

## REPORT

Meeting Date: 19<sup>th</sup> February  
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Subject: Operations Report

### Biodiversity

- **Pateke Protection:** Cat trapping around the margins of the Whangapoua estuary began again early-January. Flock counts will be undertaken throughout the month of February.
- **Takoketai/Black Petrel protection:** The cat trapping contract work for Hirakimatā was completed in December. The team from Wildlife Management International Ltd arrived mid-January to monitor the Hirakimatā black petrel colony. The team will be on site until mid-February with the aim of monitoring study burrows and banding chicks. This year the team will also be completing surveillance at other sites around the island looking for new colonies.

The cat trapping team will commence again in April when chicks are fledging.

- **Rabbit Control:** Intermittent control continues around the Okiwi Basin area by the DOC Biodiversity Ranger. Nonetheless, we are seeing rabbit numbers starting to increase. Following on from May's successful intensive cull, further control is planned for April 2019.
- **Myrtle Rust** has not been confirmed present on Aotea/GBI. Seed collection is due to commence in February. Surveillance on vulnerable species will occur as required.
- **Stoat Sighting:** On Friday 4th January DOC Okiwi received a call reporting a stoat sighting. The informant had witnessed a stoat crossing Medland road between the quarry and Mason road, this was followed closely by another stoat. Given this is the time of year when juvenile stoats would be dispersing, and the fact that stoats can cover a large range, the sighting prompted an immediate incursion response.

The joint DOC and Auckland Council operation had stoat detection dogs on site within a day of the report, and has also established a network of trail cameras, tracking tunnels and traps over a 200ha area which aims to confirm the sighting.

This incident is likely to be ongoing for several months. Regular monitoring of traps, tracking tunnels, cameras will be necessary.

The surveillance completed so far has shown no evidence of stoat presence. If a stoat incursion is confirmed the incident will be escalated to target stoats with the goal of eradication.

The response has now winding down with maintenance of the infrastructure moving to once a week until early February.

- **Pateke losses:** 12 pateke were found dead mid-January in the vicinity of the stoat sighting. DNA swabs have been taken and sent for testing, as well as several carcasses sent for necropsy. There were no obvious signs of injury. Preliminary results indicate no

sign of predation. A possible theory of botulism associated with the stagnant water environment area in which the birds were found.

- **Rakitū Rodent Eradication Project:** All of the bait stations have been removed from in and around the buildings after two months of no bait taken. A second round of tracking tunnel monitoring is planned for February.

**Marine monitoring:** the ten sampling bait holders containing live mussels anchored around Rakitū and on the east coast of Aotea were collected after the final brodifacoum application. Testing has yet to be completed.

**Weka:** the weka captured from Rakitū prior to the operation continue to be housed at Pukaha/Mt Bruce. DOC continues to monitor bait breakdown on Rakitū and are aiming to relocate the weka this month as per the conditions of the translocation permit. The weka planned to be returned to Rakitū in early February.

- **Mokohinau Islands:** During the first week of January DOC Okiwi received a report of campfire remains and signs of a tent pitched on Burgess Island (Pokohinu Island). This prompted a media release reminding the public of the total fire ban and the potentially devastating consequences of a fire on the island.

In December, a team of researchers spent four days in the island group searching for the Mokohinau stag beetle. Although no live beetles or larvae were found, and the only evidence found was exoskeletons; the lack of sightings does not necessarily determine the beetle's extinction at this point.

## **Recreation / Historic**

- **Tracks and huts:** All the directional signs removed by unknown members of the public over the winter months have now been replaced. With tracks, huts and toilets in good condition heading into the busy season, rangers on the ground have had great feedback from visitors about the facilities.
- **Campgrounds:** December and January saw another busy season for the campsite hosts, with visitor numbers up again from the 17/18 season. We recorded just over three thousand campers over all six campsites for the period of 1 December to 9 January. The most popular site was Medland's, with Harataonga coming in a close second. The feedback from the campsite hosts has been predominantly positive.
- **Kauri Dieback Track Closures:** DOC's track closure programme, which assessed the risk of kauri dieback spread, has been completed. For Aotea the decision has been made to permanently close the Whangaparapara Peak Track, Whangaparapara Pack Track and a section of the Old Lady Track from 31 January 2019.

