

**INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LAND IN
NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Mr Brendan Mulhearn

Date received: 2/08/2012

Submission to the Inquiry into Management of public land in New South Wales

July 30th 2012

Dear Sir / Madam,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the management of public land in NSW. I am an avid user of the bush in NSW for the last 35 years. My passions are spending recreation time in the bush relaxing, camping, fishing and touring by vehicle with my young family. Over the last fifteen years I have witnessed a systematic lock up of the national park estate in NSW that continues unabated to this day. My local areas that I travel to and spend my valuable recreation time in are Barrington Tops National Park and State Forests, Dingo Tops, Yengo, Myall Lakes, Goulburn River National Park and the forests south of the Oxley highway like Mummel Gulf National Park and Riamuka State Forest. All of the National Parks in these areas now have significant no access areas with gates on trails and signs from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) advising that this public land is no longer accessible by the public. When it comes to an inquiry into management of public lands in NSW please investigate just how it came to be that there is permanent no public access to what is public land?

What I have experienced has also been experienced by the general public at large. It's not just me but many tens of thousands. Unfortunately whilst the general public have had enough of being locked out of their own land the environmental lobby groups are well organised. I am very concerned that when it comes to Wilderness area nominations for both new Wilderness and additions to Wilderness the same names just keep on popping up:

- The Colong Foundation for Wilderness
- The Wilderness Society
- The Total Environment Centre
- The National Parks Association of NSW
- The Nature Conservation Council of NSW

How is it that these groups have had such a disproportionate voice in NSW when it comes to public land management?

I am also very concerned about the ongoing conversion of State Forest areas to National Parks. Who is it that is behind these conversions? Is it to appease the minority groups mentioned above? I have noted many State Forest areas that have been converted to National Park. In turn the NPWS releases a plan of management (POM) and up go the gates or the area is subsequently declared wilderness. State Forests provide an essential community service allowing vast recreational opportunities which have a positive social impact on the community. Occupying approximately 13% of NSW the states National Parks should be providing the same level of recreational opportunity but this is far from the reality. It would require a cultural change within the NPWS management for this to change. The majority of forest recreation is sustainable with good management, education and community involvement

I have observed over the last twenty years what a devastating effect the NSW Wilderness Act has had on public access to National Parks once they are converted to Wilderness Areas. Often persons who had had been visiting an area all of their lives or for generations were suddenly locked out by a NPWS gate. I have first hand experience with the public submission process for responding to NPWS plans of management (POM) for National Parks. My experience is that the submission process is a farce and largely ignored by the NPWS. I have attached documents to my submission which is proof of my claim. The attached documents are my submission to a POM for the Mummel Gulf national park including letters received back from the minister. To this day the process defined by the Wilderness Act has not been followed and this is a classic example of many peoples experience when it comes to Wilderness lock ups and National Parks plans of management.

The effect I have observed from this type of poor management of public land is the loss of access to tracks and trails, to stunning areas that a family could go bush camping to and loss of access to our states history like huts and other historical areas. Trails become overgrown and in many cases they are former fire trails that have now been served useless in the event of a bushfire.

I have called National Parks offices over the years to complain about locked off trails. The responses have included

1. It's a wilderness area and that is good because it's an extra layer of protection
2. That track is steep so it has been closed for your safety. (even though the trail has been open for the last 40 years long before the Wilderness Act existed)
3. It is for park management only (even though the trail is now covered in large fallen trees and not maintained)

I ask that this inquiry into the Management of Public Lands consider that the definition of solitude and self reliant recreation in the Wilderness Act be expanded to include other types of recreation including, but not limited to, access by vehicle. I sincerely believe that this type of recreation can be well managed and sustainable in National Park and Wilderness areas with better land management practices.

My travels to the Victorian High Country have brought home just what a basket case NSW is when it comes to management of National Parks and Wilderness areas. Whilst the bush is accessible and well managed in Victoria one comes to an abrupt halt at a large locked gate when the trail they are travelling on crosses the border into NSW. Welcome to NSW.

