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**Committee**            **Landcare**  
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## **Environmental Asset Management Plan**

### **1. Purpose**

To inform the Landcare Committee about the progress of the Environmental Asset Management Plan in caring for the environmental assets in the Greater Wellington parks and forests. A presentation will accompany this report.

### **2. Background**

Greater Wellington manages nearly 50,000ha of forests, wetlands and dunes as well as farm land in its parks and forests network. The indigenous ecosystems within them are valued for their capacity to provide clean water, their ability to hold soil, and their recreational value. They also make an important contribution to the region's biodiversity. A programme to manage the threats to the long-term ecological viability of the parks and forests ecosystems was developed through the Environmental Asset Management Plan (EAMP).

Prior to 2003, the EAMP consisted largely of large-scale, aerial 1080 possum operations on the forested areas of the Current and Future Water Collection Areas, and the control of pest plants identified in the Regional Pest Management Strategy (RPMS).

While those programmes were helpful, the ecological integrity of the Parks and Forests continued to decline. For example, monitoring information obtained from the long-term vegetation plots showed that seedlings that were palatable to goats and deer were being eaten and thus not growing past browse height (those palatable species also provide important food sources for native birds, lizards and insects). Further, weed mapping surveys completed in 2001 demonstrated the presence of numerous pest plants on Council-managed land, not just those identified in the RPMS. While information about bird abundance was limited at the time, the combined monitoring data available indicated that indigenous biodiversity was also declining on Council land.

Based on this information, it was clear that a greater level of intervention was required by the Council if these trends were to be changed. In 2003 during the

last LTCCP, Council committed additional resources to help ‘halt the decline’ in the biodiversity then present on Council land.

### 3. Where are we now?

The funding from the 2003-13 LTCCP has enabled an integrated program of possum, goat and pest plant control to be implemented across Council-managed lands. Possums are now controlled through the use of five-yearly aerial 1080 operations in the larger forested blocks and ground control operations in accessible terrain. Goat numbers are managed through a Judas goat control program, while Pest Plant Plans focus control work on the weediest pest plants that threaten the integrity of these ecosystems. In the past two years, 11,500ha of council land have received possum control, 30,000ha have been hunted intensively for goats and over 55 pest plant infestations have been controlled.

Monitoring of the environmental outcomes of these operations since 2003 has shown:

- Increases in bird numbers in forested areas after 1080 operations (unfortunately numbers fall again after three years as rats re-establish their numbers).
- Improvements in the growth of “palatable” seedlings (now being seen for the first time in areas where intensive goat control is underway).
- Bellbird were recently recorded in Korokoro Bush after decades of absence.
- The forest canopy is in good condition in most areas and no loss of indicator tree species (rata trees).
- Boneseed, boxthorn and Italian buckthorn have been removed from Queen Elizabeth Park. Buddleia has been largely eliminated from the upper Wainuiomata catchment.

<b>Control Program</b>	<b>Prior to 2003</b>	<b>Since 2003</b>
Possum Control	1080 aerial operations on 85% of the Current and Future Water Collection Areas, and Kaitoke Regional Park  6 yearly cycle  Ground control on the larger park forest remnants in Battle Hill and Belmont	1080 aerial operations on 100% of the Current and Future Water Collection Areas, and Kaitoke Regional Park  5 yearly cycle  Ground control on all park forest remnants. Ongoing control is progressively being implemented (currently in 70% remnant area).
Goat Control	Professional hunting initiated in Wainuiomata/Orongorongo WCA	Intensive hunting and Judas goat control program implemented in the Current and Future WCA’s

	and Korokoro Bush (8,000ha)	and all the parks where required (40,000ha).
Pest Plant Control	Five pest plant species targeted	Fifty-five pest plant species controlled
Monitoring	Four quantitative monitoring techniques used - largely focussed on impacts of animals on <i>forest vegetation</i>	Twelve quantitative techniques used to assess outcomes of management on <i>ecosystem health</i> .
Rodents	Primarily by-kill from 1080 possum operations but there was an ongoing control programme on 30ha at Battle Hill	Primarily by-kill from 1080 possum operations but there is now also an ongoing control programme on 710ha in Belmont and Battle Hill

#### 4. Where to from here

The biodiversity programme is starting to deliver the benefits it was designed for, particularly in terms of vegetation. However, it only scratches the surface when protecting all biodiversity on Council land. While controlling possums, goats and pest plants provides some protection for the vegetation of the parks and forests, unfortunately birds, lizards and invertebrates are still being depleted by rats and mustelids.

Programmes could be developed that would address these trends. Unfortunately, an integrated pest management project covering all Council land would be very expensive. Consequently, we have focussed on small areas where we can make a difference. At present, two local restoration projects that are currently planned are in East Harbour Regional Park (in association with MIRO) and in the Wainuiomata/Orongorongo water collection area (mainland island project). We are looking forward to the restoration projects delivering significant gains in animal biodiversity.

#### 5. Communication

Press releases have been issued on an individual project basis.

#### 6. Recommendations

*That the Committee:*

1. *Receive the report.*
2. *Note the contents of the report.*

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