

Foundation North - GIFT Submission on Auckland Council's Draft Regional Parks Management Plan

March 2022

*I roto i ou tātou ringa ringa te rongoā - already in all our hands
are the remedies*

Foundation North and GIFT:

Foundation North was established in 1988 as one of 12 regional community trusts, to distribute income to support regional communities in perpetuity. Foundation North holds in trust an endowment, or pūtea of over a billion dollars to make grants each year to not-for-profit groups in Auckland and Northland.

In 2016 Foundation North initiated the Gulf Innovation Fund Together (GIFT) to spark innovation to improve the mauri or life force of Tikapa Moana/Te Moananui-ā-Toi (Hauraki Gulf). The aim was to support breakthrough ideas and solutions to improve the Gulf's health.

When Foundation North initiated GIFT, it knew little about the human systems surrounding the Hauraki Gulf, root causes behind its environmental degradation, or what it will take to reverse declining ecosystem health. Five years on, GIFT grantees have provided evidence from their projects, evaluation, reflection and learning processes about what is blocking change and where seeds of hope and potential lie. Our annual GIFT reports can be accessed here:

<https://www.giftofthegulf.org.nz/what-we-have-learned>.

Influenced in part by this evidence, Foundation North has recently organized all its work around 5 focus areas, one being Whakahou Taiao – Regenerative Environment. This states that Foundation North will support joined-up approaches to conserving, restoring, and renewing the environment so that Te Taiao and people can flourish together. Initiatives proposed by tangata whenua are the priority. Importance is placed on activity that will lead to:

- Ecosystems and communities being renewed and regenerated
- Mātauranga Māori (indigenous knowledge, practices, and approaches) being recognised, valued, and implemented
- Tino rangatiratanga – community-led action for Te Taiao
- Connection and access to Te Taiao.

For the period April-Dec 2021, Foundation North had a spend on Whakahou Taiao - Regenerative Environment of \$3,059,530. This is in addition to substantive spends on multi-year projects such as Te Korowai o Waiheke (stoat and rat eradication on Waiheke Island) and partnering with The Nature Conservancy in a \$3 million pledge to establish NZ's first-ever conservation challenge fund to help reverse the Hauraki Gulf's decline by restoring lost mussel beds.

G.I.F.T submission on draft regional parks management plan:

Overall opinion of the draft plan direction:

ONE: GIFT fully supports:

- A. The commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- B. Enabling connection and access to Te Taiao for diverse communities
- C. The commitment to collaborate to achieve outcomes in the regional parks
- D. Emphasising the urgency of climate change activities in park management

TWO: GIFT encourages:

- A. A clearer activation of the evolved Tiriti partnership that operates in modern times.
- B. An enhanced central focus on the regeneration of mauri in the vision for regional parks, that goes beyond working together for treasured and resilient parks.
- C. Inclusion of the significant potential of blue carbon in climate change actions in the regional parks, particularly in relation to the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park and other sensitive marine catchments such as the Manukau, Kaipara and Mahurangi.

1A: GIFT FULLY SUPPORT the draft plan focus of commitment to Te Tiriti

Notable excerpts from the draft Regional Parks Management Plan:

A key focus in this draft Plan is to support the principles of Te Tiriti in park management. This includes support for partnering with mana whenua (refer chapter 5). In so doing, we acknowledge and seek to embed te ao Māori into park management and build council's understanding and relationships with mana whenua as kaitiaki.

In the Tāmaki Makaurau context, a te ao Māori perspective guided by mana whenua is fundamental to manage, develop, and enhance regional parks

Given the council's obligations as a partner to act reasonably and in good faith, it is crucial for council to find ways to embrace the values of te ao Māori in its processes and culture in respect of tikanga, and mātauranga Māori to deliver benefits for mana whenua, Māori, and the wider hapori / community.

