

## WAIPARA RIVER WORKING PARTY

Monday June 15 2009  
Working Paper Number: FOUR  
- Camping, Fire Risk, Rubbish

### Summary

This paper addresses three management issues as follows:

- Camping
- Fire risk
- Rubbish

Camping in the river has been associated with a number of issues that can have detrimental impacts on the environment. This paper provides some different management options for camping within the river for the Working Party to consider and goes on to look at the management implications associated with these options.

The paper goes on to look at fire risk and the existing mechanisms that control fire in the river. The paper considers how the fire risk message can be more readily made available to river users.

Lastly the issue of illegal rubbish dumping is considered. The paper identifies the existing mechanisms that are in place and goes on to consider how the public can be greater informed about the hazards associated with illegal rubbish dumping and the penalties that apply.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report covers three issues: camping, fire risk and rubbish. Camping is a popular past-time in the river although there are a number of management issues associated with camping that can have detrimental impacts on the environment. The Working Party needs to consider what type of camping, if any, is appropriate in the river and establish some management practises to mitigate the effects of camping.
- 1.2 Whilst fire risk and rubbish are issues that need to be considered in association with camping, these are also issues in their own right. The Working Party needs to consider what measures should be put in place to reduce the incidence of fire and illegal rubbish dumping and consider potential management issues with respect to these matters.

## **2 CAMPING**

- 2.1 Freedom camping is a popular recreational activity in the Waipara River. In many instances, people have been going camping in the river for generations. The most popular areas for camping in the river appear to be around the State Highway 1 Bridge area downstream to the Waipara River mouth. Limited camping also occurs upstream from the SH1 Bridge to Doctors Gorge.
- 2.2 Freedom camping is the use of public land for free overnight camping. Freedom camping poses a number of issues for our communities. These include:
- Pollution of waterways and other places with human waste and rubbish
  - Risk of fire being started by campers unaware of fire rules and risks
  - Loss of amenity and privacy for residents living nearby popular freedom camping hotspots
  - High cost of enforcement, signage, compliance and waste management
  - Risk of crime
  - Safety issues for campers with respect to other users of the river e.g. the use of firearms and motorised vehicles
- 2.3 The Working Party needs to consider whether freedom camping is appropriate in the river and if not what the ideal outcome might be. If freedom camping is to continue in the river in any form, then the issues associated with camping need to be addressed. The following are a number of options that the Working Party can consider with respect to camping in the river:
- The status quo which is informal (or freedom) camping throughout the river
  - Designated camping zones
  - Formal camping at designated camping sites
  - No camping
- Designated camping zones**
- 2.4 This approach would require freedom campers to know where they can and can't camp in the river and what is expected from them if they choose to camp in the river. This information could be made available to the general public through a number of mechanisms such as:
- Information on the Council's webpage including;
    - camping rules such as the carry-in, carry-out message,

- location of camp areas within the river,
  - and the location of Council dump stations, recycling and waste disposal facilities.
  - Signage at the main access points to the river.
  - No camping signs for those areas where camping is not permitted.
- 2.5 This option may require enforcement; particularly if the Working Party were to identify areas where camping is to be banned. Campers would need to be advised of the consequences of littering, lighting fires and dumping of human waste. These matters can potentially be enforced under the Litter and Rural Forest and Fire Acts as referred to later in this report.
- Formal camping at designated camping sites**
- 2.6 Alternatively, the Working Party may consider that camping is appropriate but only if limited to designated camping sites. The establishment of designated camping and picnic areas would help to keep any rubbish in a concentrated area that is easy to clean up if necessary and would also allow for information signage to be targeted at that area to educate campers on the risks and hazards associated with camping in that area.
- 2.7 If the Working Party decided on this option, they would need to determine how many designated camping sites should be provided, the capacity of the sites, the location of the sites and whether facilities should be provided.
- 2.8 In considering the location of potential designated camping sites, the Working Party needs to consider a number of issues such as:
- Access
  - Facilities
  - Safety of campers
- 2.9 Access to designated camping sites is an important consideration. The type of access available will determine who is able to use the site. A designated camping site located near a formed and legal road may attract campervans and users that do not have four wheel drive vehicles. Camping sites that are located more remotely and away from formed roads may only attract those persons that have four wheel drive access. Those sites that are more readily accessible will be easier to monitor for compliance issues such as rubbish disposal and the lighting of fires. However, easily accessible sites may also be subject to pressure from higher visitor numbers.
- 2.10 The Working Party needs to determine if designated camping sites should be provided with any facilities such as a potable water supply, toilet facilities and waste disposal facilities. The provision of these facilities may determine where camp sites can be located i.e. within close proximity of existing Council water supplies and easily accessible for the removal of rubbish and effluent. The servicing of camp sites may require significant capital outlay and regular maintenance and monitoring by the regulatory authority. As such, the Working Party may need to limit the number of potential designated sites in order to get the potential buy-in of the relevant authorities.
- 2.11 Another matter to consider is the potential safety of campers with respect to other river users and activities that may occur in the river such as shooting and use of firearms and traffic safety in terms of vehicles travelling along the river. The Working Party may need to consider confining camping to those areas away from where shooting and vehicles might be

