

**Waitakere Ranges Protection Society INC.
P.O. Box 15668, NEW LYNN, AUCKLAND**

Annual Report to AGM 27 March, 2000

The past year has been a full and exciting one for the society. Since we were here a year ago, many things have happened to make me confident in the future of the society and the long-term protection and conservation of the ranges.

A year ago I was here predicting a rather dismal future with the Go Waitakere faction taking control of all committees in Waitakere City Council. After 25 years of WRPS action we were facing our biggest challenge yet, and I reported that the threat to the ranges had never been greater.

A year further on and GW still have control of council, and as most of you will know, they have passed some resolutions in the last year that seriously threaten the ranges by attempting to change the subdivision rules to allow smaller lot sizes. This brought an immediate and vigorous response from the society and from a number of communities, especially Laingholm, Huia, Piha and Karekare. It is wonderful to have the support of these communities, and to know that the society is not alone in our fight to save the ranges. It gives me great hope that if the actions of GW are so strenuously opposed we can succeed in thwarting their resolutions and ultimately see them out of office in 18 months. You can be sure that our society will be doing everything that it can to see that GW do not have control of the next council.

In 1999 the society made an official complaint to Dr. Williams, Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, about various procedural matters relating to GW and their anti-environmental actions. Dr Williams has recently been in Waitakere City to make a preliminary investigation of our complaints, and we await his decision. Various other groups and individuals in the city have also brought similar matters to his attention.

And so to more positive matters.

This year has seen an expansion of the society's involvement in its two core activities; planning and ecology

The first involves us in strategic planning policy at a local, regional and national level. WCC District Plan hearings continue with the city operating on a transitional plan which is a complex combination of the old and the proposed plan. A decision from the Environment Court on the Oratia Structure plan is now available, and the society is pleased that the original structure plan has been upheld and the increased subdivision rights sought by various appellants were not allowed. The society's submission based on less subdivision in the upper catchment to create an urban buffer zone was dismissed on the grounds that the evidence for protection of landscape values in the upper catchment was unnecessarily restrictive and subjective. This failure of the RMA to adequately protect landscape values is an area of concern.

We have also made submissions on various management plans. We had an input into the West Coast Plan over the past two years, and are pleased with the draft recently released by WCC. We were also party to many resource consents applications in the Ranges and made submissions to council on consent conditions. At a national level, the proposed amendments to the RMA last year were of considerable concern and the society was well-represented to the minister by the Northern Region NGO. These amendments are now consigned to history, and we look forward to working with the Labour government on strengthening the RMA to ensure better protection of the environment.

Our other main activity is ecology. The society has always been an initiator of research projects into the flora and fauna of the Ranges. This past year has been no exception, and we have achieved some great progress. Coastline protection is high on our agenda, and this past summer has seen two master students from biological sciences at Auckland University work on a survey of the coastline, funded by all stakeholders. This new information will be compared with existing data bases and will form the basis of a more extensive survey. Thanks to committee member Susan Turner for her work on Coastline Protection. The idea of a mainland island in the Ranges was focussed in an excellent day at Arataki Centre in August. Organised by the society in conjunction with F&B this meeting of experts from around the country was both stimulating and productive, resulting in a much clearer vision of the Ark in the Park, which is now an idea owned by all the stakeholders in the Ranges, with the Friends of Arataki taking the role of coordinators. Special thanks to Keith Strode-Penny and Graeme Ramsay for their continued work on this project.

Our Vice-President Kevin Gould has continued to edit our newsletter together with his other responsibilities for research projects. He was responsible for organising the society's wasp research and this project has moved along very successfully. We have just finished conducting a wasp survey with the help of Dr. Jacqueline Beggs from Landcare Research and the results should allow us to initiate an eradication program next summer. This project well demonstrates the society's method: we identify a problem, we initiate a pilot study, we find the funding, we get the data, and then we find the responsible agency to implement and fund the continued program.

