



NEWSLETTER NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF NSW INC

Special edition 2021 137
SOUTHERN SYDNEY BRANCH

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The Value of National Parks

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BUSINESS MEETINGS All are welcome to attend, have your say and hear what's happening in the NPA. Contact Brian on 95209341 or Gary on 95701813 for details. These meetings are now held on either the 1st or 2nd Monday of the month.

Member meetings are currently via Zoom

Editorial

When Dr Geoff Mosley was Director of the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) he hosted the Second National Wilderness Conference at the University of Sydney. It was November 1979 and the proceedings were published in 1980 under the title *The Value of National Parks*¹. It remains an important statement of principles to this day.

There was a cogent reason why such a conference was held in 1979 and it is pertinent to our own Branch for that year was the centenary of The National Park, now renamed Royal National Park. It is also appropriate that we return to that conference under the directorship of Geoff Mosely because he has also produced a significant study of Royal National Park and its values, calling for it to be included on the World Heritage list for those special values.²

1979 was a significant year. Paul Landa was the Minister for the Environment in NSW and the Commonwealth Government, under the leadership of Malcolm Fraser, had declared Kakadu National Park and the Capricornia Section of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. It was on the verge of protecting Christmas Island. Both major parties spoke to the ACF conference and both supported national parks.

But perhaps it is apposite to quote words from the keynote address by none other than Judith Wright. Speaking of Terania Creek, then a major battleground in the environmental movement, Wright says “for the first time in Australia, a piece of land ... whose value to its defenders is neither a market-value nor a value-as-use – a piece of land on which its defenders do not even live, so that the territorial seems not to apply – has roused a large number of people to physical defence of its integrity”³.

We in the National Parks Association of NSW have spent our entire existence seeking to protect those lands whose values go beyond their market value and their potential “use” at a later stage. In recent years we have seen these values under direct assault from a variety of sources and, with a heavy heart, we produce this special edition of the Branch newsletter to highlight our concerns.

That concern includes our fears for our own beloved Royal National Park and what we see as major challenges to its very integrity.

We note that the internationally recognised definition of a protected area (PA) is: “A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values” (IUCN Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Categories, 2008).

We also note that “the overriding purpose of a system of protected areas is to increase the effectiveness of in-situ biodiversity conservation.” (IUCN 2008). We fear this is no longer uppermost in the minds of our government.

¹ ACF “The Value of National Parks”, 1980 (ed John Messer and Geoff Mosely)

² Geoff Mosely, *The First National Park: A Natural for World heritage*, SSEC 2012

³ ACF Op Cit, p28

**Our Next Members Night
And AGM**

ZOOM PRESENTATION AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, 29 September 2021

7:15pm for a 7:30pm start

And, yes, it will again be by Zoom. The link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8102670640>

You are invited to a Zoom Presentation about the campaign to protect the Greater Blue Mountains by Harry Burkitt, General Manager of the Colong Foundation for Wilderness which has been around for 53 years since 1968.

Harry will speak about current threats facing the Blue Mountains (a World Heritage Site) and how the campaign addresses the threats regarding fires, Warragamba Dam raising and coal mining and working to protect values – with UNESCO and within corporate and political circles. This is a crucial campaign to protect this important national park and we think you'll find the presentation engaging and relevant!

Prior to that presentation the Branch will hold its AGM. There will be a brief presentation from the President, followed by a spill of all official positions and elections to office positions. Now only Branch members can vote or stand for positions but if you are interested and wish to nominate please contact the Secretary prior to the meeting. Contact is sbnpansw@bigpond.com

Positions required for election are:

President

Vice President

Vice President 2

Hon Secretary

Minutes Secretary

Hon Treasurer

NPA State Council delegates (4 positions available)

Other positions you might wish to offer for are:

Activities Coordinator

Newsletter editor

Executive members. This is a fluid number and if you have a particular interest, expertise or passion do put up your hand.

The Plan of Management Process And Royal/Heathcote/Garawarra

Any proposed plan must be measured against the object of the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 No 80. My belief is that they appear in order of priority. Accordingly, we accord Object 1a the highest priority.