GIFT Comments:

- Te Ao Māori/Māori world view is premised on Mātauranga Māori/Māori knowledge systems and operates on a very different set of values and mental models to the prevalent paradigm. GIFT's vision to restore the mauri of Tikapa Moana/Hauraki Gulf is acting as a doorway into this world. Te Ao Māori does not separate people and nature; they are one and the same. Harming ecosystems is harming ourselves.
- Through GIFT we are learning that placing Māori values and concepts at the centre, holding space for knowledge systems to coexist and complement each other, and trying to work with all of this knowledge authentically, helps to shift mental models and allows different things to happen.
- Foundation North fully supports mana whenua with Te Ao Māori concepts and practices prevailing in decision making for the management of regional parks. It is important to value and support skilled facilitation of the journey of decolonisation and to learn to work in bicultural ways.
- It is worth noting another area of learning through GIFT, about leadership. In the Hauraki Gulf, iwi capacity to engage in other people's processes can be limited by over consultation, poor engagement processes, heavy existing demands from local and central government around resource management, differing stages of Treaty settlements, lack of people on the ground, capability and intra and inter-iwi dynamics.
- In GIFT, we are exploring what might support not just iwi or mana whenua to grow their leadership and kaitiaki capacity, but also what might support tangata whenua leadership for change in the Hauraki Gulf and surrounding landscape.

1B: GIFT FULLY SUPPORTS making the regional parks more accessible and welcoming to Auckland’s diverse communities

Notable excerpts from the draft Regional Parks Management Plan:

Healthy parks build healthy people and healthy communities. Parks contribute to people’s wellbeing by providing opportunities to experience nature and interact with nature. They provide for spiritual and physical wellbeing by providing public spaces for all to enjoy in their own way. We aim to add value to visitor experiences by providing these opportunities in parks to build community, connections, and cater for diversity. We will retain the natural character of the parks and prioritise free access for informal recreation.

Equity of access means providing opportunities and infrastructure for everyone regardless of abilities, gender or ethnicity.

GIFT comments:

As stated in the introductory context to this submission, in our commitment to Whakahou Taiao – Regenerative Environment, Foundation North supports joined-up approaches to conserving, restoring, and renewing the environment so that Te Taiao and people can flourish together. Importance is placed on activity that will lead to:

- Ecosystems and communities being renewed and regenerated
- Mātauranga Māori (indigenous knowledge, practices, and approaches) being recognised, valued, and implemented
- Tino rangatiratanga – community-led action for Te Taiao
- Connection and access to Te Taiao

The focus on making the regional parks more accessible and welcoming to Auckland’s diverse communities is likely to increase the quantity of connections and access to Te Taiao.

A caveat is noted that mana whenua must set the pace and depth of accessibility with a view to maintaining the mauri of the natural spaces. GIFT questions whether mana whenua have co-authored the Park Categories described in section four of the Draft plan, and if not, advocates that this section be reconsidered through a lens of te ao Māori.

1C: GIFT FULLY SUPPORT the commitment to collaborate with others

Notable excerpts from the draft Regional Parks Management Plan:

Over the next decade, we aim to build new relationships to deliver more of this draft Plan. This may require us to work in new ways and to develop our capacity to set up effective relationships.

Partnering with organisations can help us deliver projects or programmes on parks better, faster and/or cheaper. It is an important way to strengthen our delivery given the challenging pressures on budgets and capacity to achieve the proposals in this draft Plan

GIFT comments:

We understand that turning the tide of degradation in the Hauraki Gulf and ensuring healthy and resilient regional parks will require a collective effort and we are willing to play our part. We offer the following:

- As a philanthropic funder in the Auckland and Northland rohe, we can offer a neutral space to bring people together. We would welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively to continue the conversations needed for systems change.
- Access to our resources and learnings from the GIFT website. For example, our case studies, evaluations and guidelines for ethical engagement.
- The opportunity to act as a connector to assist in the establishment of relationships with Iwi, community and stakeholders in our rohe.
- An invitation to Auckland Council staff to participate in our collaborative learning and development sessions, for example we ran a series of mauri wānanga over 2021/early 2022.

