

Recreational Horse Riding in the Auckland Region

(with particular focus on the Auckland regional parks network)

Issues and Options Paper



April 2008

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Introduction

Reason for ARC's recreational horse riding project

The Auckland Regional Council (ARC) Parks network has over 40,000 hectares of parkland at 25 locations. This represents 6% of the Auckland region's land area and 69% of the public open space on the mainland. This valuable community resource attracts between 5 and 6 million visitors each year for a wide variety of recreational opportunities, one of which is recreational horse riding.

Submissions to the 2006 annual plan highlighted that horse riding is a popular and growing activity in the Auckland Region and that the horse riding community would like ARC to improve and expand access in regional parks for horse riders.

While ARC's park rangers are aware of many issues at an individual park level (through discussions with local riders and/or clubs), it is recognised that there is a need to better understand the regional issues and opportunities. For that reason, the ARC is undertaking a recreational horse riding project. The findings from this project will guide future policy and recommend a framework for decisions on a regional basis. This includes collaboration with other recreational horse riding facility providers, such as district councils and forest managers.

Project objectives

The objectives of the ARC horse riding project are to:

- determine current and future demand for publicly accessible recreational horse riding opportunities in the Auckland Region;
- evaluate current and future supply of these opportunities (which includes identifying and evaluating where they are, what they offer and any constraints and conflicts);
- assess any provision gap;
- provide positive guidance to the ARC, other providers and the community on their role in promoting, managing, planning and providing for recreational horse riding in the Auckland region; and
- identify possible changes in the extent and quality of provision (through policy and/or management actions) that will help ARC achieve this role.

Project scope

There is a range of horse riding pursuits undertaken in the Auckland region. This project concentrates on activities that are casual and non-competitive, i.e. trekking rather than formal and competitive events, such as show jumping, show hunting, dressage or cross country. These latter activities require grounds or land that caters for more intensive use and infrastructure in one area and is often leased for exclusive use. These activities do not generally fit with the remote and natural settings of a regional park. It is, however, recognised that riders who participate in these organised events often train or exercise their horses by going out trekking and participating in other casual activities.

Consultation/research

On the 14 July 2007, ARC held a horse riding workshop with representatives of the horse riding community where information on the regional park network was presented and feedback on need, barriers and opportunities was sought.

Following the workshop, work was commissioned to review current literature, summarise the findings of a survey¹ of horse riders and analyse the current barriers and opportunities on the regional parks.

¹ In 2007, the survey was distributed to people outside of the group already involved in the ARC workshop, in order to validate views presented there. A snowball sampling approach was taken whereby the questionnaire was distributed initially via email and published on forums. All participants

Purpose of this paper

The purpose of this paper is to present the findings of the consultation and research to date and to seek feedback to ensure this is an accurate record of the issues and options that the horse riding community believe to be important. Once feedback has been received, consideration will be given to the suggestions and if and how these can be addressed. A report will be taken to Council outlining the project findings and recommending an improvement plan.

were encouraged to distribute the survey further. 40 responses were received from families or individuals representing 45 riders and 10 responses were received from pony clubs of PC districted representing 15 clubs with approximately 544 members.

Recreational horse riding in the Auckland region

What is recreational riding?

For the purposes of this project, recreational horse riding is considered to be casual and non-competitive trekking.

How many people go recreational horse riding in the Auckland Region?

Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC) estimated in 2003 that there were 23,000 regular riders (who rode once every four weeks) and 78,000 people who have ridden at least once in the last 12 months in the Auckland Region. SPARC's research shows that participation starts early and continues well into the over 50s age group. It also highlights the high female participation rate at all ages.