Those objects are as follows

- (a) the conservation of nature, including, but not limited to, the conservation of—
 - (i) habitat, ecosystems and ecosystem processes, and
 - (ii) biological diversity at the community, species and genetic levels, and
 - (iii) landforms of significance, including geological features and processes, and
 - (iv) landscapes and natural features of significance including wilderness and wild rivers,

- (b) the conservation of objects, places or features (including biological diversity) of cultural value within the landscape,

- c) fostering public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of nature and cultural heritage and their conservation,

When a DPOM is developed it must be checked against the considerations of requirements under Section 72AA of the National Parks and Wildlife Act. They reinforce the objects as listed above. Again, the most important is “the conservation of biodiversity, the maintenance of ecosystem function, the protection of geological and geomorphological features and natural phenomena and the maintenance of natural landscapes”.

The DPOM for the Royal/Heathcote/Garawarra reserve system has now been placed on exhibition and public comments have closed and in our Executive Summary NPA submitted that: “With respect to the draft POM, NPA is dismayed by the extensive and fundamental changes to the management of the Parks. The proposed changes amount to a major shift in the balance between conservation, recreation, and commercial operations. What is proposed is weighted towards commercial recreational opportunities with a heavy emphasis on creating more paid visitor attractions without any consideration of the likely impact they will have on the landscape, ecological or cultural values of the Parks. NPA considers it is appropriate to delay such consideration until a review of environmental factors or an environmental impact statement is prepared.

NPA is also concerned by proposals to increase opportunities for active recreational pursuits and development including overnight accommodation. They are likely to be not ecologically sustainable and therefore, threaten the ecological integrity of the Parks. Significant increases in visitation and activities are proposed without regard to whether proposed visitor carrying capacities of the Parks would be ecologically sustainable.”

Members should be aware that we have grave concerns about both the planning for the park and how those plans are managed in the field. This newsletter spells our concerns.

Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area Draft Plan of Management and Draft Mountain Biking Plan.

Southern Sydney Branch has made a comprehensive submission objecting to both these planning documents. The proposed changes amount to a major shift in the balance between conservation, recreation, and commercial operations. You can read more in the submission.

The NPA submission followed months of deliberations by a dedicated team of members who undertook field surveys, met frequently, and reviewed published papers.

The primary concern was that minimal information of new visitor facility proposals was provided and no detail was given to their likely heritage impacts. The reserves are within easy access of millions of greater Sydney residents yet no attempt at determining sustainable carrying capacities was undertaken. Instead, more visitor facilities are proposed including 'serviced' camping with car-based sites allowing for campervans in expanded recreation zones. Of concern was that the draft plans state that proposed new visitor facilities will be subject to future NPWS environmental assessments for which the NPWS has a policy of not making publicly available. Related to this is that comprehensive flora and fauna surveys of the reserves are decades old.

NPA had to seek additional mapping from the NPWS to show that the proposed mountain biking networks crossed over areas of mapped endangered ecological communities, while statements in the plans said that such outcomes would not be allowed.

According to the draft plans, a 2002 trial that allowed mountain biking to occur on 6km of track in addition to the 150km of allowed management trails, has resulted in at least 104km of additional illegal tracks half of which NPWS now propose to formalise. Recent work by NPA has shown that in some proposed mountain bike areas, the actual length of existing illegal tracks is 50% greater than that listed in the draft plans. This brings into question the ability of the NPWS to apply legislation that clearly make such actions an offence.

NPA proposed that mountain biking in the reserves be restricted to the existing management trail network, and that Government look for opportunities on other lands to meet demand. A number of mountain bike discussion papers have been produced by the NPWS which when accessed show that mountain bike riders represent less than 0.8% of all visitors, however large parts of the reserves are to be zoned for mountain biking incorporating the grading of tracks to meet international standards and allowance for national, regional and club events.

The NSW Government recently announced a major \$80M funding boost for a visitor facility expansion in the reserves. Therefore, there are proposals in the draft plans for new facilities that have no assessment of impacts, the NPWS has not yet considered community input on those draft plans, the Minister has not signed off on a new plan of management, and yet proposed new facilities are already funded.

Ross McDonnell

This paper appeared first in *Nature NSW*.

