

THE WAITAKERE RANGES PROTECTION SOCIETY INC.

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,
Arataki Visitors Centre, Monday 30 March, 2009**

Annual Report of the Executive Committee

I am pleased to present the 35th Annual Report of the Executive Committee of The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society Incorporated.

Four days ago, on Friday 27 March, the much-anticipated report on the governance of Auckland was released. Some of you will have analysed the report in more detail than I have, and our executive have not yet had the opportunity to discuss it. The Society will need to take some expert advice on what the implications for the ranges and the Heritage Area might be under the proposed structure. Should the government proceed to implement the recommendations of the report, there will be huge changes for the whole of Auckland and we are now entering a time of environmental and political uncertainty. We will keep our membership informed as the implications for the ranges become clear.

It is now nearly a year since the Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area Act was passed by Parliament. We are pleased with the ownership that the three Councils have shown, and the increased public awareness of the Heritage Area. Waitakere City is now proceeding with implementation of the first of the Local Area Plans provided for by the Act. Oratia Valley including Waiatarua has been chosen as the test case, and meetings are presently being held where locals can tell Council their vision for the valley. As well as attending these meetings, the Society is meeting regularly with Council officers for updates on progress of the LAPS.

It is about thirteen years since the Swanson Structure Plan was first mooted by landowners in the area wanting subdivision, seven years since Variation 88 was notified, six years since we appealed Council's decision to allow 137 new lots to the Environment Court, and it is still not concluded, but is certainly nearing the end. The Environment Court Decision in January to allow only 52 new lots is a significant victory for the Society, the Preserve the Swanson Foothills Society, the ARC and those individuals who opposed the Structure Plan proposed by Waitakere City and the 198 lots proposed by the developers. As the Court said, "we consider that the existing fine balance between rural and urban in the Swanson foothills is in real danger of being upset to its detriment by further subdivision and development". The 350-page decision has not been appealed, and Waitakere City is instructed by the Court to make the

appropriate changes to the District Plan by August. We thank Douglas Allan and Gary Taylor for representing the Society at numerous hearings over the past eight years, and the support of the ARC and their expert witness Stephen Brown who gave landscape evidence that was preferred by the court.

The Society has prepared a detailed submission on the proposed amendments to the RMA which is due 3 April. It is worth noting that under the proposed “streamlining” changes to the Act the right of the Society to make legal submissions on many matters of concern would be considerably restricted. For example, the Society would not have been able to appeal the Swanson SP decision to the Environment Court.

The Society will be making submissions on the scope of the review of the Regional Park Management Plan that are due 13 April, and the ARC will release a draft Plan for public discussion in October. We are also working with the ARC to resolve the application by Watercare Services to vary the dam consents that were granted in 2005. The variations are apparently necessitated by unforeseen construction problems and will delay the release of compensation flows by some years. With regard to WC Plan Change 22, which seeks to create a Whenuapai Airport Special Area in the District Plan, the scheduled hearing of public submissions in February was postponed pending a decision by the Government on the future use of the base by the Air Force.

After some initial concerns at the ARC/DOC proposal to introduce grass carp into Lake Wainamu in order to manage Egaria infestation, we decided against opposing but our comments on the proposal led to some changes in the monitoring and the containment methods. We will be keeping a close eye on this project to ensure that all safeguards are in place. We continue to support the proposed marine mammal sanctuary on the west coast, and we continue to oppose the granting of exploration licences for seabed iron sand mining on the west coast.

In April we were pleased to be able to gift the Big Muddy reserve to the ARC for inclusion in the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park. These two titles totalling 11 hectare were purchased by the Society in 1996 with help from ARC, ASB, F&B and Parks and Wilderness Trust to save them from residential development. At the time of transfer, the capital value of the land was \$700,000. The land will now be protected in perpetuity.

In June we celebrated our 35th birthday party at the Waitakere Hall where the Society held some of its first meetings in 1973. Over 120 people attended and it was a most enjoyable afternoon. We presented Honour

Awards to Bob Harvey, Bob Happy, Mary Woodward, Jack Colmar, Graeme Campbell, John Staniland, Bruce and Trixie Harvey.