provided for. This issue is also relevant to identifying designated camping zones for freedom camping.

- 2.12 One potential area for a designated camping site would be in the State Highway 1 Bridge area. This area contains a large tract of Crown land and currently contains one of the two nohoanga sites on the river. The area is bounded by the Waipara Boys Brigade camp which provides and maintains a public swimming hole. The area is easily accessed from Darnley Road to the south and in close proximity to the Waipara Township on the north bank.
- 2.13 The Department of Conservation (DOC) owns two parcels of land on the south bank of the river. One parcel described as Section 1 SO 367396 contains 1.9707 hectares of land on the western side of the access track and is described as conservation area classified as recreation reserve. The second parcel of land is substantially larger in area and is located to the east of the access track. The Working Party may wish to approach the Department of Conservation about the feasibility of providing a DOC conservation campsite in this area.
- 2.14 In addition to the above site, there are a number of other sites that may be suitable as designated camping sites or zones for freedom camping within the river. These include the site that was visited on the field trip between Webbs Road and the Waipara River mouth, the Horseshoe bend area and Stringers Bridge area. The Working Party will need to consider the different areas within the river and determine what areas, if any, are suitable for some form of camping.

#### **No camping**

- 2.15 A third scenario is that the Working Party could consider prohibiting camping throughout the Waipara River, with the exception of the nohoanga sites. Ngāi Tahu Whānui have temporary, but exclusive, camping rights at the nohoanga sites for 210 days a year that can be exercised between August and April. A ban on camping would have the benefit of limiting environmental damage due to human waste, rubbish disposal and fire risk. However, this option could be quite controversial given the current and past popularity of camping in the river.
- 2.16 A prohibition on camping in the river might be difficult to enforce and monitor. One possible method of enforcement could be the use of a bylaw. The Council has an existing Freedom Camping Policy pursuant to Clause 10.1 of the Public Places Bylaw 2008. This policy bans freedom camping in any vehicle on any road within the Hanmer Basin Management Area, Motunau Beach Township and any recreation reserve within the Council's control under the Reserve Act 1977 within these two townships.
- 2.17 If the Working Party were of the view that camping should not be permitted within any part of the river, they may wish to recommend to the Council that the existing Freedom Camping Policy be amended to include the whole of the Waipara River. The policy would need to be amended to refer to camping in tents as well as camping in vehicles within this area. Alternatively, the Working Party could approach the Council about drafting a new policy or by-law specifically for camping within the Waipara River.
- 2.18 Any potential ban on camping within the river would need to be reinforced through signage. A new national '*No camping*' sign is currently being promoted by the New Zealand Freedom Camping Forum.

### RECOMMENDATION ONE

THAT THE WORKING PARTY RECOMMEND THAT ENVIRONMENT CANTERBURY, THE HURUNUI DISTRICT COUNCIL AND THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION PROVIDE INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF FREEDOM CAMPING.

### RECOMMENDATION TWO

THAT THE WORKING PARTY DESIGNATES SPECIFIC CAMPING 'ZONES' OR 'SITES' IN THE WAIPARA RIVER.

### RECOMMENDATION THREE

THAT THE WORKING PARTY ESTABLISH SIGNAGE AT THE MAIN ACCESS POINTS TO THE RIVER IDENTIFYING THE LOCATION OF CAMPING ZONES OR SITES WITHIN THE RIVER AND OUTLINE THE CAMPING RULES THAT APPLY.