Remembrances of Species Lost to the Royal Parks

Written by Ross Jeffree and Gary Schoer

By many measures the Royal Parks (Royal and Heathcote National Parks and Garawarra State Conservation Area) are undergoing increasing ecological degradation and the stuff of environmental despairs...the latest being illegally constructed earthen jumps, and displaced bush rock within more than 100km of mountain bike tracks that fragment vulnerable habitat and kill fauna. It is likely that past megafire impacts and enhanced climate risks we are seeing now, and that are predicted to increase in the future, will add to the cumulative impacts from 37 of 39 legally and scientifically identified threatening processes in the Royal Parks. But arguably the *most visceral measure of environmental demise* is the 20 or so species of mammals, birds and amphibians which have been classified to be locally extinct or presumed lost. This conclusion has been highlighted in a 2011 NPWS report and



Lost-Parma wallaby



Lost-Ground parrot



Lost-Long nosed potoroo

alluded to in NPWS's *Draft Planning Considerations* document, supporting the Draft of the new Revised Plan of Management.

The number of locally extinct species can never be exactly stated as, for example, the Greater Glider has been detected on a couple of occasions in the Blackbutt Forests of the Hacking River since the devastating 1994 bushfire which destroyed most of its habitat (tree hollows) and food (Eucalypt leaves) within these forests. The discovery of a dead Dusky Antechinus at Burning Palms also removed that species from the indicative list of 25 locally extinct animal species. It is always possible that more species will be removed from this classification if extensive and targeted surveys for species such as the native Water Rat and Platypus are carried out. A particularly pleasing trend seems to be that Koalas that are genetically similar to the highly threatened Campbelltown and Appin populations are appearing more regularly in Royal and Heathcote National Parks. A mixed gender cluster in the southern sector of Heathcote National Park has been recommended by NPA as an Asset of Intergenerational Significance under an amendment to the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 2004. Such a classification would afford this recently discovered population the same degree of high-level protection afforded to the Wollemi Pine.

There is a need to remain positive about the future of flora and fauna in these three reserves; there are, after all 347 known animal species (vertebrates), 1000 plant species and 52 different plant communities in this biodiversity hotspot. However, there are other indicators that the Reserves need all the help and exemplary management that they deserve. There are 12-15 Threatened Ecological Communities and 16 threatened plant species. At least 44 animal species are listed under NSW's Biodiversity Conservation Act. The Rosenberg's Goanna and Broad-headed snake occur in higher densities here than other locations in the Sydney Basin. It is always beholden on us to acknowledge the contribution that all species make to creating sustainable ecosystems. Concentrating management actions solely on formally threatened species and communities might lead to neglect of what we take for granted. We might think that there is always a chance to see Swamp Wallabies in the Royal Parks, but if road kills and speed limits continue to be ignored this once-common species may be lost-and there are many such examples where local losses might be a forerunner to broader species loss.

Five Horsemen of the Biodiversity Apocalypse.

It is difficult to be precise about which factor, or more often mix of factors, led to the local demise or decreasing abundance of so many animal species; many factors are likely to be operating on a much broader scale (such as fox impacts). It is likely that several cumulative threats have operated over many years, but for example hunting that might have been a threatening process in the past may now be replaced by habitat fragmentation and illegal mountain biking on informal tracks as a direct threat to animal survival. Conservation biologists often use the acronym HIPPO as a quick reference guide to such likely causes in descending order of importance (2), with indications of relevance to the Royal Parks:

- Habitat destruction, including climate change impacts; megafires*, fragmentation (eg caused by mountain biking and other excessive tracks), exotic plants competing with native species that provide food for native animals
- Invasive species; foxes, cats and Rusa deer. There has been some recent evidence of a Lyre bird killed by a fox on Lady Carrington Drive (Steve Anyon-Smith, personal communication 2021)
- Pollution, particularly in rivers and other freshwater environments; suburban runoff introducing nutrients that lead to proliferation of weeds. Historic collapse of a coal wash dam at Helensburgh that released that waste product into the Hacking River have had unknown consequences on aquatic and terrestrial animals dependent on clean water.
- Population growth; Sydney's ever-increasing population, without commensurate increases in NPWS staff, inevitably puts enhanced pressure on biodiversity. Increasing numbers of mountain bikers threaten basking reptiles and the habitats of ground-dwelling birds. On some evidence, this has led to 'track-kill' of a broad-headed snake recently photographed on an illegal bike track (Tassia Kolesnikow personal communication 2021)
- Overhunting. It is possible that the Dingo was hunted to local extinction many years ago. Threats from animal collectors may reasonably be included in this category. The illegal search for and removal of Broad-headed snakes for the endangered animal trade is a well-recognised threat to

them in Royal National Park. The overturning and displacement of bush-rocks in the search for them and to construct illegal Mountain Bike jumps can also destroy their preferred habitat.