1D: GIFT FULLY SUPPORT the draft plan focus on centering park management decisions around the climate emergency.

Notable excerpts from the draft Regional Parks Management Plan:

Keeping the forest we have healthy is by far the biggest positive impact we can make to mitigate climate change on regional parks. Maintaining the health of forest and larger shade trees is essential for them to continue growing and storing carbon. This means protecting them from threat of fire and from browsing animals such as pigs, goats, deer, and possums with sustained pest control. We can also plant more trees and other vegetation to capture more carbon including larger tree species to provide shade for visitors and animals. We have committed approximately \$10m to plant 200ha of new native forest over the next 10 years to sequester more carbon as part of a wider \$152m effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across all council activities.

GIFT comments:

- Permanent Native forests as part of the solution as a long-term store of carbon.
- Proactively having conversations with mana whenua about the long-term vision for the approximately 700ha of farmland that hangs in the balance for its future use.
- Being guided by mana whenua priorities for land use where a combination of permanent native forests and farmland can be achieved.
- We support the proposed approach to “sustainable management and climate change.”

GIFT appreciates the opportunity to give the following suggestions for improvement:

2A: GIFT encourages a clearer activation of Te Tiriti partnership that has evolved to modern times.

Notable excerpts from the draft Regional Parks Management Plan:

We recognise that working in partnership can occur at all levels of decision-making and management. At one end of the spectrum is co-governance, Co-management is another form of partnership. Partnerships may also occur at a project or operational level.... The way in which we partner with mana whenua will continue to evolve and grow.

GIFT Comments:

- Foundation North encourages the final regional parks management plan to include significant investment in this area to truly enact a “genuine, active and enduring commitment to Te Tiriti.” This investment must not only develop Council capacity to work with mana whenua but must develop mana whenua capacity to guide and lead regional park management decisions.
- In GIFT, we are consciously responding to requests from Iwi to assist and resource them based on their interests and aspirations for the Hauraki Gulf. We draw on the experience and skills of our staff and kaumātua to guide us in this mahi and have developed tools to support our work and our practise. Please refer to our [guidelines for ethical engagement](#).
- There are many individuals and small groups in the Gulf doing great work, but through GIFT we have seen that many are working in isolation and feel exhausted and unsupported. GIFT grantees are clear about their need and desire to connect and build joint capacity to amplify efforts, and this is a key focus for GIFT. Central and local government can also help by bringing stakeholders together, alongside a commitment to reducing the burden of compliance and bureaucracy.
- We anticipate that the many people involved in contributing to regional parks management have similar challenges, with especial capacity challenges for mana whenua. We encourage the Council to dedicate both financial and in-kind support to enabling working in partnership.
- This includes the objectives and policies set out on pages 42-43 of section 5 of the draft Plan and encourages the Council to be innovative and courageous in exploring new ways to work in partnership with mana whenua.
- GIFT draws Council attention to the recently passed (28th February 2022) proposal by the Hauraki Gulf Forum to advocate changes to the HGF legislation that confirms a commitment to co-governance. GIFT encourages the Council to lean into similar courageous conversations and willingness to disrupt traditional bureaucratic practices for co-governance.

2B: GIFT encourages enhancing the Regional Park Vision to include Regeneration of Mauri

Notable excerpts from the draft Regional Parks Management Plan:

The vision is intended to be enduring: a long term, open-ended outcome. We have two sides to our vision. One side focuses on the parks themselves and our relationship with them. The other side focuses on our relationships: how the council, mana whenua and the regional community will work together in caring for and enjoying these special places.

GIFT comments:

GIFT supports both sides of this vision and encourages the Council to include a central binding focus of **regenerating the mauri** of the regional parks and connected ecosystems.