### RECOMMENDATION FOUR

THAT THE WORKING PARTY RECOMMENDS THAT THE HURUNUI DISTRICT COUNCIL ON BEHALF OF THE WORKING PARTY APPROACH THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND COMMENCE DISCUSSIONS WITH THEM ABOUT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CONSERVATION CAMP SITE ON THE DOC OWNED LAND AT THE END OF DARNLEY ROAD.

## **3 FIRE RISK**

- 3.1 In terms of the Forest and Rural Fires Act 1977, the Department of Conservation (DOC) is responsible for the control of fire in all New Zealand river beds where this is on unoccupied crown land or crown reserve. A map showing those areas of the Waipara River subject to DOC fire control will be available at the Working Party meeting.
- 3.2 The rules governing fire restrictions are outlined in the Forest and Rural Fires Act 1977. It is the Department of Conservation's responsibility for publicly notifying changes in the fire season. All areas under DOC fire control have a year round restricted fire season, which means any open air fires require a written permit, with the exception of small fires that provide for cooking and comfort. If fire conditions worsen DOC may declare a prohibited fire season, in which case all permits are cancelled and no fires may be lit. Any person found to have started a fire in a DOC controlled area may be personally liable for the costs of fighting the fire should it get out of control.
- 3.3 Given the existing provisions in terms of the Forest and Rural Fire Act, it would appear that the main issue with respect to fire is educating the public and enforcement of the provisions. As there are only two fire seasons, restricted and prohibited, the Working Party may want to include fire season information on information signage established at the river. Other forms of education could include public notices or articles in the local papers, information on the Council's webpage, and notices in 4WD club newsletters and websites.

### RECOMMENDATION FIVE

THAT THE WORKING PARTY ENSURES THAT INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE ON FIRE RESTRICTIONS AND THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE INDIVIDUAL THROUGH SIGNAGE ALONG THE WAIPARA RIVER

## **4 RUBBISH**

- 4.1 Rubbish dumping is an issue in the Waipara River as it can be hazardous for the environment and is unsightly. The Working Party needs to consider how the incidence of rubbish dumping can be reduced alongside ways to identify offenders and thus provide further deterrence.
- 4.2 Illegal dumping of waste can be detrimental for the environment in a number of ways. Illegal dumping can disrupt natural processes on land and in the water. Dumped household appliances and cars are not only an eyesore, but can also release toxic chemicals. The run-off from improper disposal of toxic substances such as motor oil or household cleaners can contaminate the river. Dumping of household waste can attract pests and diseases. Garden waste can contain weed seeds and vegetation fragments that may establish and become a nuisance.
- 4.3 The illegal dumping of waste is an offence against the Litter Act 1979. The Council has a number of available enforcement options including the issuing of an infringement notice (maximum \$400 fine) or prosecution through the Courts. The penalties of being found guilty at court are high and result in a fine of \$5,000.
- 4.4 If the illegally dumped litter was of such a nature as it could endanger any person (example - any bottle whether broken or not, glass, article containing glass, sharp or jagged material, or any substance of a toxic or poisonous nature), those responsible could be sentenced to a maximum of one month imprisonment and/or a maximum fine of \$7,500.
- 4.5 Whilst the dumping of waste is an offence and enforcement options are available to the Council, it is not always possible to catch offenders particularly in isolated areas such as the Waipara River.
- 4.6 Getting rubbish out of the river, particularly with respect to car bodies and larger appliances can be problematic. In many instances, the areas where material has been dumped can be inaccessible to vehicles required to remove the rubbish.
- 4.7 The Working Party might like to consider erecting signage informing the public that the illegal dumping of waste is an offence under the Litter Act 1979 and the penalties that apply. Signage could also direct the public on how to report illegal dumping of rubbish where this has been observed.

### **RECOMMENDATION SIX**

THAT THE WORKING PARTY ESTABLISH SIGNAGE AT THE MAIN ACCESS POINTS TO THE RIVER INFORMING THE PUBLIC THAT THE ILLEGAL DUMPING OF WASTE IS AN OFFICENCE UNDER THE LITTER ACT 1979 AND THE PENALTIES THAT APPLY.