The track closure programme included a public consultation process. A small number of submissions were received opposing the proposed Aotea closures, these were carefully considered with feedback provided to submitters. Reasons behind the closures were primarily related to the exposure to kauri root systems and the high risk of soil transfer, with visitor numbers compared to the cost of upgrades and important consideration.

The Whangaparapara pack track has been closed since it was damaged in the 2014 storm.

- **Kauri Dieback:** Further capital upgrade work for tracks is planned for the upcoming summer on the Whitheys, Maungapiko (lookout track), Kiwiriki, Tramline (partial), South

Fork, Old Lady, Old Mill and Bridle tracks. Kiwiriki and South Fork tracks will be significant in terms of scale. The contract for this work is currently out to tender.

- **Visitor data:** The latest data from track counters has prompted a simple analysis of track users based on the locations where track counters are present. Counters are in place at the top 6 tracks on Aotea/GBI based on usage. The analysis looks primarily at the data provided from 2011/2012 through to 2018/2019.

Kaitoke hot springs track: 4.65% - average increase - This is our most used track. The users are primarily day visitors making a trip to the hot springs. This track is also one of the main entry and exit points for the Aotea track. The increase is moderate given that in 2011/2012 there were 10297 track users compared to the recent period of 2018/2019 where there were 11017 track users.

Mt Heale south fork track: -4% - average decrease - a moderate decrease over the years. This offers an alternative route to the Aotea track primarily if users do not want to use the Kaiaraara track with its multiple staircases and steeper terrain. The decision to use South Fork, as opposed to Kaiaraara, is often made at Mt Heale hut when users contemplate having to ascend to Hirakimata before turning down Kaiaraara. Last annual figure is calculated at approx. 1960 (counter is currently faulty, figure is based on an average of the past years).

Palmers track: 22% - average increase – an increase from 3721 track users in 2011/2012 to 5356 in 2017/2018. The popularity of this track may warrant future investment to address the increased usage.

Bushes beach track: -5% - average decrease – a steady decline in numbers over the corresponding years. Last annual figure is 3111.

Kaiaraara Kauri Dam track: -9% - average decrease – this figure is reflecting the impact of the storm damage of 2014. During that period, the track was closed for a period for remedial work to be done. This track has also been impacted by the absence of the Kauri Dams which were mostly damaged and washed downstream by the 2014 storm. The dams were a prime attraction in past years. Last annual figure is 2456

Warrens track: -10% - average decrease – The usage of this track has steadily decreased over the corresponding years. Last annual figure is 2191.

A summary of this data suggests that the overall number of visitors are lower than equivalent mainland sites. Also, the increase in numbers is very moderate considering the experiences being reported at some of our mainland sites. Anecdotal feedback suggests general satisfaction of our tracks and facilities. The data also helps with any future strategy work which might include our visitor groups.

All these tracks have been subject to recent Kauri Dieback mitigation work or have been programmed over the next 2 years. The Forest Rd (data not available) has also had extensive work over the past year. A large capital works project is currently programmed to further upgrade Whitneys track, Maungapiko lookout track, part of the Tramline track, Kiwiriki track, South Fork track, Old Lady track and Bridle track. Despite the visitor data indicating moderate numbers, the primary reason for this work is to mitigate for the risk of spreading Kauri Dieback disease.

## **Community**

- **Community and contractor BBQ:** We had a great turn out of community partners and contractors to the pre-Christmas BBQ held at the DOC office in Okiwi on 21 December. It was great for DOC staff to be able to spend time with members of the community and thank them for their support throughout the year.
- **Kauri dieback track ambassador:** Having completed training with DOC in Auckland mid-December, our ambassador Amy has been out on the tracks, talking to visitors 2-3 days a week. As anticipated, high-use tracks like Windy Canyon and the Hot Springs have provided the most opportunity for interactions, but there have still been steady numbers on other kauri tracks such as Kaiaraara and Bush's Beach. A high portion of those spoken to came from the Waitakere region so were well aware of decontamination protocols. Interactions have primarily been positive, with questions focused on disease origins and vectors.

The second part-time ambassador position has yet to be filled.

## **Staffing and Infrastructure**

- The team is settled now with all vacancies filled and several casual staff in place should they be needed. Most staff housing is also occupied leaving limited space for visitors.