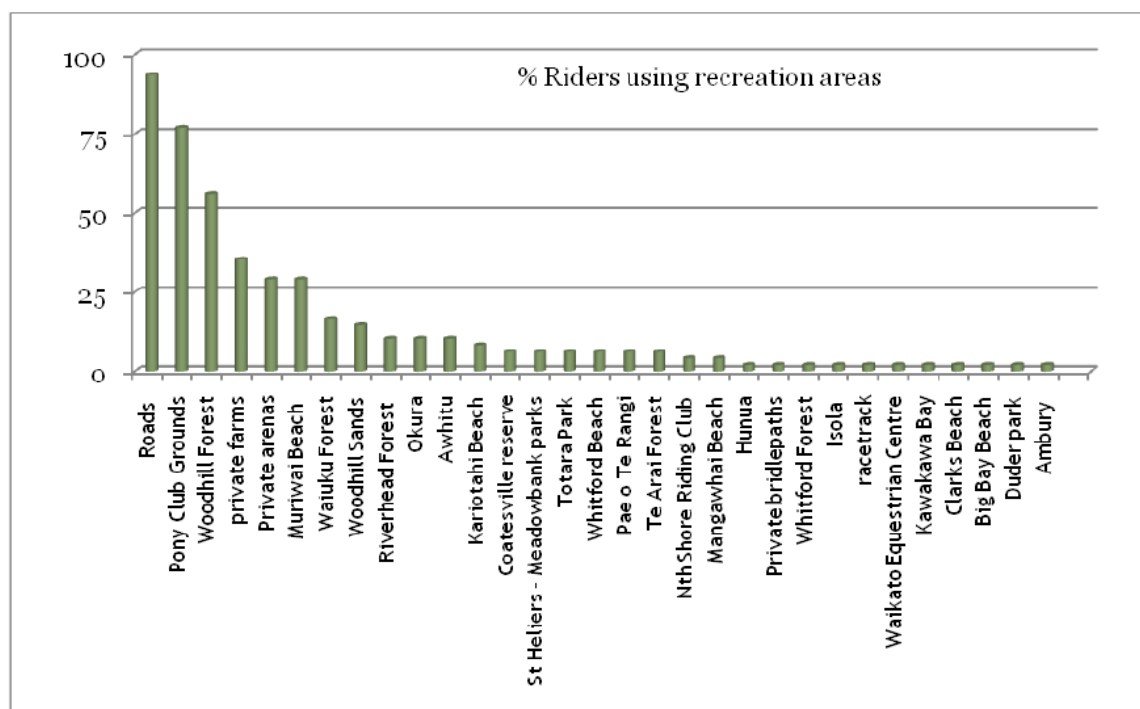
Opportunities for recreational riding are currently provided in a number of ways, through pony clubs, riding schools, independent riding clubs and casual riding on public and private land, bridleways and roads. The majority of pony clubs and riding schools either own or lease facilities and provide more formal organized activities. These facilities are often used as riding venues by other riders. The survey undertaken as part of this project (here on referred to as the equestrian survey) showing that 75% of riders either join pony clubs or pay ground fees in order to use pony club facilities.

There is an increasing number of independent riding clubs and casual riders, not focused on competitive riding, but looking for more informal and unstructured riding opportunities. There is currently little research available to quantify the number of casual riders in the Auckland region however, as has been recognized earlier, the majority of all riders identified by SPARC will participate in casual riding opportunities at some time throughout the year.

Where do people go recreational horse riding in the Auckland Region?

The equestrian survey highlighted the top three riding areas to be roads, pony clubs and Woodhill Forest. It also showed that private farms and arenas had a significant role to play in the provision of facilities and also the importance of a number of regional parks for recreational riding. The results of the survey are shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Current Recreational Riding Sites



Horse riding in the Auckland Regional Parks

The ARC aims to provide world-class accessible parks, providing a unique range of quality experiences while preserving the natural essence of the region.

In achieving this, the ARC has to balance the demands for a variety of recreational activities (including horse riding, mountain biking, walking, camping and many other outdoor activities) alongside the protection of the park environment, the health, safety and wellbeing of other park users, park resources, the facilitation of park operations and the enjoyment of other park users. The Regional Parks Management Plan (RPMP) guides ARC in its decision making on a day to day and long term management of the parks.

Horse riding and mountain biking are jointly covered under Objective 37.3.1 of the RPMP. It provides for "horse riding on some regional parks where the individual or group is undertaking the activity without any financial gain or reward for that activity and where the activity does not create undue conflict with other park users or have adverse effects on the environment".

Three policies guide where and how opportunities will be provided:

- Horse riding and mountain biking will generally be allowed on farmed areas and designated tracks (Policy 37.3.2.1).
- Tracks will only be designated as suitable for horse riding and mountain biking where consultation has been undertaken with key park users and stakeholder groups (Policy 37.3.2.2).
- Restrictions as necessary to protect the park environment, the health, safety and wellbeing of visitors and to facilitate park operations and the enjoyment of other park users may be implemented as detailed in Policy 37.1.2.2² (Policy 37.3.2.3).