The greatest potential threat to the ranges at present is the microscopic pathogen *Phytophthora* taxon Agathis (PTA). It is likely to be an introduced organism, but this is not certain. PTA is associated with kauri collar rot and kills the living tissue of the trunk by slowly ring barking it at ground level. The affected tissue shows excessive gum bleeding as the tree 'fights back'. Collar rot disease was first reported in the 1970s from Gt Barrier Island but as only a small area was affected, no particular concern was raised. Recent work shows that it is present in patches throughout the Waitakeres, and is also in Trounson and Waipoua forests. It affects trees of all ages, including some of the giants in the Cascades, and seems to spread slowly through the soil. Pathology experiments confirm PTA is indeed a kauri killer but other tree species seem unaffected. PTA poses a real threat to kauri, both at the ecosystem level as the present small infestations expand, and to individual iconic trees. The disease is being closely studied and monitored by MAF Biosecurity NZ, DOC, ARC, NRC, EW and EBoP. Much more research is needed to clarify the full nature of the threat and ways to combat it. In the meantime, we advocate that those who tramp through the Waitakeres minimise moving soil between different areas, and ensure that boots and equipment is cleaned before entering and after leaving an area. More information is in our latest newsletter.

Our Oral History project was given a boost by a successful grant application to Lotteries that allowed us to purchase a professional digital recorder. Our committee member Carole Shone is about to begin stage three of the project and will be interviewing Geoff Scholes, Mary Woodward, Dave McKay, John Lewis, and Tony Randerson. All recordings and transcripts are archived in the Waitakere and Turnbull Libraries.

We have recently made a grant application to Creative Communities for funds to initiate a painted mural in the Henderson. We want to gift this mural to the people of Waitakere City to celebrate the passing of the WRHA Act, and to bring a bit of the ranges into the CBD. We have identified an appropriate wall on the corner of Great North Road and Alderman Drive. If fund raising is successful we will ask artist Ben Tippett to prepare a concept design for the wall. We envisage a scene of the Waitakere Ranges showing the flora and fauna, the landscape and the people who live in and enjoy the ranges.

Sales of The Waitakere Ranges have slowed, but considering that we have sold nearly 2800 from a print run of 3000 in three years, we are at

the point where the last 200 copies gain rarity value. We are proposing to take a number of the remaining books and have them signed by as many of the authors as possible, and then perhaps auction those as a fundraiser. We have quotes for a reprint and certainly sufficient money from the sale of the books to do this at some time.

We received a grant from the ASB of \$20,000 which allowed us to employ a part time Heritage Area Coordinator for a year from October 2008. Mels Barton has been averaging 20 hours a month writing submissions, letters and reports, consulting with communities, networking and planning, arranging educational events, fundraising and keeping our membership informed. This has taken a huge workload off other members of the executive, and we are very pleased with the increased activity that we can achieve in this way.

In order to retain our charitable status the Society registered with the Charities Commission as required by the Act. We have been informed that our current constitution will not allow us charitable status, and we have therefore asked Greg Presland to draft a new constitution that will be acceptable to the Society and the Commission. Our constitution is 36 years old, and is definitely in need of revision in a number of areas. These have been identified and Greg is currently competing a draft, and we envisage circulating this to all members in the next few months and then calling a special meeting to discuss the proposed changes.

Throughout the year the Society relies on professional consultants to prepare submissions and evidence for us on a range of matters. The *pro bono* contribution of our legal counsel Douglas Allan and resource management consultant Gary Taylor is invaluable. We acknowledge the work that James Hook has done for us on various resource consent matters. We thank McGregor Bailey Ltd who have been our honorary auditors for the past four years, but who are now unable to continue the audit owing to changes to the law, and the Society is now faced with having to pay for our annual audit from a registered auditor. Thanks also to Jenny Taylor who has maintained our membership database and coordinated mail outs for many years.

