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VEHICLE CLUB
Wellington (inc)

Submission

Greater Wellington – Draft Regional Forest Lands Plan: Future Water Collection Areas - June 2004

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INTRODUCTION

1 The Cross Country Vehicle Club (Wellington) Incorporated

This document is a submission on the Greater Wellington Draft Regional Forest Lands Plan: Future Water Collection Areas June 2004 (“the Plan”), by the Cross Country Vehicle Club (Wellington) Incorporated (“the Club”).

The Club has a focus on organised four wheel drive (4WD) activities for its members and their visitors. The Club was formed in 1971 and currently comprises over 300 members plus their families and friends. As such it is by far the largest 4WD club in the region and one of the largest in the country.

In the year ending June 2004, the Club organised in excess of 80 trips or driving events for its members.

2 The Club’s Operating Principles

The Club operates on the principle that access to land is a privilege, not a right. The Club has developed a strong relationship with many land owners and land managers and has earned a high level of credibility by demonstrating over many years respect for land and conditions of access and reliability in following through with commitments and codes of practice.

The Club has developed a number of sub-committees and through them it manages projects to achieve agreed objectives each year. Many of these objectives are specifically orientated to developing and/or strengthening relationships with land owners/managers.

Ongoing examples relate to access in:

- Akatarawa Forest (Greater Wellington)
- Aorangi Crossing in the Wairarapa (DOC Wairarapa)
- Odmins Road (DOC Waikanae)
- Foxton Beach (Horowhenua District Council)
- Whangamomona Road (Taranaki District Council)

In several of these projects the Club has worked closely with the Akatarawa Recreational Access Committee (ARAC) of which the Club was a founding member.

The Club also conducts its activities in accordance with the principles of Tread Lightly.

3 Managed Access

The Club has found the most successful approach to 4WD access to land is the concept of “Managed Access”.

Managed Access usually applies to places that are not generally open to the public as of right. Access is granted subject to a plan, following an agreed code of conduct, and usually with a permit and/or fee regime.

The underlying concept of Managed Access is to enable both land owners/managers and users to clearly understand:

- where it is okay to go;
- where it is not okay to go; and
- the behaviour expected in places that it is okay to go.

Land owners/managers and the Club have found through experience over the years that Managed Access gives a focus to satisfying each party’s requirements so that users can enjoy themselves and land owners/managers can rely on appropriate behaviour.

4 Safety System

The Club has a formally adopted Safety Policy which lays out the requirements for ensuring that the safety of all persons who are engaged in, or are associated directly or indirectly with, the Club's activities is managed to prevent harm. The policy is a living document and is subject to ongoing review.

In addition to this safety policy the Club operates a graded system for trips which ensures that participants' knowledge and experience is appropriate for the level of activity being undertaken. This process starts with a defined training process for initial entry into the Club followed up by ongoing assessment by activity organisers.

This combined approach enables the Club to minimise the risk of adverse outcomes when utilising other people's land. This gives confidence to land managers/owners that they have taken all practicable steps and are therefore not exposed to unmanageable risk from the Club's activities.

OVERVIEW OF THIS SUBMISSION

5 Principles

In making this submission the Club has operated according to the following principles:

- The Club supports the planning process, the consultation opportunity and the involvement of the user communities.
- The Club supports the principle of having the Plan.
- The Club wishes to ensure that the opportunities for its members in the areas covered by the Plan are maximised, consistent with other objectives of the Plan.
- The Club's main area of focus is the Akatarawa Forest but the Club believes that opportunities in the Pakuratahi Forest could also be developed.
- The Club appreciates the opportunities it has had for input and will take up any future opportunity to speak in support of its submission.

Predominantly the comments in our submission are relevant to the sections of the Plan specific to our scope of interest; the Club has not necessarily commented on other sections, which in general it agrees with and supports.

6 Perception

In its dealings over many years with land owners/managers the Club has worked to successfully allay the perception that 4WD activity is inextricably linked with damage to the environment.

