



MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed until Friday 1st December

Public urged to stay out of the forest

“Stop visiting the Waitakere Ranges forests until it’s safe for our kauri, or risk losing them forever” is the plea from leading conservation organisations, who are urging the public to respect a rāhui by local mana whenua Te Kawerau ā Maki, and help stop the spread of kauri dieback disease.

The Tree Council, Waitakere Ranges Protection Society, Forest & Bird and the Friends of Regional Parks are asking the public to support the temporary closure by staying away from bush tracks and forested areas within the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park until essential actions are taken to protect kauri.

A rāhui, which is being placed over the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park by Te Kawerau ā Maki from Saturday 2nd December, restricts use of or access to an area or resource by unauthorised persons. This restriction of access to the public allows the environment to heal without human impacts, and provides time for planning and remedial work to be undertaken in a controlled and safe manner. The rāhui will not restrict access to beaches, public land adjacent to beaches, private land or public roads.

According to The Tree Council’s Secretary Mels Barton, Auckland Council has not acted fast enough to stop the spread of the disease since alarming reports in August. “Auckland Council reported that the spread of kauri dieback in the Waitakeres had more than doubled from 8% 5 years ago to 19% of kauri infected now. Urgent action such as widespread upgrades of tracks and cleaning stations had to be made as well as the closing of tracks around healthy kauri, but this has just not happened.”

President of the Waitakere Ranges Protection Society John Edgar says that infection is definitely being spread mainly by people, rather than wild animals. "The majority of the infection is along the track network and worst in the areas with heaviest foot traffic, which is why it is so important to restrict public access."

The groups had lobbied for a list of essential and long overdue actions to urgently take place before the park became inundated with summer visitors, but were fobbed off by the promise of more reports but limited action.

"We're very relieved Te Kawerau ā Maki has taken this strong stance which paves the way for urgent action from Council," says Forest & Bird Regional Manager Nick Beveridge. "Auckland Council's Environment and Community Committee is finally going to make a decision about what to do about combating kauri dieback in the ranges on December 5th. We hope they will support the iwi, scientists and conservationists by enforcing a total closure of the park."

However Environment and Community Committee Chair Penny Hulse has already indicated that she does not support a full closure, claiming that Council will be wasting money on barriers and guards that they would prefer to spend on track upgrades.

The conservation groups think that this predetermination of the outcome is misinformed. "Council needs to implement Biosecurity Act powers to impose a Controlled Area Notice to enforce the closure. They have not taken this advice to date and so are making statements about how hard it will be without the benefit of professional advice on what it would take to close the park under the Biosecurity Act. This is unhelpful," says Mels Barton.

"Auckland Council has put forward a budget of \$51.48m in the draft Pest Management Strategy for kauri dieback. This level of funding is what is required to upgrade the infrastructure in the park, not a few hundred thousand" says John Edgar. "To say that you can't upgrade the tracks if you spend any money on closing the park is just not true. Council should be asking the government for financial help with this issue to get the upgrade programme happening as fast as possible, not complaining about the small change and using that as an excuse to do nothing."

According to Bronwen Turner, Chair Friends of Regional Parks, "If we want kauri to be in the Waitakeres and all our regional parks for future generations, we must act now to protect it. Everybody can play their part by letting friends, family and visitors know why the rahui is so important. We urge Aucklanders to support proposed spending on Kauri dieback in Auckland Council's Draft Long Term Plan but we urge Council and Government not to wait till next year and to immediately invest in the infrastructure needed to protect the kauri in the Ranges."

The conservation groups respectfully ask the public to use the other 25 Regional Parks in Auckland for their recreation that are not comprised of kauri forest and avoid the Waitakere and Hunua Ranges until the essential actions to upgrade infrastructure and protect kauri have been taken.

ENDS

Cont'd overleaf

Notes:

A rāhui is being placed over the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park by Te Kawerau ā Maki at 7am on Saturday 2nd December at the Cascades Kauri Park (near the Auckland City Walk). Everyone is welcome and encouraged to attend. More details about the rāhui can be found on www.tekawerau.iwi.nz

Comment:

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