

**Subject:** Forest Recreational Access Policy

**Category:** Forestry Policy. Updated 20 December 2010

**Purpose:**

To provide managed access to Council forests for recreation purposes.

**Background:**

The Council provides forests primarily for commercial purposes. Recreational use is already extensive but opportunities exist for further recreational use where this can be managed cost-effectively.

The Council forests are currently managed under contract to P F Olsen Limited who report to The Manager, Property Services.

The previous policy regarding public access stated:

*Where practical and safe, public access and use of forests will be encouraged. To maintain control over usage, public entry into the forest areas is by permit and with appropriate insurance if deemed by the forest manager to be necessary.*  
 (Five Year Forest Management Plan, May 2009)

**Features of the forest estate**

The Council commercial forests comprise the following:

FOREST	Gross area (ha) as at 30 June 2010
Borlase	971.1
Eves Valley	65.8
Howard	955.3
Kingsland	171.9
Rabbit Island	958.6
Sherry	623.4
Tunnicliff	133.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>3879.4</b>

**Current recreational management**

During the year 2009/10 157 permits were issued for a wide range of activities. The most popular were:

Recreational hunting and trapping	67
Servicing utilities	14
Firewood and cone collection	13
Horse riding	11

Multi-sports and orienteering	8
School groups	8
Pest control	7
Fishing	7
Motorsport events	6
Walking and/or dogs	4
Miscellaneous	12

Permits are generally not issued for walking or cycling on existing forest tracks, so no records are maintained for these activities undertaken in Council forests. However, they are recognised to be quite significant particularly in both Rabbit Island and Kingsland Forests.

### **Current issues**

- unauthorised entry and vandalism
- restricting access during times of high fire danger
- catering for increased demand especially at Rabbit Island and Kingsland forests

### **Revised Policy**

“The Council recognises that its forests play a role in meeting the diverse recreational demands of the District”.

The Council will provide for recreational opportunities subject to:

- minimising disruption to commercial forestry management and harvesting activities
- protecting the forests from any undue risks due to fire or disease
- protecting the health and safety of authorised forest users
- minimising environmental disturbance and damage to forest infrastructure (eg roads)
- minimising any liability to Council (the Forest Manager may require evidence of public liability insurance and forest fire fighting cover for certain permitted activities)

Development of any new tracks or recreational facilities that has a significant cost will require approval from the Council before such work may be undertaken.

### **Provisions and Objectives**

The recreation policy has the following specific objectives:

1. Expand the network of cycle and walking tracks in Rabbit Island. Tracks would be constructed to a high standard and with professional signage and provision of maps via interpretative boards, pamphlets and the internet. The Rabbit Island trails will complement the proposed National Cycleway proposal via Rabbit Island to Mapua. Entry would be un-restricted during daylight hours unless due to high fire danger (this will take some planning).

2. Expand the network of walking and mountain bike tracks in Kingsland Forest. Signage as appropriate.
3. Identify suitable routes for horse trails at Tunnicliff and Rabbit Island. Signage as appropriate.
4. Assist in the facilitation of an off-road motorcycle venue at Borlase Forest. This initiative is currently being promoted by the Nelson Motor Cycle Club, and it would be run under their jurisdiction for events three to four times per year. Some permanent signage and possibly other facilities would be put in place.
5. Develop a nature trail up Reservoir Creek (Kingsland) to the lookout. The current track is very rough and poorly marked.
6. Complete the upgrade of the Conifer Arboretum and walkway at Rabbit Island. This would be carried out in conjunction with the Parks and Reserves Dept.
7. To provide access for hunting on a permit-only basis.
8. To provide access for one-off events by permit. Events to include but not limited to such activities as servicing utilities, firewood, organised sporting or recreational activities, school groups, pest control and fishing.
9. Events which provide for spectators will be required to provide a comprehensive health and safety plan showing how the event and crowd safety will be managed. Health and safety plans will be required to be submitted for approval for all group activities as part of the permit issue process.

## **Permits**

The Forest Managers are authorised to issue permits for access into the forests as provided in this Policy, and have the discretion in consultation with Council staff to authorise such other access that may be requested from time to time. Permits are not required to be issued for walking or cycling unless forest access is restricted for operational reasons. Permits are to be issued for specific dates and times and for specific forest areas.

## **Charges**

Access to Council forests where allowed is generally provided without any charge. A bond may be required for certain activities where there is the potential for damage to occur to the forest estate. The amount of such bond is to be paid prior to any permit or access being granted and will be assessed by the Forest Manager. The bond or any part of it which has not been used to repair damage to the forest estate will be returned upon application to the Forest Manager.

Any event or activity that charges participants must supply details of such charges with the permit application. At the Council's discretion, up to 10% of any entry fee may be payable to Council as a permit fee. Otherwise, permits will be issued free of charge.

The Council will recover costs from any person or persons who cause damage to or whose actions cause expenditure to be incurred over and above that which may normally expect to be incurred.

## **Expenditure**

The forestry budget will provide sufficient expenditure to maintain access and security into Council forests to meet forestry management and harvesting requirements. Expenditure to maintain facilities that have been primarily provided for recreational purposes is not to be charged against the forestry accounts without the prior approval of Council and is expected to be funded from some other source. The costs of providing any additional security to meet recreational activity in forests over and above that which is currently provided may incur a charge to the activity for a permitted event.

Where the ongoing recreational use of forests requires an increase in security services to maintain the security of the forests the appropriate Council department is expected to meet the costs of such additional security, or, a restriction on access to the forests may be made if the security of the forest is at risk. Any proposed expenditure is to be agreed with the bill payer prior to the costs being incurred.

## **Review**

This policy should be reviewed by 1 March 2012.

<b>Approved:</b>	<b>Date of Issue:</b>	<b>Review Date:</b>
	22 February 2011 Jim Frater, Manager Property Services	