Sincerely

Brendan Mulhearn

**Submission To: Ranger Mummel Gulf National Park,
Regional Advisory Committee
National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council
Minister Administering the NPW Act**

30th April 2010

Submission for the Draft Plan of Management for the Mummel Gulf National Park and State Conservation Area

My family and my extended family camp annually at Mummel Gulf National park. Our group comprises of 7 adults and 4 children. Specifically we camp in Mummel Gulf National Park to enjoy the park's remoteness from civilisation, sheer ruggedness and beauty and vehicle based bush touring opportunities on offer, in particular that provided by Dicks Hut Fire Trail and the River Rd. We also enjoy and value highly the camping opportunity at New Country Swamp, the closeness to nature, the solitude and bush walking for example the Mummel Gulf Walking Track near the New Country Swamp camping area.

We are very strongly opposed to the following aspects of the Mummel Gulf National Park plan of management (POM):

1. The closing to the public of Dicks Hut Fire Trail
2. The closing to the public of the River Rd
3. The plan of management for the park does not conserve cultural recreational values which is an identified aim of the plan of management on page 7 1st paragraph under the heading 3. Values.

It is vitally important that these trails be left open to the public and not gated and closed. There is no way that young families or the elderly can walk down the rugged Dicks Hut Fire Trail or the River Rd. I have a 3 year old and a 5 year old and my wife is pregnant with our 3rd child due late this year. I believe it is vitally important to expose my young children to nature from an early age to foster a close tie and long lasting respect for the Australian natural environment be it forest, plain, desert or ocean. These youngsters are our future generations who will be responsible for managing and caring for our natural environments. Indeed they may themselves one day be rangers or politicians guiding and protecting this states natural area. The Mummel Gulf National Park plan of management discriminates against my family and those members of the public who cannot bush walk in wilderness areas.

The declaration of wilderness for the good of the community and for future generations is an absolute travesty. There is no community in wilderness. Locking the public out of Dicks Hut Fire Trail and River Rd closes the heart of the Mummel Gulf National Park to all but able bodied bushwalkers. And this is a key point - it is the heart of the park that is truly so special. The Mummel valley is a key drawcard in our decision to travel to this park. The plan of management effectively closes the majority of the park whilst leaving open only the roads that skirt about the border of the park. Whilst it is commendable that the Pan Handle Fire Trail is open to the public under this plan of management this trail is in the northern spike of the park surrounded by private property and pales in comparison to the sheer beauty and remoteness of the Mummel River valley area accessed by Dicks Hut Fire Trail and the River Rd. Whilst these trails should of course be open to bush walking and park management it should not be for the exclusivity of this group. Bushwalkers are just one group of members of the public who recreate in Mummel Gulf National park and for that matter in any other natural environ in NSW.

As noted in the POM the camping area at New Country Swamp was established by the Tamworth 4wd Club for the benefit of club members and the general public. Considerable effort was expended by the club so that club members could camp in the Mummel and enjoy the Dicks Hut Fire Trail and the River Rd. Alarmingly these are exactly the two trails that the POM proposes be closed and hence contradicts the stated aim of the POM to conserve cultural recreational values. Closing these trails which have been established for over forty

years also disregards the history of the area including the red cedar timber and cattle grazing history of the Dicks Hut lease area.

The members of our group range in age from 2 to 70. The children are aged 3, 4, 5, and 7 years. How is this plan of management catering for us as community members in closing off the trails that we as community members so cherish? These trails and this park are also our history. These trails are our shared history from the early pioneering days of logging, grazing and lease grants. These trails whilst they may be longer used to haul timber or drive cattle can now be used as a highly valuable economic resource to promote tourism in NSW. The Mummel Gulf plan of management skims over the history of the lease situated on the Mummel River in the valley floor of the park. There also needs to be much greater recognition of our pioneering history. Who was this man Dick? When did he reside there? Where was the hut and house located exactly? The area (see photo) is now cleared and when one travels down Dicks Hut Fire Trail and stands on the former grounds of the lease there is an amazing feeling of ruggedness and remoteness looking back up at the surrounding escarpment. It is vital that those in the public that want to make the effort to travel into these remote locations can experience the solitude and power of this natural environment and ponder just how important and special the forest reserve system is - in this case the Mummel Gulf National Park.