² Policy 37.1.2.2 states that restrictions that may be implemented on activities relate to the: size of group; location duration; time of day; season or time of year; infrastructure conditions; and environmental conditions.

In some regional parks, horse riding is considered a permitted activity³ in the RPMP (Table 1 outlines the parks where horse riding is considered a permitted activity) and designated trails have been developed to enable this form of recreation. In some cases this access is free and available at any time, while in others a permit and/or key may be required and riders may be required to contact the ranger in advance.

In all other parks, horse riding is considered a discretionary activity because it is not explicitly provided for in the RPMP. Riders⁴ can, however, still apply for discretionary use consent to go horse riding and these applications will be assessed on a case by case basis.

Alternative locations

Auckland Regional Parks are by no means the only location that riders go recreational riding in the Auckland Region. Local reserves, beaches, forests and private arenas and farms are well utilised (Table 2 describes the popular reserves, beaches and forests).

While the majority of Auckland's territorial authorities only provide small reserves with sporting and training facilities to local clubs, there are some reserves that are open to the public for trekking. Several councils have also signalled their intention to develop bridleways.

Recreational horse riders often pay to utilise privately and publicly owned exotic forests in the Auckland Region and private arenas and farms.

Nearly all of the recreational riding opportunities are located outside of Auckland's metropolitan urban limits. They are clustered in the south western corner of the Rodney District, the west coast of Waitakere City, Manukau City and the northern part of the Franklin District.

³ Permitted activities are allowed 'as of right' without specific approvals. They are generally informal, unstructured activities that do not detract from the park environment or other park users. The Regional Parks Management Plan identifies in which parks horse riding is considered a permitted activity.

⁴ The requirements for this application mean that it is unlikely that people wanting to ride as an individual user would be able to warrant this process.

Table 1: Current casual riding opportunities on regional parks

Regional Park	District	Yes/No	Description
Ambury	Manukau	Y	Horse riding is permitted in the southern end of the park.
Atiu Creek	Rodney	N	New park. No management plan yet.
Auckland Regional Botanic Gardens	Manukau	N	
Awhitu	Franklin	Y	Horse riding is available in the paddocks – no permit is required. But you need to contact the ranger prior to discuss access, on 09 235 1106.
Duder	Manukau	Y	You can ride your horse at Duder between 1st October and 30th June but you must have a permit (\$50).
Hamlins Hill/Mutukaroa	Manukau	N	
Hunua	Franklin	Y	Horse riding is available at Mangatawhiri – a permit (\$50) is required. You also need to contact ranger at least 2 days in advance.
Long Bay	Rodney	N	
Mahurangi	Rodney	N	
Muriwai	Rodney	Y	Is permitted on designated trails including beach access at Okiritoto Stream.
Omana	Manukau	N	
Pakiri	Rodney	N	New park. No management plan yet.
Scandrett	Rodney	N	
Shakespear	Rodney	N	
Tapapakanga	Manukau	N	
Tawharanui	Rodney	N	
Tawhitokino and Orere Point	Manukau	N	
Te Rau Puriri	Rodney	N	New park. No management plan yet.
Waharau	Franklin	N	
Waitakere Ranges	Waitakere	Y	A permit (\$50p.a) is required for Horse Riding in the Waitakere Ranges at the following locations: - Anawhata farm park. - Karekare: before 10am and after 4pm. - Pae o te Rangi farm park: key bond (\$250) also required. - Piha: before 10am and after 4pm.
Waitawa		N	New park. No management plan yet.
Wenderholm	Rodney	N	
Whakanewha	Auckland	Y	Horse riding is available on bridle tracks– no permit is required.
Whakatiwai	Franklin	N	

