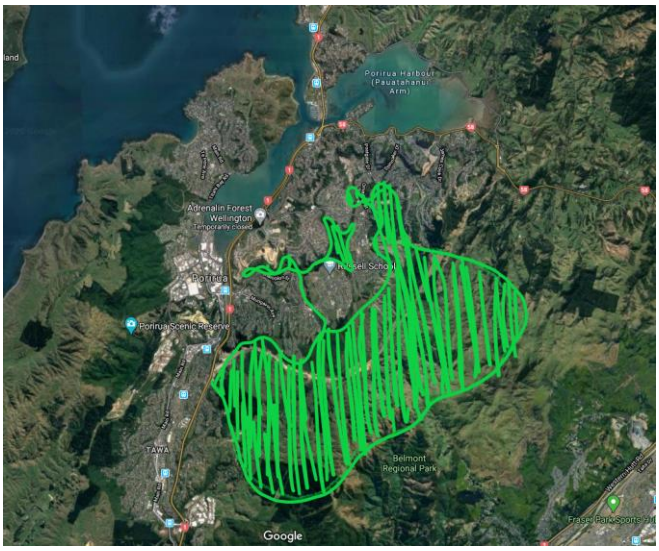
Tucked in at the foot of these bare hills is a beautiful community full of amazing people who deserve big things.

Winding through those hills is the roadworks to build Transmission Gully. A large part of these hills is part of Belmont Regional Park.

What if we could turn those bare hills into a protected ngahere that wraps itself around the Porirua East community to protect its residents into the future?

People of Porirua East want and deserve a close connection to te taiao / nature. Many in this community don't have easy transport to get to other nature spaces.

Porirua is currently at the beginning of a huge redevelopment, with new housing and infrastructure. We have an opportunity to compliment that investment in the built environment, with investment in the natural environment.



A Ngahere Korowai would learn from the vision of the Wellington town belt and all the benefits it brings to the future generations of Porirua East (access to nature, low carbon development, compact city growth).

This community has the ability and passion to contribute to a large visionary project like this Ngahere Korowai.

Collective

A collective of people and organisations is forming around this idea. We are having conversations about what this project wants to achieve and how to do that. We can see this collective starting to take more formal shape throughout 2021. The current members who have been participating in the exploration of this idea include:

- Wesley Community Action

- Zealandia
- Porirua Mens Group
- Porirua Regeneration Project (Kainga Ora)
- Greater Wellington Regional Council
- Porirua City Council
- Local people who visit Wesley House in Cannons Creek

We have had interest and conversations from a range of others as well

Project aims

We are continuing to develop the aims of the project, with input from local people. The current identified aims are broad:

- Increase biodiversity (Kākā, kereru, Ruru flying around Porirua East)
- Owned and driven by Porirua East locals
- Opportunities for employment and skills training (including tree planting, track building, pest management, project management, communication, HR, teaching, local tourism)
- Increased water quality (watercress and tuna in the awa around Porirua East)
- Ngahere korowai protected for future generations (legal protections)
- Flood protection (climate change resilience)
- Capturing pollution (carbon and air pollution from transmission gully)
- Increased pride in Porirua East (from the rest of the region too)
- Increasing peoples time in nature – including healing, restoring, rongoa, healthy tinana and wairua

Current workstreams

There are a number of potential workstreams in this project. We have identified some of the key ones below.

- Community nursery
- Community planting and connecting
- Skills and employment
- Communication
- Funding for project coordination
- Legal protection status
- Citizen science projects (e.g. EDNA of mānga and awa)

- Work with community to hone exactly what we are aiming for (e.g. a Zealandia in Porirua/reforesting/protecting from urban sprawl?)

Research questions

There are many areas of research that we need to engage in to help set the priorities for this project. Some of the identified ones are:

- What is the optimum size for building biodiverisity and what corridors are needed?
- What is the baseline? (biodiversity, water quality and time spent in nature)
- Where are the waterways and which need priority planting? What is our route to the harbour?
- What will transmission gully traffic do to air quality and can a ngahere korowai help protect?
- Where are priority planting areas for flood protection?
- How might lower income communities be able to collectively participate in the carbon market through protecting and reforestation?