These HIPPO's have not gone away but most likely have intensified in recent years, with Climate Change and usage pressures producing a likely, but hard-to-assess cascade of cumulative impacts. Clearly, a contemporary benchmark of vertebrate biodiversity is critically needed in the Royal Parks to assess the severity of this continuing trend of degraded biodiversity. How best to reconstitute lost biodiversity through the establishment of corridors, ecological restoration and rewilding activities would be better informed by such knowledge of the current status of vertebrate biodiversity.

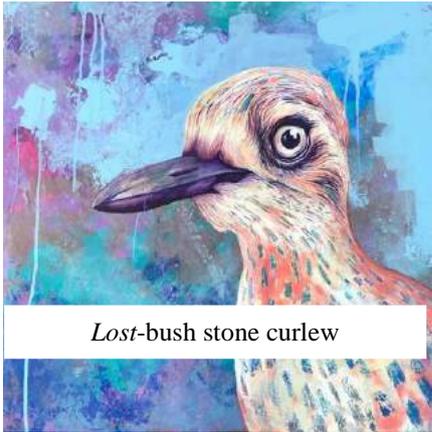
It is time to 'think globally: act locally', to continue to enhance our part in the ecological restoration of our Royal Parks, in the context of;

- i) the declaration of the UN Decade of Ecological Restoration (2021-2030) and,
- ii) the Prime Minister's recent announcement that Australia has joined a coalition of countries committed to conserve 30 per cent of the world's land and sea.

Those vertebrate species lost within the Royal Parks still exist within their broader geographical ranges. But more importantly, their demise represents our own local example of the national and global phenomenon of dwindling population sizes and range shrinkages of vertebrates, even in species of 'low concern' - which adds up to a massive anthropogenic erosion of biodiversity and of the ecosystem services essential to civilization (3).

The new economics of biodiversity outlined in the influential Dasgupta Review (4) determines that our protected areas should be viewed as components of Natural Capital, part of our national inclusive wealth and that ecological restoration represents an increase in our inclusive wealth, which is the "present discounted value of the flow of net social benefits it confers on society", in economic-speak! In contrast, ecological degradation represents depreciation of our national natural capital. Ecological restoration in National Parks represents much greater certainty of biodiversity conservation compared to other private sector land tenure arrangements.

Gary Schoer, in the following article, looks at a case study of the hopeful restoration of 140 Ha of a degraded addition to Heathcote National Park. The question he poses is: Can government and community working together help to restore habitat and ecosystem services to repair a key wildlife corridor and help halt the trend in species loss from a National Park?



Lost-bush stone curlew



Lost-stuttering frog

References

1. The Vertebrate Fauna of Royal & Heathcote National Parks and Garawarra State Conservation Area. <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/nature/surveys/20110249RoyalHeathcoteFauna.pdf>
2. Wilson E.O. 2016. Half-Earth *Our Planet's Fight for Life*. Liveright publishing, NY., pp. 259.
3. Gerardo Ceballos, Paul R. Ehrlich, and Rodolfo Dirzo 2017. Biological annihilation via the ongoing sixth mass extinction signalled by vertebrate population losses and declines. PNAS July 25, 2017 114 (30) E6089- E6096; <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1704949114>
4. Dasgupta P. (2021). The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review. London: HM Treasury).



Kennedia prostrata

Restoring a recent degraded addition to Heathcote National Park: Rallying intergenerational support for a startup project funded by a hopeful Tucker Foundation grant.

Gary Schoer, NPA Southern Sydney Branch 0409 666 163; ssbnpansw@bigpond.com

Your Branch for many years has lobbied strongly for additions to the Royal Parks (Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area). Working together with other local environment groups we have achieved many gains for the local environment including addition of Crown Lands to Heathcote National Park between Heathcote and Waterfall and addition of some private lands to Royal National Park to help complete the protections for the historic Burgh Track between Helensburgh and Garawarra Farm.

For decades we have advocated for the addition of Crown Lands adjacent to the former Garawarra Hospital and the Princes Highway to Garawarra State Conservation Area. In the last 12 months, ironically, it was a land swap under the state's biobanking legislation that led to this 140Ha land parcel (see attached map) being added to Heathcote National Park. This addition provided direct links eastwards to conserved lands of Garawarra State Conservation Area that links further east to Royal National Park...and westwards to the extensive natural "Special Areas" of drinking water catchment lands connecting further west to Dharawal National Park.