Damage to sensitive areas can be caused by many factors, of which irresponsible 4WD activity is but one possible factor. Often damage (or perceived damage) is caused by people acting in ignorance of the behaviour that would be desirable for the area or circumstances.

Hence the Club's support of Managed Access regimes to enable the Club to make clear:

- where it is okay to go;
- where it is not okay to go; and
- the behaviour expected in places that it is okay to go.

The Club strongly believes, through its experience to date, that this encourages the majority of people to abide by the requirements.

In stating this, the Club recognises that cases of wanton vandalism can occur by uncontrolled users who deliberately circumvent the rules and guidelines. The Club understands the frustration that this can cause for land owners/managers, but firmly believes that the complying majority should not have their enjoyment curtailed as a result of the actions of the non-complying minority.

The Club also, wherever possible, actively seeks to identify the non-complying minority to assist land owners/managers to take action. In addition the Club tries, whenever it gets the opportunity, to educate these users (abusers) in what is appropriate behaviour.

SECTION-BY-SECTION COMMENT

7 Regional Forests – Future Water Collection Areas

The club notes the description of the areas covered by the Plan and the fact that parts of the areas have been, or are currently, subject to considerable human modification. It is these modified areas that are particularly suitable for 4WD recreational activities (though there are suitable non-modified areas as well).

The Club notes that the Plan is ‘non-statutory’ but commends Greater Wellington for its efforts to plan for good land management practice. The Club sees good land management practice as balancing the environmental, recreational, heritage and cultural values of the areas in a manner that ensures that all these values are given equivalent weighting consistent with the overriding purpose to enable future water collection.

8 Plan’s Purpose

The Club commends Greater Wellington for its willingness to work towards a common understanding and agreement with the regional community about a long-term vision for the areas and how they will be managed.

9 Vision

The Club recognises that Greater Wellington has an overriding obligation to ensure the long term suitability of the areas for future water collection. Notwithstanding that constraint, the areas represent one of the most significant opportunities within the Wellington region for recreational activities, with managed 4WD recreational activities being one such valid and popular activity.

10 Future Water Supply

The Club believes that the ability to maintain the areas for future water supply purposes can be achieved in a manner that does not preclude extensive, managed 4WD access to those areas that have been, or are currently being, subject to human modification as well as to natural areas that are not degraded by managed 4WD access.

The Club recognises that some specific areas will not be suitable for even managed 4WD access and fully supports the protection of such specific areas.

Because the forest areas are such an important resource for current 4WD activities the Club shares Greater Wellington’s desire for a management approach that secures the area for future generations (including future generations of 4WD users).

11 Environmental Values

The Club fully supports the protection of environmental values within the Plan areas. The Club believes that this is best achieved by the proper and scientific identification of areas that are at particular risk and designating these as Significant. These can then be managed according to a strict regime with the balance of the areas being managed in a way that has a more equal balance between the environmental, recreational, heritage and cultural values.

12 Landscape and Geological Features

The Club fully supports the protection of the essential landscape character and values, and the significant geological features of the areas. Managed 4WD access to the area has no, or negligible, impact on such values.

13 Cultural Heritage

The Club fully supports the conservation of the cultural heritage where this is practical. The Club notes that the Plan recognises that it is also a dynamic process; after all cultural heritage is simply the protection of what was once the culture of the day. In this regard the Club, through its membership of ARAC, was heavily involved in the rebuilding of the Orange Hut. So while it was not possible to save the old structure the new structure now keeps alive people's association with place and enhances the area for current and future generations.

14 Use, Development and Management

The Club is unsure of the exact difference between the 'managed' and 'restricted' definitions in the Plan but provided the system applied is consistent with its Managed Access approach (as detailed in section 3 above) the Club supports the concept of managing motorised recreation on the basis of requiring permits or permission.

The Club vigorously supports the continuation of motorised recreation in the Akatarawa Forest. The Club believes that many parts of the Forest are suitable for this purpose and that Greater Wellington should, as a matter of general policy, operate on the basis that such activity is appropriate unless there is compelling reasonable and objective evidence to the contrary. Further comment on the designated track concept is contained in section 15 below.