Table 2. Other publicly accessible recreational horse riding opportunities⁵

Venue	District	Description
Okura Beach	Rodney	Okura is a tidal estuary and therefore consists of mudflats, sandbars and marine rock outcrops. This provides a unique riding experience - riding in the sea rather than beach riding. There are no specific trails. Riding only recommended for around an hour at this location, during the lowest part of the tide because otherwise you have to swim back.
Muriwai Beach and Te Oneone Rangatira	Rodney	The ARC provides a horse park (parking area) at Muriwai and owns a strip of land behind the dunes called the Five Mile Strip. This horse riding area consists of the trails (there are basically two with joining minor trails) behind the dunes up to Coast Rd (the very first road running parallel to the dunes) for about 5 miles from the horse park. There is also approximately 30km of beach to ride on.
Woodhill Forest Equestrian Park (WFEP)	Rodney	WFEP is a block of the Woodhill Forest that has trails for exclusive use by horse riders. It is leased from the forest licensee, Hancock Forest Management Ltd. Riders pay an annual registration (\$70) plus an initial fee (\$20) to get a key to gates.
Woodhill Forest, South Kaipara	Rodney	Outside of the equestrian park, there are shared trails throughout the forest (some areas are exclusively set aside for other recreation groups and the NZ Defence). Access is free. Widely regarded as the best recreational riding area in the region because of its all weather sandy trails, range of terrain and obstacles for jumping and length of trails.
Riverhead Forest	Rodney	5,000 hectares of clay based pine forest owned by Matariki Forests/Rayonier NZ Ltd. Voluntary registration (\$50 p.a) provides riders with a key to all of the horse gates and a map of the forest. No formal facilities. Suited to slow (walk and trot) road rides, surefooted and independent horses and riders.
Coatesville Reserve, Coatesville	Rodney	RDC reserve that is managed by Coatesville Pony Club. Open for public riding but club controls seasonal access. Cross-country course is free. Charge for all weather arena.
Sinclair Park, Kaukapakapa	Rodney	RDC reserve that is managed by Kaukapakapa Pony Club. Open for public riding but club controls seasonal access.
Glasgow Park, Waimauku	Rodney	RDC reserve that is managed by Waimauku Pony Club. Open for public riding but club controls seasonal access.
Reserve at Green Road, Dairy Flat	Rodney	Newly acquired 154 hectare site may provide an equestrian area.
Sanders Reserve, Paremoremo	North Shore	Planning in progress for a shared equestrian area.
Whitford Beach	Manukau	Access to tidal mudflats managed by MCC and DoC. Whitford beach should only be ridden below the high tide mark, so as to ensure you don't disturb nesting birds.
Whitford Forest	Manukau	Clay based pine forest owned by Matariki Forests/Rayonier NZ Ltd. Voluntary registration (\$50 p.a) provides riders with a key to all of the horse gates and a map of the forest.
Totara Park, Manurewa	Manukau	216 hectare farm park owned and managed by MCC. Two shared trails (approx. 3km) through the farm land are open to the public. Parking for 3-4 horse trucks.
Karioitahi Beach	Franklin	Karioitahi is a black sand beach, backed by steep sand and clay cliffs. There is a single trail at the southern end of the beach leading into Woodhill Forest.
Waiuku Forest	Franklin	1000 hectares of sand dune based forest owned by the Crown Forests Ltd and managed by Northern Forests Ltd. Franklin District Council and user group representatives help develop and co-ordinate horse riding facilities and events. Horse Riding is permitted within forest, opening hours (7am - 6pm daily). Recreational use is free.