But there was a catch. We were unsuccessful in encouraging the former land owners (Department of Lands as it was known then) to better manage this important patch of bushland especially to exclude trail bikes. So the land "gifted" to NPWS carries with it a substantial area of cleared and degraded land, merging into cleared areas under high tension power lines that considerably reduces the wildlife corridor benefits that should be an integral part of this national park addition.

With the full support of the local National Parks and Wildlife Management, NPA has submitted an application for \$25 000 Tucker Foundation "seeding" grant named for the famous Australian expressionist painter and his wife to commence the processes that should lead to the full restoration of the damaged parts of this land supported by both government and any other successful grant applications. If the Tucker grant is successful (we will hear later in the year) we aim initially to support contractual work to tackle a large weed outbreak, particularly Crofton Weed, to give native seed a better chance of germinating. And we wish to track any improvements in plant and animal diversity by funding pre-project plant and animal diversity studies by an ecological consultant/s supported by volunteers.

While the anticipated employment of contractors will provide a professional head start to this project, the involvement of NPA and other community members is an important and necessary component to maximise the outcomes we can get and provide back up support to the total project as it progresses.

NPA has not only been motivated by clear ecological needs to help catalyse this restoration. We have seen how local people have been exhibiting a sense of powerlessness and anxiety, increasingly common around the world, in dealing with climate change, habitat degradation and galloping species loss. Existential threats to our blue and green planetary home add another, now recognised stressor to the lives of many. Psychiatrists have coined the word Solastalgia for a pervading sense of anxiety associated with the loss of what people perceive as their natural home. The word originated in the Hunter Valley where a local psychiatrist author I Higginbotham, explored the sense of loss that people affected by coal mines in the Hunter area feel. He had

spoken with many clients who exhibited real physical and psychological symptoms associated with perceived losses to their natural world.

This concern that our future “home” is being despoiled by actions of past generations has also led to a successful court case in Australia initiated by young people that makes it obligatory for the Commonwealth to have a duty of care in assessing the impact of a northern NSW coal mine on future generations before any approvals are given. It is likely that there will be more legal challenges that question the extent to which we can ignore the aspirations and fears of the young who are inheriting a world made worse by poor (or no) ethical-based decision-making.

But this intergenerational anxiety can be overcome. As the author of the aforementioned article asserts,

The innate desire to be connected to life and living things, what E. O. Wilson calls “biophilia”(2) or what could be called ‘ecophilia’ is, in part, an innate desire to overcome solastalgia by finding an earthly ‘home’ in the connection with living things and life processes on this planet. The defeat of solastalgia and non-sustainability will require that all of our emotional, intellectual and practical efforts be redirected towards healing the rift that has occurred between ecosystem and human health, both broadly defined. In science, such a commitment might be manifest in the full redirection of scientific investment and effort to an ethically inspired and urgent practical response to the forces that are destroying ecosystem integrity and biodiversity.

So, in providing a practical solution to the anxieties of solastalgia, we would like all NPA readers to strike up a conversation with their family members including young adults, about which of the following opportunities for involvement in this phase of our project might strike a note. NPA has had several interns over the decades who have built up experiences that we are happy to recognise via references and statements of skills learnt. There is something in it for the environment, your mental wellbeing and perhaps your future career path...

If you are an adult that has benefited from the dedication of our land managers and NPA activists in enjoying the recreational and natural pleasures of our local national parks during Covid restrictions and other times, please consider what you might further contribute to the common good and to these wonderful local lands by putting your hand up for supporting our joint restoration project. Many others, like the bush helpers from the “Friends of Royal” have put much spare time into bush regeneration and other nature-based contributions in our local national parks, so who knows what further opportunities may arise as this local restoration project gains momentum. One person can’t achieve much, but together we can make a big difference.

In the first instance communicate by Email with me (Gary Schoer) on ssbnpansw@bigpond.com and we will take it from there. Indicate whether you wish to offer whatever general support is needed or list your preferred types of involvement from the following range of skills we mentioned in the grant application. If you are interested we can send you a copy of the grant application.

Targeted skill sets for Heathcote National Park Restoration project: Indicate those that interest you and state whether you have some of these skills or are desirous of learning. A phone number would be appreciated for texting and voice calls, though we will mainly initially communicate via Email.