Dicks Hut Fire Trail and the River Road are spectacular trails - as scenic as they come. With a descent from well over 1000 metres down to a few hundred metres the scenery is stunning, with flora changing from the upper reaches all the way down to the river in the Mummel Valley. The remoteness of the valley and the solitude are valued highly and this is why we choose to spend our self reliant recreation time touring by self reliant vehicle in the Mummel Gulf National Park on these trails.

On our last trip to Mummel Gulf in March 2010 our group combined spent many hundreds of dollars in Gloucester and at Nowendoc. This money was spread between several businesses including fuel at Nowendoc and also the Gloucester Caltex service station, food from the local takeaway, grocery items from the IGA and other businesses. The Mummel Gulf National Park plays a small but important part in regional economies in Gloucester, Barrington, Walcha, Nowendoc and Wauchope. This plan of management does not nurture this economic tie with our camping activities. If the trails in the heart of the park are closed then we will not return. Sadly greater vehicular based bush touring opportunities can be found in other states and with us on our travels interstate will go our money to be spent in other state economies. Tourism in National Parks including the Mummel Gulf national park is an important economic generator for regional areas. These regional areas have suffered significantly in the past with the reduction of logging operations. The state government should now be doing everything it can to promote tourism in the NSW reserve system and an important part of this includes keeping significant trails open within national park and wilderness areas.

It is often the response when one calls the NPWS or speaks to rangers that vehicle based touring opportunities exist in NSW State Forests. This is not an acceptable response when one considers that State Forest areas in NSW are being re-declared on an ongoing basis as National Parks or State Conservation Areas and in some cases subsequently Wilderness areas as is the case with Mummel Gulf NP. The State Forest estate is shrinking at a fast rate.

We also camp in Doyles River State Forest. It is with dismay that this is yet another area flagged by wilderness groups for future Wilderness declaration. We used to tour by vehicle in the Barrington tops but this is now by and large declared Wilderness and the trails locked off with gates and left to be grown over. When does this all stop? When all of the NSW reserve system is declared wilderness and locked off? With respect to Mummel Gulf it is on the southern end of the New England Tablelands. Take a look at a map of the Forests reserve of the New England tablelands and one can see that it is already largely declared wilderness inaccessible to all but the hardest bush walker and NPWS parks management vehicles.

The Mummel POM states Dicks Hut Fire Trail and the River Rd are fire trails. Once these trails are gated it becomes a great burden and cost to the public purse to keep these trails

clear of fallen trees. I know from experience that these trails become overgrown, often within a year, when gated as the NPWS does not have the resources or the time to keep the fire trails network clear. Keeping the trails open to the public ensures that the trails remain clear of fallen trees and readily accessible in times of fire, at no cost to the tax payer or to the resources of the NPWS. With respect to the conservation of the forest in times of fire fighting this is a great benefit.

The adults in our group work in the following fields: Information Technology, psychology, electrical engineering, teaching, midwifery, and the building trade. We are self reliant in the bush. We do not leave any evidence of our passing. We take all rubbish out. We tread lightly. We love the bush - the solitude, the closeness to nature, the flora the fauna, the scenery, the remoteness, the ever changing weather conditions from wintry mist to summer heat. We all work full time and choose to spend our precious weekends and work annual leave on camping trips where possible. Our recreation by vehicle is self reliant - we carry all of our equipment including camping gear, sustenance, medical kit, clothing and water in our vehicles. We have UHF and AM radios, mobile phones and when in very remote areas we carry a sat phone and personal epirob, maps and safety / recovery equipment. We do not carry generators or dogs.

I ask the Regional Advisory Committee, the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council and the Minister administering the NPW Act: Why are we as members of the community being locked out of our National Parks and Wilderness Areas? Which group has been so selfish as to ignore our history, our culture our connection with nature, and to declare large swathes of NSW as wilderness and lock the general public out of these areas by way of gating the historic roads and trails?