- Regenerative practice or development is the process of cultivating the capacity and capability in people, communities, and other natural systems to renew, adapt and thrive. It is not about maintaining what is or restoring something to what it was. Rather it is about creating systems and places that have the capacity to evolve towards increasing states of health and vitality.
- A definition of regeneration is renewal or restoration of a body, bodily part, or biological system after injury or as a normal process.
- The seemingly spontaneous regeneration of nature at many parts of New Zealand during Covid lock down in 2020 provided tangible experiences of regeneration. This provided a window into what might be possible when humans behave and operate differently.
- Covid has given us lessons that we can apply to management of regional parks. It has shown us that we can adjust to financial difficulties and different ways of working and interacting physically when we follow the rules and support each other. Public health has been the priority.
- GIFT suggests that the final regional parks management plan extend the current vision so that regenerating Mauri is the priority around which we can all take climate action to achieve. A focus on regeneration provides an inspiring pathway that has multiple entry points for humans to contribute.
- A focus on contribution is well aligned with Foundation North's philanthropic work. For the last five years Foundation North and GIFT have embraced the vision of regenerating Mauri and this has acted as a gateway to learning from Te Ao Māori.
- Mauri is the life supporting capacity of an ecosystem inclusive of people who are an inseparable part of it. Mauri is about shared wellbeing for all living systems, that is inclusive of species and habitats. Choosing a vision of improving Mauri was a courageous decision with few people understanding what was meant by the term Mauri. It was a leap into the unknown.

GIFT embraced this leap by running wānanga on Mauri with the GIFT network. At the wānanga and in ongoing conscious efforts to regenerate Mauri, lessons were learned that are applicable:

- For system level impacts, a few years of dabbling and exploring is not enough. It takes ten years or more intentional funding and support to make major impact.
- We must acknowledge the kaitiaki role of iwi and our role as guardians and stewards in relation to nature.

- To acknowledge our dependency on nature for wellbeing and the interconnectedness of life.

2C: GIFT encourages the inclusion and exploration of blue carbon opportunities in management of the regional parks.

Notable excerpts from the draft Regional Parks Management Plan:

Globally, humans have less than a decade to make the major changes needed to bring carbon levels in the atmosphere down to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

GIFT comments:

- There is much known and yet to be discovered about options for ocean processes to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Seaweed can rapidly sequester carbon and store it indefinitely if it sinks to the deep ocean. Mangroves and seagrasses are also effective at removing carbon dioxide and provide adaptation benefits.
- The Auckland region has many coastal communities who will bear the brunt of climate change. Specifically exploring the role of oceans and what regenerative action can take place in oceans is considered by Foundation North to be a crucial part of climate action relevant to regional parks with such extensive coastal area. As one of the larger regional councils nationally, with substantive coastal area, we can lead the way in exploring the role of ocean processes for carbon reduction and re-setting the imbalance of the earth's land and sea ecosystems.
- The establishment of GIFT to specifically encourage innovation around a water body, in this case the Hauraki Gulf, has produced lessons and understandings about human behaviour way beyond our expectations. Foundation North believes that by embracing the yet-to-be-determined potential of ocean processes in Auckland's regional parks, the pathway to carbon reduction and a high functioning Aotearoa climate will be accelerated.
- Foundation North funded \$75,000 towards a pilot of the Greenwave model in NZ that deploys regenerative ocean farming techniques and supports the Auckland Council to give greater consideration of blue carbon and innovative carbon products generally in regional park management decisions.
- Foundation North points to the recently agreed Te Mana o Te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020 that identifies key marine outcomes by 2050 and acknowledges the influence of this national strategy in the Draft Regional Parks Management Plan.

CONCLUSION:

We thank you for the opportunity to submit on the draft Regional Parks Management Plan. We do not wish to speak to our submission but look forward to working more with Auckland Council in implementing the plan over the next 10 years.

Ngā mihi nui



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Chief Executive, Foundation North/GIFT