



ARAC Akatarawa

Akatarawa Recreational Access Committee Incorporated
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Regional Parks and Forests Submissions
Wellington Regional Council
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Wellington

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Dear Susan

Submission on the "On Track" Review

This submission is made on behalf of the Akatarawa Recreational Access Committee Incorporated (ARAC).

ARAC's Background of Success

Whilst you may be aware of the origins of ARAC, and have been heavily involved in liaison with us, you might not be totally aware of the significant increase in the scope and membership of ARAC.

Formed in 1996 to seek protection for the recreational values of the Akatarawa Forest, the ARAC formula has proven to be very successful. Territorial Authorities, and other Governmental Organisations such as DOC find the benefits of working with a single group representing a large collection of recreational user to be particularly effective. To this end, ARAC has expanded into areas ranging from Wellington South Coast, all the way up to the northern Manawatu.

As well as the original ARAC Akatarawa, we now have ARAC groups dealing with Land Managers in Wellington's South Coast, Lower Hutt Firebreaks, Waiotauru Valley in the Southern Tararuas, Wairarapa and the Aorangi Crossing and we are now in the process of establishing ARAC Manawatu to help with managed access to places ranging from Foxton Beach through to Takapari Road in the Ruahine Range.

In total now, we count our membership at some 3,500 users, primarily focused on Motorised Recreation, but with some members interested in horse riding, mountain biking and walking/tramping.

The ARAC success story continues, and we look forward to continuing our productive and convivial working relationship with Regional Council.

Part I Considerations for the Akatarawa Forest

Assumption

We make the assumption that the newly modified Management Guidelines for Motorised Recreation in the Akatarawa Forest will be included within the Draft of the Management Plans. These guidelines have proven to be extremely effective in allowing the various responsibilities and behaviours expected of both users and Regional Council alike to be defined. Proving the evolving nature of these guidelines, the recent modifications accepted by the Landcare Committee confirm the willingness with which both parties can resolve issues before they become problematic.

(If this assumption is incorrect, we make the most strenuous submission that the current guidelines should form the basis for managing motorised recreation in the Akatarawa Forest, and should be incorporated within the various Draft Regional Plans.)

Modifications to the existing Management Guidelines

One of the biggest problems we perceive with enshrining the current Management Guidelines within a Regional Plan will be the restriction that could be placed upon the "evolving" nature of these guidelines. An inflexible approach that may mean having to wait up to five years to be able to reflect operational and practical changes may render the same guidelines obsolete and hence unenforceable, something that could prove detrimental to the viable and indeed valuable working relationship between ARAC and Regional Council.

We would suggest that along with the incorporation of the Management Guidelines, Council should give serious consideration to some more flexible approach to alterations to these guidelines. In particular, modifications to the track network may prove desirable for operational and quite practical reasons.

As a suggestion, we would recommend the retention of the previous concept of "Zones", but with a limited focus. ARAC agrees with, and fully supports Council's desire to document and approve the use of specified tracks, whilst providing a set of controls to restrict access elsewhere. This removes any uncertainty and possible ambiguity in interpretation. However, if every time the track network needed to be reviewed, demanded a full public consultation, the nett effect could be to see the "approved" track network within the Regional Plan become

completely out of synch with what is happening in practice. This will only serve to undermine the viability of the Regional Plan.

Rather, we would suggest that with the retention of the original “Zone” system, the track network can be defined as now, with only specified tracks being available for use. However, at an operational level, allow Council to modify the list of available tracks by closing, restricting access, allowing new access, extending access etc., but only within the definitions allowed for each “Zone”. Such a compromise solution would afford the best of both worlds, by allowing the Plan to retain the essence of an “evolving” document, but retaining the management certainty provided by having an agreed and definitive track network.

Part II Belmont Regional Park

We would ask Council to consider incorporating permitted access to Motorised recreation under such terms and conditions as may be acceptable to say The Friends of Belmont Regional Park, but that would allow at least two “public days” per annum when managed motorised access would be afforded. We see this as a way of satisfying the desires and aspirations of many motorised recreational users, and helping reduce illicit activity. We do not support a “free for all” approach to allowing motor vehicles into Belmont Regional Park, but we are in favour of managed, sustainable and low-impact use.

Part III Battle Hill

More of a formality, but we urge Council to ratify what is now happening and formally recognise that limited vehicle access can be afforded across Battle Hill station under strict permit control.

Part IV Rimutaka Incline

As you might be aware, we will be seeking access through the Rimutaka Incline for ad hoc events (currently proposed as bi-annual) to provide a prestige Off Road experience that we see as highly educational and of tremendous benefit to promote the value of this wonderful resource. It may be that we will be able to find a track network that will afford access to the Incline Summit without having to traverse the whole of the Incline Track, but a formal recognition that Council may issue permits for such events would be desirable.

It should be noted that our intentions are always to ensure that use of such key facilities would be to provide a positive impact. i.e. We would seek to ensure that any track used is left in the same or better condition, and that funds raised would be used to improve facilities over all the track network supported by ARAC.

Part V Queen Elizabeth II Park

We understand that other user groups are seeking a formalised motorised recreational area within QEII Park. Whilst we have no particular request for such from amongst our Members, nonetheless, we must recommend to Council to at least consider providing additional motorised venues where this is appropriate and compatible with other key values.

As the number of motor vehicles capable of venturing off-highway increases, demand for recreational use of these vehicles will only increase. Providing managed, approved and permitted locations for people to exercise their desire for motorised recreation will only help minimise inappropriate or illicit activities elsewhere.

Please note that we do not condone illicit activities, but rather see them as a predictable outcome where approved venues are inadequate or simply not available at all.

Our Thanks

We would like to thank Council for affording us the opportunity to make submission before the Draft Regional Plans are produced. This is a wonderful opportunity to be involved in the early stages of the decision making process, and we are conscious that such involvement is a direct result of the close working relationship that ARAC has forged with Council. A working relationship we value in the extreme, and want to see continuing well into the future.

Again, a simple thank you.

For and on behalf of the Akatarawa Recreational Access Committee

Andy Cockroft
Coordinator