The outgoing committee have worked hard over the past year to ensure the objectives of the Society are realised to the highest standards. Our monthly executive meetings are well attended, and the contribution from all committee members is much appreciated. We have experts in many fields on the committee, and consequently we function well considering the diverse nature of our activities. Two members of our current committee are not standing again. Jacquie Reed who has been on the

committee for the past two years has moved to Whangarei to work for the Northern Regional Council. And Carole Shone who has been on the committee for three years will not be seeking re-election, but will continue to work on our Oral History project. Thanks to both of them for the contribution they have made. Members of the Society are welcome to attend our monthly meetings and we encourage feedback on matters of concern in your communities. I would like to ask the outgoing committee to stand up. These people are your elected executive who have given the Society so much of their time over the past year. It has been a pleasure and an honour to work with you all and I would like this meeting to join with me in showing our appreciation for your efforts on our behalf.

Special thanks go to our vice-president Anna Fomison, treasurer Sandra Jones, and secretary Mels Barton. Anna is editor of our quarterly newsletter which contributes greatly to our advocacy and together with Mels Barton she coordinates our presence at events and festivals. Our website continues to be maintained by Mike Nixon. I was honoured to be made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to art in the New Years list and I appreciated the letters of congratulations from members of the Society. It has been my pleasure to be President and chair of the executive committee for the past eleven years, and I have enjoyed it very much. I want to thank committee members and my family and friends for their support which has enabled me to better serve the Society. However, I must add that in these times of recession, the expectation that volunteers can continue to commit hours a week is unrealistic, and I am sure that I speak for most of the committee when I say that the past level of service that we have delivered is increasingly unsustainable. This means that we need to better prioritise our projects and be more efficient in our allocation of time.

We chose not to raise our membership subscription rate again this year, and this was recognised by many members who paid their subscription and added a donation. When Sandra Jones gives the financial report this evening, you will note that the Society is in a strong financial position. A large proportion of this is the money that we have received on the sale of the Waitakere Ranges book. This is being accumulated to cover the costs of a reprint in the next few years. The remainder of the reserves are in operating or in tagged funds for items such as land acquisition. The executive considers that it is very important in the current global recession that the Society runs larger than usual surpluses to ensure that our objectives are not compromised by lack of available funds, since funding bodies who have supported us in the past have recently signalled that their financial situation has changed considerably, and that it may be some time before normal funding activity is resumed.

The Society extends its condolences to the families of Geoff Moon and Geoff Park, who died in the past few weeks. Geoff Moon was an ardent supporter of the Society. As a photographer of our native birds and bush he was unsurpassed. His cheerful enthusiasm was most infectious, and one always felt enlivened in his company. Those of you at our AGM in 2007 will recall that Geoff was there, and it was his 92nd birthday, and that was typical of Geoff, to be out at a meeting on his birthday. We will miss him greatly, and he will always be remembered for his good humour, those wonderful bird books and the painstaking patience necessary to observe and photograph wildlife as he did.

Geoff Park who died two weeks ago was New Zealand's leading ecological historian. In his seminal book *Nga Uru Ora*, he showed us a new way of looking for Aotearoa, of excavating the past through a detailed study of our ecology, and of predicting the dire consequences of the slash and burn mentality that has reduced the native forest of New Zealand to a tiny fraction of its once magnificence. Geoff was a good friend of the Society and a strong supporter of our work towards permanent protection, and some of you will remember the address he gave at our AGM in 2003 entitled "The Auspicious, Wild West – The Waitakere Ranges in the Scenic Paradise of the World" where he charted the scenic preservation movement in New Zealand and the role that the ranges played in that. At 62, his passing is a great loss to New Zealand.

At the AGM last year we were asked if, with the passing of the WRHA Act, the work of the Society would be complete. I wish that the answer was yes and that the ranges were truly saved in perpetuity, but unfortunately the unrelenting workload of the executive over the past year is evidence that our task is far from over, and that there are and will continue to be new and recurring threats that will demand a strong and resilient opposition, and a strong vision for the future. I am confident that after 36 years, the Society is up to the challenge ahead, that new members and passionate volunteers will continue to come forward as we work to ensure the long-term wellbeing of the Waitakere Ranges and its communities.

Thank you.

I move that the Annual Report be received.

John Edgar, President, Waitakere Ranges Protection Society