It is ironic that an area such as Mummel Gulf has a long history of logging and grazing, with trails through the park including River Rd and Dicks Hut Fire Trail. But in 2007 the area is totally suitable for wilderness declaration? After all of this activity since the late 1800's the bush is still conserved and it is still a pristine environment eligible for so called wilderness declaration. There is no reason why the Mummel POM has to result in the closure of these trails.

Recommendations:

1. That the POM be revised to allow access to Dicks Hut Fire Trail and the River Rd and in turn to comply with the POM's identified aim of conserving cultural recreational value.
2. That a National 4wd Tourist Trail registry be formed and maintained by the NSW State Government.
3. That the River Rd and Dicks Hut Fire Trail as trails of significance be added to this registry.
4. That other tracks and trails of significance from existing forests are considered and added to this registry regardless of management tenure - State Forests, National Parks, State Conservation Areas or Nature Reserves.

Appallingly the gates to lock off these trails have already been installed as at April 2010 even though the Mummel plan of management is still in draft and public comment does not close until May 24th. The fact that these gates have already been installed makes a mockery of the public exhibition and submission process.

Yours Sincerely

Brendan Mulhearn.

Appendix A. Pictures

Public lock out gate already installed (during so called public submission period) in April 2010 on Dicks Hut Fire Trail



Dicks Hut



Dicks Hut - date unknown



View of part of Dicks Hut Lease Area 2010



Mummel River crossing, River Rd 2010 – The track has caused no issues with the conservation of the forest in the last 40 years and also offers great community and social benefit. If locked it will be over grown within one year and future generations will miss out.



Ms Robyn Parker, MP
34 Church Street
MAITLAND NSW 2320

30th April 2011

Dear Robyn,

In May 2010 I sent a submission to the NPWS concerning the plan of management for the Mummel Gulf National Park. Approximately two weeks later I received a letter from the DECC NPWS Walcha area manager Roger Mills saying my submission to the plan of management had been received. This was the first and the only piece of correspondence received from DECC regarding the plan of management and what was meant to be a public submission process.

My submission objected to the closure of iconic and historic vehicle touring trails in the Mummel Gulf national park, in particular Dicks Hut fire trail. It was with great sadness that on a recent trip to the park in Easter 2011 that the Dicks Hut Fire Trail and many other trails have been gated, closed and locked denying access to the public of NSW. My family has camped in the area accessible by these trails for 20+ years.

The plan of management and submission process is intended to be a public submission process under the NPW Act. According to the act all submissions are referred to:

1. Regional Advisory Committee
2. National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council
3. Minister administering the NPW Act.

No correspondence was received from the committee, the council or the minister with the findings of their considerations with respect to my submission. Not even an update as to the status of my submission in the process or the outcomes and how they were arrived at. Indeed I have never heard from DECC again on the matter which I believe is an unacceptable situation that there is a public submission process that DECC is unaccountable for.

From my point of view, as a member of the public there was no public submission process and sadly I believe the decision to close these trails was made regardless of any community input. Robyn brand new gates to close these trails were installed PRIOR to the end of the exhibition period for the draft plan of management! This I believe is evidence that the whole process is and has always been a façade as of course DECC would not go to the expense of installing the gates if they weren't going to be used.

Robyn could I please request that:

1. A review is made of the Mummel Gulf National Park plan of management and the submission process supposedly carried out during 2010

2. Evidence by way of meeting minutes that my submission was indeed reviewed by the Regional Advisory Committee, the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council and the Minister administering the NPW Act at the time.
3. That the gates be removed until proper consultation is given to myself and those members of the community that went to the effort to place submissions to the draft POM

Robyn I live in the Maitland area and over the past 15 years I have been systematically locked out of NSW National Parks one after another. I recently travelled to Victoria to experience that states great National Parks where vehicle access is allowed and sensible management is in place to ensure sustainable access to vehicle trails. The Victorian government has a tourism campaign advertising iconic four wheel drive treks in Victoria. NSW National Parks covers approx 10% of the state and yet there is no equivalent great drive treks as the trails are all behind locked gates. This is a great loss to the NSW regional economy. I alone spent \$1000 in Victoria on my recent trip to the Victorian High Country not to mention another \$1000 spent by the companion I was traveling with. Surely there is an opportunity here for NSW regional development as there are so many significant National Parks in regional areas.