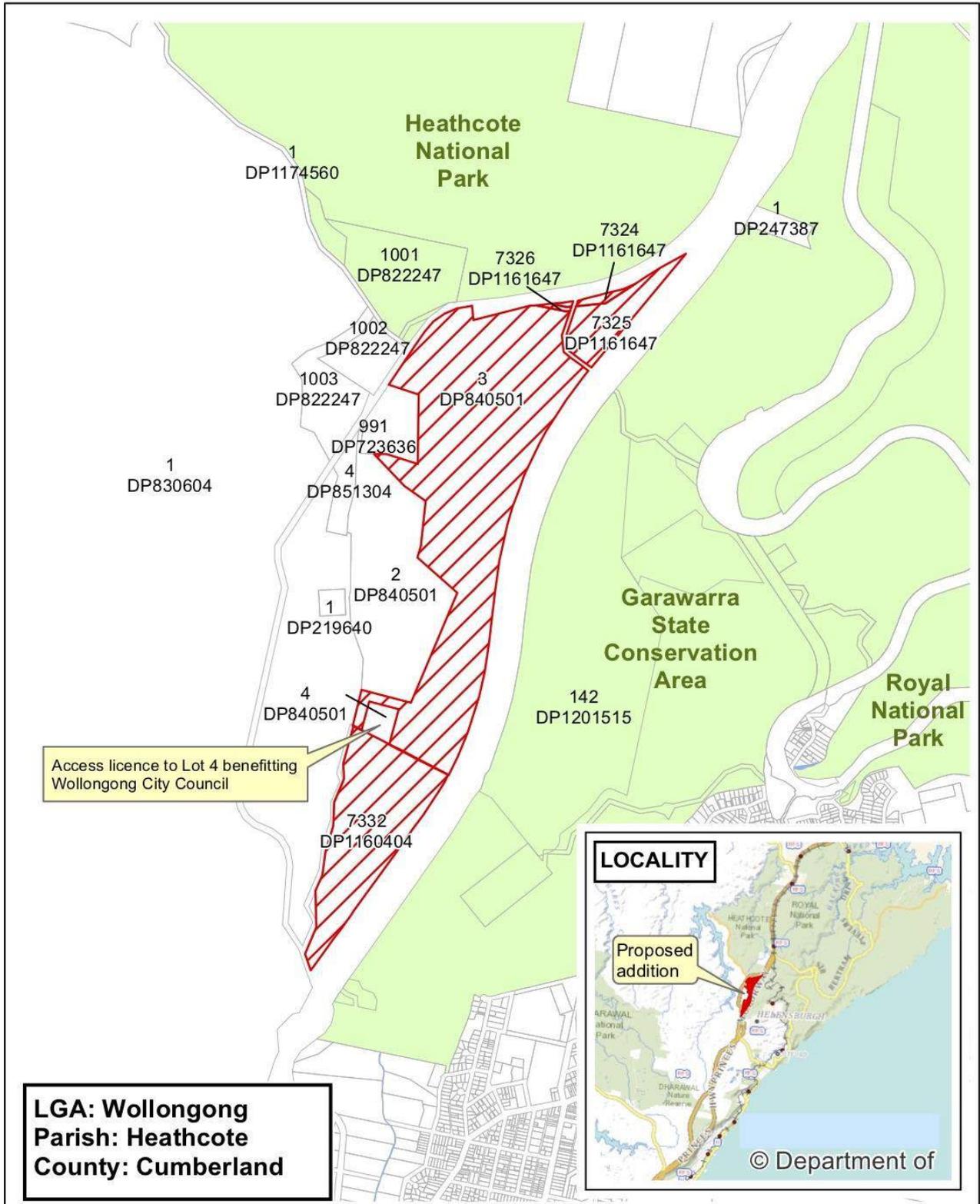
1. Social media communications (we baby boomers are only just developing these skills!)
2. Maintaining volunteer database

3. Project management in partnership with NPA Southern Sydney Branch executive who will maintain formal links with NPA NSW and relevant NPWS management and staff
4. GIS and mapping
5. Financial management of grant...with support from NPA's state financial officer.
6. Bird watching and identification
7. Native plant identification and assessing distribution and abundance including threatened species mainly supporting contractors
8. Animal trapping protocols and possible support for contractors
9. Photography (of diversity of plants and animals and recording of project progress)
10. Assistance with animal sensing camera arrays to record what is using the land
11. Weed identification
12. Bush regeneration
13. First aid
14. Tree and native shrub planting (further grants will be sought for large scale restorative works)
15. Researching scientific literature
16. General support as needed and as available
17. Other skills you have that you could offer to the project

If you are a young adult or tertiary student, please indicate if you would be interested in engaging in a formal Intern relationship with National Parks Association of NSW

References:

1. Higginbotham, N et al (2007) Solastalgia: The Distress Caused by Environmental Change
• Australasian Psychiatry 15 Suppl 1(1):S95-8
2. E.O. Wilson (1984), Biophilia, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts.