The Club does not support the prohibition of motorised recreation in the Pakuratahi Forest as it believes that there are opportunities in the modified areas of this forest which are appropriate for managed 4WD drive access. The Club would be pleased to work with Greater Wellington, either directly or through ARAC, to identify these areas and an appropriate access regime.

The Club conditionally supports the concept of charging a fee on the basis that such a fee should only be for the purposes of covering the reasonable costs incurred by Greater Wellington in managing any permit system. Such permit systems should be designed to be of minimum complexity and cost and wherever possible work on the basis of self management by responsible bodies, such as the Club or ARAC.

15 Recreation

The growing membership of the Club is testimony to the increased popularity of 4WD activities as a legitimate and desirable form of recreation. Increasingly, the concept that access to New Zealand's more remote areas should be restricted only to those able to walk there is out of step with the demands of a modern society. The more limited opportunities now available for families to spend time together, along with society's expectation that people of all abilities (not just the able bodied) should be able to share access to such areas, has made 4WD activities the ideal solution. In the wider Wellington region a number of the areas that have such remote areas are under the control of Greater Wellington. As the Plan correctly identifies, the Akatarawa Forest currently provides a regionally significant resource for such activities.

The Club believes therefore that Greater Wellington has a responsibility to continue to provide for, and extend, the opportunities for such activities in both the Akatarawa Forest and the Pakuratahi Forest. In extending that access the Club believes that Greater Wellington should operate on the basis that such activity is appropriate unless there is compelling reasonable and objective evidence to the contrary.

The Club believes therefore that the inclusion of Table 3 and Map 5, as a fixed part of the Plan, is unduly restrictive. The Club understands the need for a clear definition of the tracks and areas available for use at any one time to give certainty to the land managers and users. The Club believes however that Table 3 and Map 5 should be living documents used by Greater Wellington and ARAC to develop and manage motorised access and, as such, be subject to ongoing review.

As stated above, the Club believes that this ongoing review should be on the basis that those areas identified as having Significant environmental value are managed as prohibited areas with the balance of the forests (Akatarawa and Pakuratahi) being available for managed 4WD access.

The Club is fully supportive of the concept that such managed access be in accord with principles of Tread Lightly and the Motorised Recreational User Code and Management Guidelines 1997. The Club also supports the rigorous policing of such use with the withdrawal of permits, and the seeking of reparation for damage, from those who do not comply with these principles.

16 Plantation Forestry

The Club accepts that due to plantation forestry operations or fire risk there will be times when access to parts of these forests will need to be restricted for safety reasons. At all other times the Club believes that plantation forests are suitable, and should be available for, managed 4WD access.

17 Communities, Neighbours and Other Agencies

The Club is one of a number of active community organisations involved in the forests and it is committed to continuing and building on, that involvement into the future. To that end the Club will continue its active involvement with ARAC so that the needs of the many users of the forests can be accommodated fairly. It should be noted however that membership of ARAC does not preclude the Club from continuing to have its own voice on matters related to the forests, such as this submission.

18 Tangata Whenua

The Club does not believe that managed 4WD access, as it proposes will constrain Greater Wellington's commitment to work with Tangata Whenua.

19 Research, Monitoring and Review

The Club supports ongoing research, monitoring and review so that reasonable and objective information is available for assisting management of the areas covered by the Plan. It is important however that such information is seen as only one of a number of inputs into the appropriate balancing of the environmental, recreational, heritage and cultural values of the areas. The continued direct involvement of legitimate users of the areas in the management process is essential for the maintenance of transparency in decision making.

20 Implementation, Funding and Methods

The Club believes that one way of improving the rigorous policing of the principles of Tread Lightly and the Motorised Recreational User Code and Management Guidelines 1997 is for an increased Forest Ranger presence within the forests. If this is not possible consideration should be given to an Honorary Ranger (Similar to Honorary Boat Wardens) system.

21 Club Contacts

As detailed in section 5 the Club appreciates the opportunities it has had for input and will take up any future opportunity to speak in support of its submission or to provide further information. The following Club officials can be contacted for further information or to arrange meetings:

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