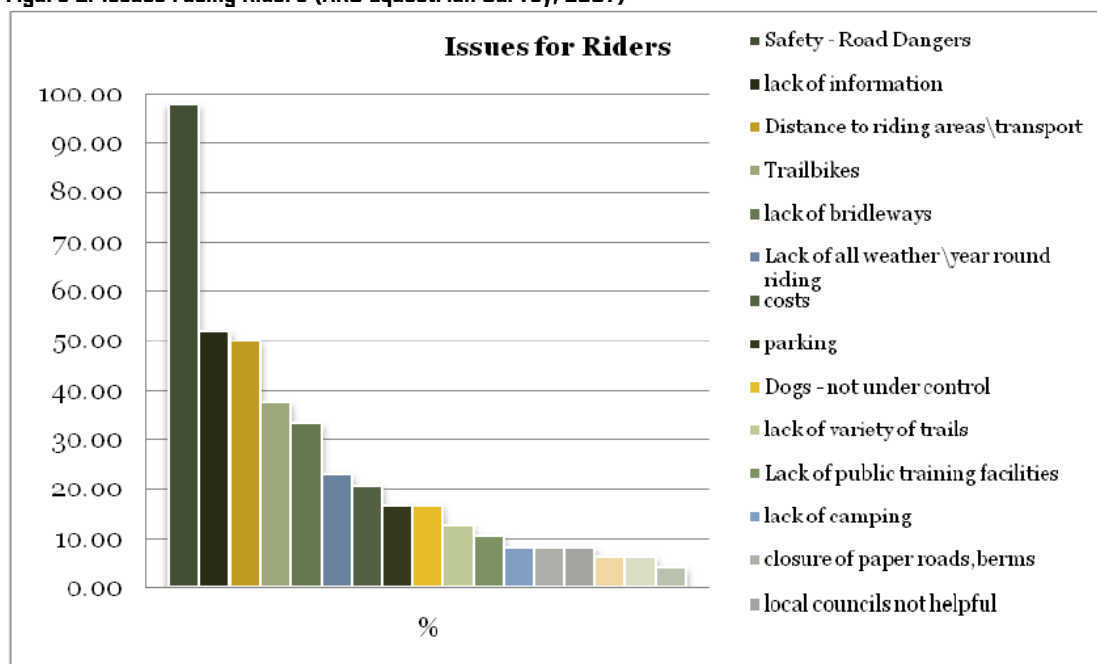
⁵ Information taken from following website: <http://bridleways.googlepages.com> More information and photos of each location are available on this website.

Issues

The consultation and research undertaken to date has highlighted that there are a number of constraints and challenges that impact on recreational riding throughout the region; some of which are directly related to regional parks (Figure 2).

In this section the issues have been grouped and summarized so that they can be evaluated and addressed. There is a focus on issues that ARC has the ability to influence change.

Figure 2: Issues Facing Riders (ARC Equestrian Survey, 2007)



Limited access to information (off-park)

Riders have identified a number of sources of information about the opportunities available, including the ARC website, however, there isn't access to simple and accurate information about the permit system, access points, parking areas, gates, water sources, terrain and expected ride times. Riders can access the ARC website and call centre for some information, however you then they often need to contact the rangers of each park for permits and maps. Many riders also find maps and trail information variable. Although some of this information is available once the riders arrive at a particular site, it is highlighted that it is not always available prior to arrival to help with planning. Riders often rely on word of mouth to pass on information. As a result there is often lack of awareness and confusion about riding opportunities, access arrangements and permit requirements.

Riders also noted that the current ARC permit system does not enable riders to be contacted, or to be updated on changes or park closures.

Long distances to riding areas

Half of those surveyed stated that they were concerned about the time and cost associated with the distances they have to travel to ride safely. This is associated with uneven distribution of riding areas across the region and a lack of linkages, such as bridleways.

Lack of variety in riding opportunities

Not all regional parks are suitable for riding and the current RPMP outlines conflict with other users, protection of livestock and protection of the park environment, as some of the reasons for limiting riding in some of the regional parks. Many riders considered that while the reasons for separating users are important, the impact of this segregation is that riding is primarily only allowed on open farm land, or road like trails, thus limiting riding opportunities and experiences within regional parks.

Inconsistent and confusing management process in regional parks

Riders consider that the current permit system is inconsistent and confusing. The requirement varies from park to park, including: free permit, \$50 annual permit, a key bond, no permit or to contact the park ranger before entering the park. This is further complicated by seasonal and time restrictions. Also, once a rider has obtained a permit the current permit system does not provide any identification or means to distinguish between a permitted rider and an un-permitted rider. The use of wording such a 'casual', 'permitted' and 'permit' is also seen as confusing to some riders.

Inconsistent and limited facilities in regional parks

Signs:

There is often a lack of directional signs to the loading/unloading zone and the directional signs within the park are often inconsistent and too small or poorly located to be useful. Signs that inform both riders and other users of trails, boundaries and crossing points are considered limited and inconsistent from park to park.

Park information is often provided at information kiosks / boards at main entrances and car parks, however, riders are often directed to areas with limited or no information in terms of access points, parking areas, gates, water sources, terrain and expected ride times.

Parking provision:

Horse trucks or vehicles with floats are generally large and require large turning circles. In many cases existing parking facilities are too small or non-existent.

Conflicts between user groups

The majority of areas available for horse riding are used by many other user groups including mountain bikers, walkers and dogs. While most of the different users groups are considerate of the needs of others, it was found that there is potential for conflict where they meet riders. This was considered to be partly because of a lack of signs and trail design.

