



Media Release

14 January 2011
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SHARED INTEREST IN PROTECTING ENVIRONMENT

The Opotiki District Council and other parties involved in the development of the new Motu Trails cycleway have a shared interest in protecting the physical environment that acts as a drawcard for visitors.

That assurance has come from Opotiki District Council chief executive Aileen Lawrie in the wake of concerns expressed by some Tirohanga residents about aspects of the \$1.74 million economic development and job creation project.

The concerns emerged at a public forum in Opotiki on Wednesday night and centre on the proposed development of a 10-kilometre trail through the back dunes along the coast between Opotiki town and Waiaua.

Ms Lawrie says that the parties involved with the Motu Trails project have considered the dunes section - one of the key selling points of the proposed local tourism venture - very carefully during the planning phase.

Despite claims to the contrary, there has been a number of consultative initiatives with the few Tirohanga residents who have concerns, including one-on-one meetings on site.

“The main tourism advantage for our district is the pristine environment. That is what our international and domestic visitors come for and we are intent on maintaining that,” Ms Lawrie says.

“The Opotiki District Council and all its partners in the Motu Trails project share a common interest with local residents in dune welfare.

“Our Council, working with the Department of Conservation, has commissioned expert reports on the potential impact of the trail on the dunes flora and fauna and coastal erosion and all the reports have indicated that the proposed trail will have minimal effect. They also suggest ways of minimising impacts that have been incorporated into the design.

“The trail itself has been designed to have a very low impact on the dunes by minimising earthworks and generally following the rise and fall of the natural shape of the dunes themselves.

“The trail construction will be accompanied by plantings and weed control to enhance the environment and vehicle barriers to minimise unintended use.”

Ms Lawrie says that following the removal of grazing from some of the dunes sections in recent decades, the major on-going human impact has been illegal vehicle access spreading out from the few road access points.

The Council and its partners believe that encouraging low-impact walking and cycling access to the dunes area will help to change the nature of use and will discourage the damaging vehicle access that has been seen in recent years.

Like the Council, the Department of Conservation equally shares a common interest in dune welfare - in fact this is part of its mandate.

DoC is a partner in Coastcare and over the last five years has done major plantings at Tirohanga as part of that initiative.

Ms Lawrie says the Motu Trails cycleway will be a major community asset and will be used extensively by local residents to easily access and enjoy the beach and dune environment.

“It is being developed with the aim of enhancing our district's economy and providing new business opportunities for local residents by attracting cycling and walking visitors.

“The Motu Trails is expected to bring between \$3 million and \$4 million of revenue into our districts over the next five years.”

Ms Lawrie says the Opotiki District Council and Department of Conservation have heard the concerns of Tirohanga residents and have been working hard to incorporate solutions, where appropriate, in the trail design and location.

Following Wednesday evening's meeting at the Council, the community is now being invited to provide comments on the proposals for the dunes section of Motu Trails.

These can be emailed to info@odc.govt.nz or put in writing and delivered to the Council or Department of Conservation offices in Opotiki by 21 January.

A summary of submission will be compiled and will be made available to interested parties and residents by 28 January, with a further public meeting on the issue to be held on Wednesday 2 February.

Ends ...

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Aileen Lawrie, chief executive Opotiki District Council and Chairman, Motu Trails Governance Group
Phone 07 315 3030 or 021 819 342