LGA: Wollongong
Parish: Heathcote
County: Cumberland



Legend

- Proposed addition
- NPWS Estate
- Cadastre Parcels

**Addition of land as
Heathcote National Park**

**Planning,
Industry &
Environment**

0 0.25 0.5 1
Kilometers

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Mountain bikes, and NPWS Management failures compromising the ecological values of the parks

With the uncanny strangeness of lockdown many people have found consolation in bush walks, escaping into nature, sharing beautiful photos on social media to cheer their friends. Covid has shone a bright light on the importance of our natural spaces. NPA members already have a full understanding of this value, especially the value of the Royal and Heathcote National Parks.

The grim part of this story starts now. As part of the NPA team responsible for preparing a response to the draft plan of management and carrying out additional research I've been shocked about what we have found out in relation to "key threatening processes" which impact on the ecological values of the Garawarra State Conservation area, the Royal and Heathcote National Parks.



Over the last 20 years an increasing number of illegal (and illicit) mountain bike trails have been carved through national parks and publicly owned bushland around the Southern Sydney. In the Garawarra, Royal, Heathcote many of these are off the beaten track, in areas the general public do not go. Trees are cut and broken, bush is cleared, rocks are drilled, and ramps are built. NPA members may have seen some of this damage, but likely not the extent of it. NPWS is aware, has done nothing to stop it, and have advised they have no plans to deal with the issue any time soon.

These trails traverse, fragment and cut through endangered ecological communities. Precious habitat is compromised. Endangered species, such as broad headed snakes have been run over by bikes travelling at speed. As tracks crisscross these areas the bush becomes increasingly degraded, the novelty wears off, and new, more 'exciting' illegal tracks are then carved through more untouched bush, often through quite rough terrain. Meanwhile the transmogrification of

these beautiful areas is promoted and encouraged on social media by people celebrating the damage.

Not all mountain bike riders cause damage. It is a legitimate sport, and there are 150km of legal trails in the parks, which include management trails and public access roads. But NPA is concerned that many of these activities do not comply with the purpose of a national park and is damaging the very values of the park. It is a management failure and it is not good enough to hide behind the forthcoming mountain bike strategy. NPA has reported on this abuse for many years and yet nothing has been done.

There is a paucity of signage regarding prohibited trails. Part of the reason for this is that signs which have been put up stating mountain bikes are prohibited have been vandalised and torn down. Meanwhile illegal tracks are publicised on social media and website.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that parts of the Garawarra, Royal and Heathcote National parks are effectively being turned into novelty adventure theme sports parks. Damage to endangered ecological communities, threatened and endangered species is listed as an offence under 2.4 of the Threatened Species Act, yet NPWS allows illegal trails to proliferate, and no action is being taken. The latest draft plan of management has instead proposed 'authorising' what is termed 'unauthorised' (as opposed to 'illegal') trails. The draft plan of management states some illegal trails should be closed – but there is no information how this will be enforced. Given the lack of enforcement to date it is difficult not to be bemused and sceptical about the proposed closures.



What is just as concerning is that the draft plan also re-classifies whole 'zones' in the park (which include endangered ecological communities), as suitable for "moderate to high intensity active visitor experience." NPA demands that NPWS manage the parks they have been tasked to protect for the values they hold.

Catherine Reynolds

While the Billy Boils

To Walk or Not to Walk

On Saturday many years ago, I arrived home in Sydney, having travelled by car all day to Taree and back. On both legs of the journey, it rained constantly and, on occasions, heavily. I was not surprised therefore to hear that the Sunday ahead would be a day of terrible wild weather. I was advised that I could expect gale force winds, heavy rains and potential local flooding. Indeed, DECCW spokesperson at the time, Bob Conroy, appeared on television and advised that those who were intending to go walking in our national park system ought to consider putting it off.