Outside of regional park network

Dangers on roads:

Despite the legal right to ride on roads, a large number of riders do not feel safe on roads due to increasing traffic levels and some negative driver behaviour. The use of berms and paper roads for riding has potential to reduce the danger to riders, however, berms are coming under increasing pressures, for example, through road widening and urbanization. At present there are very few formed bridleways for people to ride on – either as a means of recreation or transport.

Commercially managed forests and beaches:

Conflicts with other users, such as trail bikes and 4WDs, has caused the displacement of some legitimate recreational horse riders. Riders are also aware of the uncertainty associated with long term access to the Crown forests; namely Woodhill and Waiuku Forests.

Possible improvements

In the course of describing issues, a number of possible improvements have been suggested.

ARC has direct control over some of these options e.g. signs in parks, and can advocate the importance of the other options e.g. improving road safety. The possible improvements outlined below do not represent the ARC's position on the issues raised. There is, however, a need to get your feedback on the priorities before finalising where limited resources should be focused.

Improve information (off-park)

There is a need to ensure riders know where they can ride, what they need to do to prepare and what is expected when they get there by:

- Developing detailed maps and guides for every park where horse riding is permitted. These should include detailed information for horse riders on parking arrangements, facilities available, location of gates, available routes, trail length, difficulty and potential hazard areas where multi user groups can meet. This information could be made available through the ARC website and be provided to all permitted riders on registration with ARC.
- Establishing an email newsletter to be sent out on a regular basis to all registered riders providing news, current issues and an update on changes and park closures.
- Developing a central point for information on all (public and private) opportunities for horse riding throughout the region. This could be through the ARC website or an independent website, for example www.playday.org

Improve existing riding opportunities

Management systems:

Improve the current approval (permit based) system by developing a consistent approach across all the parks, based around a central system to register riders allowing them to ride in suitable regional parks. Registered riders could, for example, pay a registration fee, book into a web-based booking system and display an identification tag when riding in the park. This database could then be used to consult the horse riding community and update riders about any changes to policy or conditions.

Facilities:

Develop, in consultation with user groups, a level of service that sets out the appropriate minimum standard of facilities to be provided for riding within regional parks.

Facilities may include:

- A sign posted trail (preferably a medium (10 – 30km) to long (>30km) circuit);
- Car parking and turning areas (preferably dedicated to horse riding to avoid conflict with other users);
- Tie ups for horses;
- Mounting blocks; and
- Access to water.
- Additional facilities include: toilets for riders; composting bins for manure and rolling pits.

Signs:

Ensure that signs are consistent across the network and that they clearly identify: trails; parking areas; any hazardous or sensitive area or where other park activities could occur; the needs of other user groups in shared areas; and what to do when different users meet.

Park specific suggestions

Regional Park	Suggested improvement
Awhitu	- Re-locate the code of practice that contains the list of areas where riders must not ride to the horse unloading/loading area.
Duder	- Develop signs to indicate that it is a shared area. - Develop an official/unloading area and facilities e.g. water, tie ups and manure bins. - Advocate to local councils the importance of developing bridle trails to access the park and possible link other venues such as Whitford Forest, local pony clubs and local beaches.
Hunua	- Develop directional signs to parking area. - Develop suitable facilities at the parking area e.g. tie rail, toilet, information post and picnic table and at campsite e.g. pens, troughs and manure bins. - Consider moving parking area to Mangatawhiri campsite to avoid Watercare's gate. - Extend existing trail network. - Advocate to local councils the importance of developing bridle trails to feed into the Hunua trail network.
Muriwai	- Improve signs for all users e.g. directional signs to Okiritoto Stream area and equestrian park; informative signs for riders and other users to improve management of area e.g. rules, maps, code of conduct, tide timetable, information on registration to Woodhill Forest equestrian park; history of the area; environmental issues. - Consider ways to increase security to deter vandalism and break-ins. - Improve management of the existing horse park and car park amenities. - Provide drinking water for horses. - Improve management of the wire fencing used across the dunes. - Install marker poles to direct riders to access points to the Woodhill Forest. - Consider a second entrance to the Five Mile Block for high tide access. - Collaborate more closely with Hancocks Forests Ltd to improve riding opportunities in Woodhill Forest.
Waitakere Ranges	- Reconsider the use of a key bond. The expense is off putting to casual riders. - Considers ways to expand horse riding trails to allow Waitakere riders to get to Muriwai and/or clubs in Henderson Valley, Laingholm and Karekare Beach.

