

Friends of Regional Parks news in brief October 2017

Hello Friends of Regional Parks Members and Parks Supporters

The 1 in a 100 year storm in March/April caused considerable damage particularly in some of the Southern Parks and a number of parks in the western and northern regions have also experienced flooding and ground movement due to a winter and early spring of exceptionally wet weather. The few fine days we have had have been a welcome relief and we hope more will arrive soon and allow us to be out enjoying our regional parks.

AGM 12 June 2017

Several changes to the committee resulted from the AGM with Bill Burrill stepping down from his role as Chairman after providing invaluable leadership and guidance over the seven years since Friends of Regional Parks (Auckland) was formed. We are delighted that he has become our Patron. Earlier in the year Cimino Cole resigned from the committee but will be continuing his invaluable work on the Mahurangi Coastal Trail.

New Regional Parks Manager

Rachel Kelleher was appointed to the role of Regional Parks Manager and took over this role on the 21st of August. Rachel was previously the Biodiversity Manager for the Council and was acting Biosecurity Manager for a time, which gives her a great overview of the issues affecting our parks and the asset they are for the region's biodiversity. Rachel has replaced Richard Hollier who resigned as Regional Parks Manager to take up a position at Ventia Ltd, one of the companies providing maintenance and asset management services to Auckland's parks, open spaces and city infrastructure.

We look forward to a positive working relationship with Rachel and have offered FOR Parks' assistance and support to strengthen the Regional Parks.

Auckland Regional Parks 50 - Year Vision and Values Plan

Although we hoped to have seen more definite action by now on some of the points accepted by the Parks and Recreation Committee back in 2016 the plan is still proving useful as an inspirational document for discussions with Council staff and other groups.

Some good news - Motukorea (Browns Island) becomes a Regional Park

Motukorea Island was handed back to Auckland Council management in February and was formally opened as a Regional Park in July 2017. Friends of Regional Parks congratulate the Council for achieving this outcome. Restoration volunteer days are being organised and we will advise you of these in future and gather a group of FOR Parks supporters to go along and help.

Mahurangi Coastal Trail, a 50th anniversary legacy project

Since inclusion of the Mahurangi Coastal Trail concept in the regional parks management plan variation for Te Muri in February, a favourable preliminary coastal impact report is to hand. Davis Coastal Consultants will now prepare a resource consent application for the trail and for the cable-ferry jetties on either side of the Pūhoi River Mouth. Work has also commenced on the design of the ferry, with particular regard for presenting the least impediment to navigation by other craft entering and leaving the estuary. If you would like more information please contact secretary@mahurangi.org.nz

Kauri Dieback and Kauri Rescue

The release of Auckland Council's Monitoring Report on kauri dieback showed that the spread of the disease in the Waitakere Ranges has more than doubled in the last 5 years and places like Piha face local extinctions if drastic action is not taken urgently. More than 80% of people are not using the cleaning stations and the monitoring data clearly shows that people are the number 1 vector for the disease with over 75% of the infection being along the track network. Te Kawerau a Maki, Mana Whenua for the Waitakere Ranges have called for a rāhui (closure) of the Regional Park to enable the forest to heal. This call for a temporary closure has been supported by The Tree Council, Waitakere Ranges Protection Society and Forest & Bird. They have said that the precautionary principle should be applied to keep people out of the forest until the tracks and cleaning stations can be upgraded. Auckland Council and the Government have been asked to fund \$50 million in future proofing the track network and making it safe for the 1 million annual visitors to use the tracks without spreading kauri dieback. FOR Parks is a member of the Stakeholder Working Group meeting with Council to discuss the issue along with conservation groups, recreation groups and concessionaires. FOR Parks is aware of the many factors which must be considered in preparing a successful strategy to address kauri dieback and accommodate visitors and residents in the Waitakere Ranges. There is a petition about the proposed closures at <https://www.toko.org.nz/petitions/close-the-ranges-to-save-waitakere-kauri>. Please contact me, Bronwen Turner, Chair with any concerns you have through forparks@slingshot.co.nz .

In better news, the Kauri Rescue citizen science project has signed up many participants, particularly in West Auckland, to treat their sick kauri trees and collect data about how the trees respond. The project will launch in Northland at Toll Stadium in Whangarei on Tuesday 3 October at 6pm. More Kauri Rescue Ambassadors are needed to help spread the word and get more people signed up to help their trees. You can join the team online at www.kaurirescue.org.nz. Please share with your networks.

Urban Development Authority and changes to Reserves Act and RMA.

We remain concerned about the implications for our parks of the proposed Urban Development Authority and proposed changes to the Reserves Act and RMA. We continue to monitor activity within Parliament.

Draft Concept Plan for the Gap (Taitomo) Piha

FOR Parks along with many others made submissions on the draft Concept Plan for the Gap land (Byers Property) at Piha which was purchased by Council last year. The Hearing on submissions on the Draft Concept Plan are due to be held on the 9th of November. FOR Parks considered the content of the proposed plan to be a great improvement on the draft especially as it took community input into consideration.

Auckland Plan Refresh and Long Term Plan

FOR Parks submitted suggestions to the team preparing the Auckland Plan Refresh giving more specific objectives and strategies with regard to parks and open spaces. These we felt would more appropriately acknowledge the importance of park and open space infrastructure to the long term health and well being of Auckland's residents, particularly as the area experiences rapid population growth. In keeping with the stewardship shown by our forefathers, it is important Auckland sets aside recreation areas and protects areas of high natural value in concert with urban development.

We encourage you to have input into both the Auckland Plan Refresh and the Long Term Plan, stressing the importance of continuing to acquire Regional Parks during this period of rapid urban development, having a dedicated acquisition fund and allocating sufficient development and maintenance funding to maintain the high quality of our parks as visitor use increases.

Okura Environment Court Hearing

As you will be aware from a recent email, this Environment Court case commenced on Monday September 18 with Council witnesses presenting detailed evidence on the marine and bird life around the Okura estuary. The Judge and commissioners have made a site visit including taking a boat trip on the estuary to view the area and proposed development land. We wish the Council, LBOGP Soc and Okura group success with their endeavours to achieve good open space and conservation outcomes for this area adjoining Long Bay Regional Park. We encourage members to follow their progress and consider donating to help them fund their appeal. You can find more information and donate through:

www.givealittle.co.nz/org/savelongbayokuracoastline

OR

www.longbaypark.org.nz

A New Initiative

Since its formation in 2010 Friends of Regional Parks has been consistently advocating for a dedicated fund for the acquisition of regional parkland in line with the projected significant increase in Auckland's population. The \$25M set aside by the Auckland Regional Council for this purpose was absorbed into the Auckland Council general budget and we have not yet been successful in replacing this funding.

As this situation looks unlikely to change for the better in the foreseeable future FOR Parks is investigating setting up a charitable trust fund with the objectives of assisting Council in acquiring regional parkland. We will keep you informed of our progress.

The Future and your Support

Thank you for your past support of FOR Parks. We would appreciate your continued support and if you have not already sent it we would be pleased to receive your subscription for this year. A membership renewal form is attached.

Yours sincerely,

Bronwen Turner
Chair, Friends of Regional Parks (Auckland) Inc