Mindful as I was that those who were booked in on the next day might be coming from some distance and would appreciate an early call I wondered what to do. A walk was just what a body wanted, after nine hours behind a steering wheel. I also felt somewhat obliged to take out the party who had opted to follow me into the bush. And yet there was the idea of due diligence! I had heard the message. It would be unsafe. What should I do? If I went ahead and if the weather was indeed terrible and someone in the party got into trouble, would I be condemned as reckless?

As it turned out, there was no such fury. Indeed, the Sunday that followed saw no rain in this part of Sydney and the winds were no more than a slight zephyr; not enough to even move the sheets on the line.

On this occasion I opted for safety. This was an easy day walk. Those who attended that walk may or may not want to go out in all weather. I cancelled. In retrospect it was the wrong decision. But 20/20 hind vision is always infallible.

The NPA advice back then read:

Whilst walks vary greatly in difficulty, dangers such as poor weather, can be encountered and cannot always be anticipated. Participants must also make sure that they are aware of the conditions likely to be encountered and have adequate experience for the activity which they intend to undertake. If in doubt, participants should speak with the leader for further information.

The Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs, NSW, states that walkers should:

- Carry clothing and equipment to suit the worst possible conditions you are likely to encounter.

The DECCW webpage added:

- Check weather forecasts and local park conditions and modify your plans accordingly.
- Take appropriate clothing and wear closed footwear – preferably boots or runners. Regardless of the season, always take a windproof/waterproof jacket, and clothing that can keep you warm when wet.
-
- Remember to tell your friend or relative when you do return or, if you are overdue, to phone them from the first phone box or police station you come to.

Now all this is sensible advice and I can understand the caution of all who issued dire warnings on Saturday night. And yet, deep down I am dissatisfied: not necessarily because I called off a

walk I so wanted to do; not so much because I had disappointed those who also had their plans dashed. Perhaps, most of all, I am disappointed because this might just be one more example of what has become a country, a society, where risk is to be avoided. If in doubt, don't do it!

I never followed that dictum in earlier years. I would plunge out there into the wilds, into all weather. I am not sure if I am any better for being safer now. We have made our playgrounds safe, beyond harm. Are we to also make our parks safe? Do we really want each cliff fenced off, each track signposted with a warning, each poor day of weather warned off? Or are we ready to just accept that we too must accept risk?



To those who were booked to come on that walk, I apologise for taking the safe option. We should have gone: and not just because the weather turned out fine. We should have gone anyway. We should have accepted that the weather is part of the experience. If it was wild, we should have been prepared.

So be warned.

Brian Everingham

There is no such thing as bad weather, only the wrong clothes⁴

⁴ A Norwegian Saying:

From an early age Norwegians soon learn how to dress appropriately. Grasping the concept of layering is just as important as learning to count. If Norwegians didn't go out in bad weather, in certain parts of the country they would never go out at all!

Ref: <https://www.lifeinnorway.net/no-bad-weather-only-bad-clothes/>

Our Natural World



The Black Bootlace Orchid
Erythrorchis cassythoides

This particular orchid is beginning to flower now. Look out for it. It is especially interesting. It is a leafless, climbing, mycotrophic herb that has thin, wiry, dark brown to blackish stems up to 5 m (20 ft) long and branching groups of flowers with between ten and thirty resupinate flowers. Now the interesting word within all that is “mycotrophic” and if any of you have walked on a walk with our very own David Noble you will know his love for and expertise with the fungal world! Mycotrophic hints at a very special link with fungi! Yes, this orchid has developed a symbiotic relationship deep down, underground, to enable it to thrive and develop without leaves!⁵ Yes, mycotrophic plants do not make their own food--instead, they survive off dead and decaying plant material with the help of fungi, usually a fungus in the genus *Armillaria*. The fungus attacks and digests the dead plant matter, and the mycotrophic plant absorbs the nutrients from the fungus. In effect, the mycotrophic plant is a parasite on the fungi!⁶

Our natural world truly is remarkable. There is so much more to discover. Even close to home!

⁵ If you want to learn more about this relationship go to “Root Anatomy of Nine Orchidaceae Species” by Virginia del Carmem Oliveira and Maria das Graças Sajo*

<https://www.scielo.br/j/babt/a/k8Pj6K5G45MKb5sGmFSnyFw/?lang=en&format=pdf>

⁶ <http://www.sarracenia.com/faq/faq5980.html>