Consultation:

Facilitate the establishment of a regional equestrian group for the region to co-ordinate all horse riding issues across the region. In addition to this, continue consultation at a local level between rangers and local riders.

Code of conduct:

Establish and promote a single⁶ code of practice that is practical and positive for all users groups within the regional parks, and possibly all areas open to the public, in order to create greater understanding of the needs of other groups and to help foster an expectation of sharing.

Create new riding opportunities

Where horse riding is already permitted on regional parks, consider:

- expanding the trails;
- reviewing whether horse riders may be able to share other trails;
- adding interest to existing trails by adding logs or obstacles (but always providing an alternative route around them; and
- allowing for novice users by providing shorter 'loops'.

⁶ Two codes of conduct currently exist for Awhitu and Whanewha regional parks and other codes exist for commercial forests.

Where horse riding isn't currently permitted on existing parks or a management plan doesn't exist yet for a park consider:

- assessing/reassessing the demand and opportunities to provide for horse riding; particularly in the northern parks⁷.

Support the implementation of the Rodney District Council Bridleways Strategy 2007 and the development of the multi use trails discussed in the Franklin District Council Reserves Acquisition and Development Plan 2007. Advocate to other local councils the importance of bridleways as transport routes and recreation venues; particularly between parks/equestrian venues and urban centres.

⁷ Currently there are no recreational riding opportunities on the six regional parks in the northern sector that have management plans and the three new parks that don't have management plans yet.

Conclusions

This issues and options paper summarizes learnings from this project. While it is not possible to address any of the policy issues at this stage, they have been noted and they will be considered in the review of the Regional Parks Management Plan which will commence later this year.

In the meantime, the ARC is committed to improving those opportunities that currently exist and removing barriers where possible subject to consideration of park operation needs, the enjoyment of other park users and Council's budgeting processes. Resource constraints mean that all the suggestions won't be able to be actioned immediately and for this reason there is a need to prioritise the proposed improvements. Your help with this would be appreciated as it will ensure that the priorities reflect riders' needs. Accordingly, it would be appreciated if you could indicate your top five priorities on the attached form, describe those areas which require particular attention and identify if there are other things that should be looked at.

From this feedback, an improvement plan can be developed, which will be reported to Council later this year. You will be updated on progress through the ARC website www.arc.govt.nz and an email to horse riders who have registered their contact details with the ARC.

How do I have my say?

The best way to have your say is to send the feedback on the form provided. While there are a number of questions posed, you should not feel limited to only commenting on these questions. Your comments on other issues concerning horse riding in the Auckland Regional Park network are welcome.

When you have completed your feedback form, you can:

- Send it to us at the following address:
Anna McElrea
Recreation Planner
Auckland Regional Council
21 Pitt Street
Private Bag 92-012
Auckland 1142
- Email it to us at anna.mcelrea@arc.govt.nz
- Fax it to us on (09) 366 2149
- Deliver it to us personally at:
Vodafone House
21 Pitt Street
Newton
Auckland

When do submissions close?

Submissions close at 4.30pm on Tuesday 20 May 2008.

Recreational Horse Riding Opportunities in the Auckland Region: Issues and Opportunities Feedback Form

Please fill in the form and:

- Send it to us at the following address:
 Anna McElrea
 Recreation Planner
 Auckland Regional Council
 21 Pitt Street
 Private Bag 92-012
 Auckland 1142
- Email it to us at anna.mcelrea@arc.govt.nz
- Fax it to us on (09) 366 2149
- Deliver it to us personally at:
 Vodafone House
 21 Pitt Street
 Newton
 Auckland

Question One	A number of constraints and issues have been identified that impact on riding opportunities in regional parks. Do these cover your main concerns or are there any other important issues that should be considered?
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	From the possible improvements listed in this document, what do you consider the top 5 priorities for improving recreational horse riding opportunities on regional parks?
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2.



3. 4. 5.	
Question Three	Are there other issues or options that we should be looking at?

**Thank you for taking the time to provide feedback.
The ARC looks forward to reading your thoughts.**