Last year at the AGM we presented our proposed logo for the 21st century. And we are pleased tonight to be able to present the final logo that Keith Strode-Penny has designed. I am sure you will all agree that this is an exciting new look for the society. In due course we will hopefully be printing some T-shirts with the logo and I hope you will all support us by buying one when the time comes.

Thanks to John Carlson who continues to represent the society on the Te Henga quarry committee.

Jenny Taylor our new database manager has stream-lined access to the database, which is searchable and more accessible. Our questionnaire that has been sent out asking for membership details will greatly increase our ability to respond to the needs of our members, and our new invoicing system whereby a tax invoice for subscriptions is sent out to everyone at the beginning of the financial year in March is an improvement.

Perhaps our weakest effort has been in the area of fundraising. After putting considerable amount of work into this area only to find we were turned down by various funding agencies has been rather depressing, and a new drive is required to ensure we remain able to carry out all our activities. It was really only through the generosity of our members' subscriptions and donations throughout the year that we have finished the year in such a good financial position. However, all these funds will soon be absorbed as we go into another year of litigation, and I would like to appeal to our members for help with fundraising. Maybe there is someone here tonight who can help us with this difficult but essential matter.

The society's archives which have been kept in various attics and basements are now all together in one place, my office. With another concerted effort we should be able to get these well filed and therefore readily accessible for the first time for quite awhile. After 26 years you can image they fill many boxes and filing systems, and we are searching for an ultimately safer place to store them. Any suggestions of a suitable place where they could be safe but accessible would be appreciated.

Thanks to all our committee members. Graeme Ramsay, our senior committee member has been a guiding influence in many of the society's projects, especially the Mainland Islands and the flora and fauna research projects. Denise Yates is chair of the Waitakere Community Board and continues to play an important role in the society. Our secretary Linda Godfrey has provided us with an efficient office and committee meeting room and kept excellent minutes throughout the year. Treasurer Darryl Short has kept us fiscally responsible in a year of high costs and through his careful management we remain solvent.

Thanks also to our consultants, counsel Douglas Allan, Gary Taylor, Denis Nugent, Stephen Brown, Andrea Julian and others, who have all made generous pro bono contributions to the society over the past year. Without their help, we could not meet the very high standards of representation required at hearings. The fact that the society is regularly congratulated for its considered and intelligent submissions, and for its ability to find solutions to extremely contentious issues is in large part due to our consultants.

Congratulations to committee member Keith Strode-Penny and wife Janet on the birth of their son Ben. At six months old Ben is now our youngest member and I know that his proud parents are rearing Ben to be a staunch environmentalist.

During the year Ted Scott stood down from the committee owing to pressures with his many photographic projects. Some of you might have seen his book of historic photographs "Through the Lens" which compared historic photos of the Ranges with modern views taken from the same location. A photo of our current committee at Arataki lookout was shown along side a picnic of members of the first Auckland Scenic Conservation Society in 1900.

We were lucky to be able to coopt two new committee members during the year, Simon Chapman and Jane Alexander, who are both completing master degrees in ecology at

Lincoln University. They are studying bats in the WR and we welcome them to the committee knowing that they are already making a valuable contribution to our research program. Also new to the committee was Kathryn King who graduated last year with an honours degree in planning from AU and we are all impressed by Kathryn's enthusiasm and willingness to get involved with the society's planning program. Kathryn's generous offer to work for the society one day a week this year as a volunteer has been very gratefully accepted.

At a city ceremony last December Waitakere City Council presented 100 millennium medals to honour community contributions by people in our city. I am pleased to report that eight of these medals went to members of the society which goes to show that we still have friends of the environment in council.

I would like to ask all our 1999 committee members to stand up and please join with me in showing your appreciation for all the hours of expertise and energy that they have given to the society over the past year.

So I am pleased to conclude this Annual Report with the observation that your society is stronger than ever, with a membership of over 600 people, and an enormous support base of Aucklanders who see the Waitakere Ranges as a highly valuable area of regional and national significance. You can be sure that in the year 2000 your committee will work to its maximum ability to protect and conserve this great treasure.

John Edgar
(President)