Sincerely

Brendan Mulhearn

**MUMMEL GULF NATIONAL PARK
AND
STATE CONSERVATION AREA

DRAFT PLAN OF MANAGEMENT**

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

Part of the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water

January, 2010

Acknowledgements

The NPWS acknowledges that these reserves are in the traditional country of the Biripai, Anaiwan and Thungutti/Dunghutti Aboriginal people.

This plan of management was prepared by staff of the Northern Tablelands Region of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), part of the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water.

Valuable information and comments were provided by NPWS specialists, the Regional Advisory Committee and members of the public.

For additional information or any inquiries about this park or this plan of management, contact the NPWS Walcha Area Office, 188W North Street Walcha or by telephone on 02 6777 4700.

Disclaimer: This publication is for discussion and comment only. Publication indicates the proposals are under consideration and are open for public discussion. Any statements made in this draft publication are made in good faith and do not render the NPWS liable for any loss or damage. Provisions in the final management plan may not be the same as those in this draft plan.

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DECCW 2010/29

INVITATION TO COMMENT

The *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (NPW Act) requires that a plan of management be prepared that outlines how an area will be managed by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

The procedures for the exhibition and adoption of plans of management are specified under Part 5 of the NPW Act and involve the following stages:

- The draft plan is placed on public exhibition for at least 90 days and any person may comment on it;
- The plan and submissions received on the plan are referred to the Regional Advisory Committee for consideration;
- The plan, submissions and any advice from the Regional Advisory Committee are referred to the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council for consideration;
- The plan, submissions and the recommendations of the Advisory Council are referred to the Minister administering the NPW Act, and a copy referred to the Regional Advisory Committee;
- After considering the submissions, the recommendations of the Advisory Council and any advice from the Regional Advisory Committee, the Minister may adopt the plan or may refer the plan back to the NPWS and Council for further consideration.

Members of the public, whether as individuals or as members of community interest groups, are invited to comment in writing on this plan of management.

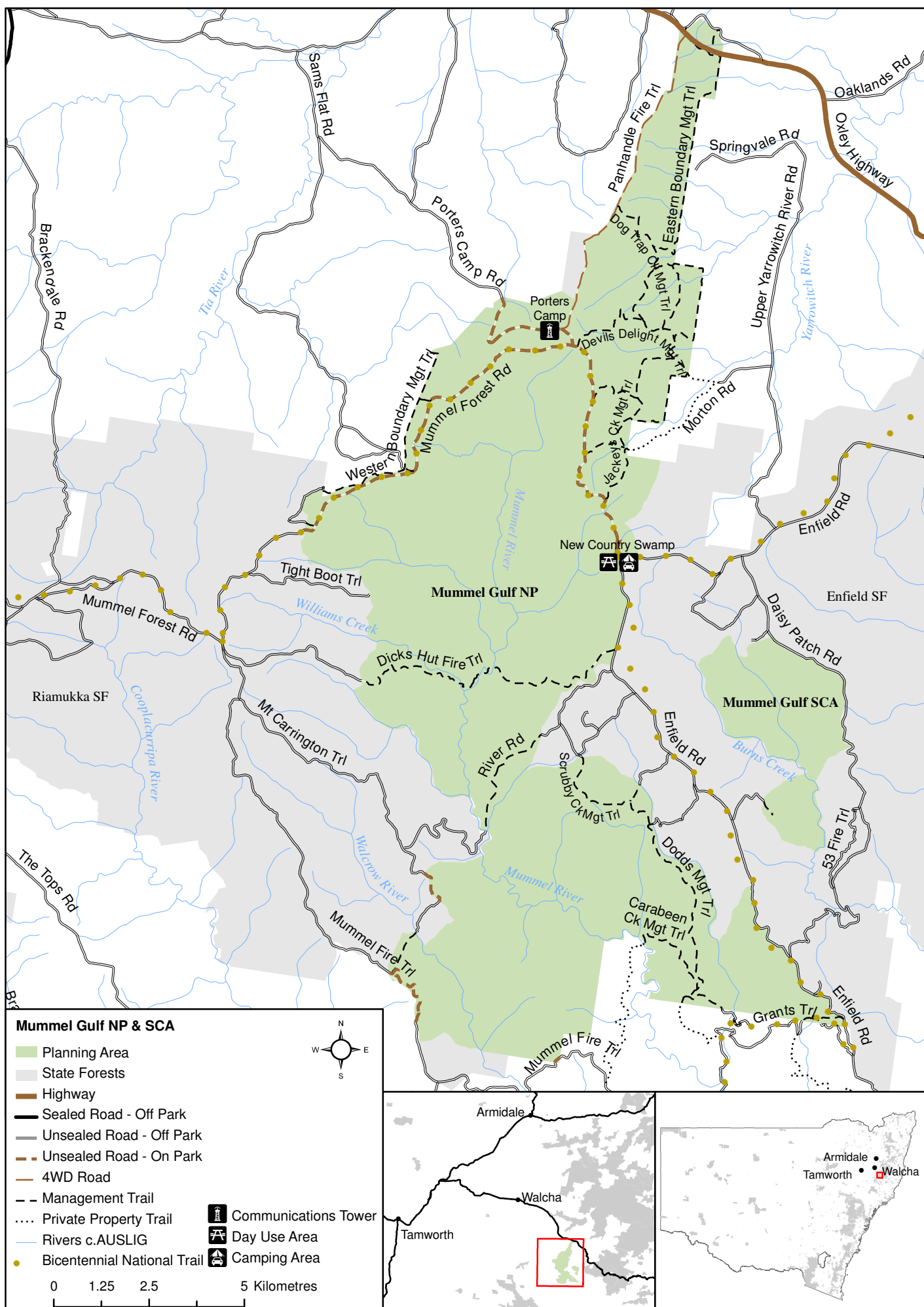
Comments should be forwarded to:

Ranger – Mummel Gulf NP
NPWS
188W North Street
Walcha NSW 2354

The closing date for comments on the plan is Monday 24th May 2010.

All submissions received by NPWS are a matter of public record and are available for public inspection upon request to NPWS. Your comments on this draft plan of management may contain information that is defined as “personal information” under the *NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998*. The submission of personal information with your comments is voluntary.

Map 1. Map of Mummel Gulf National Park and State Conservation Area



1. LOCATION, GAZETAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

Mummel Gulf National Park and Mummel Gulf State Conservation Area are located approximately 40 kilometres southeast of Walcha and 85 kilometres west of Wauchope (see Map 1).

Mummel Gulf National Park covers an area of 14,127 hectares. An original area of approximately 12,260 hectares was gazetted in January 1999 as part of the North East Regional Forest Agreement under the *Forest and National Park Estate Act 1999*, and an additional area of 1,788 hectares, known as the Dicks Hut Lease, was purchased in 2003 and gazetted as part of Mummel Gulf National Park in 2007.

Mummel Gulf State Conservation Area, formerly Daisy Patch Flora Reserve managed by Forests NSW, is 1,162 hectares in size and was gazetted in January 2003. Mummel Gulf National Park and State Conservation Area are herein referred to as “the planning area”. The planning area covers 15,289 hectares in total.

The planning area is located on the high eastern edge of the southern New England Tablelands and lies within the Walcha Shire. The reserves are primarily in the traditional country of the Biripai people but also adjoin the traditional country of Thungutti/Dunghutti, Anaiwan and Nganyaywana peoples. The planning area is within the area of the Biripai, Purfleet and Amaroo Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

Major land uses in the surrounding area include timber harvesting and cattle grazing. Tourism is growing in the region and the park and the surrounding State Forests are popular for scenic driving. The reserves are two of many in the area, with Cottan-Bimbang National Park, Werrikimbe National Park, and Nowendoc National Park located in close proximity and collectively they form part of a regional system of conservation reserves.

As well as the gazetted National Park and the State Conservation Area, the planning area includes lands which are vested in the Minister under Part 11 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (NPW Act). These lands include Mummel Forest Road, Porters Camp Road; sections of Panhandle Fire Trail and Mummel Fire Trail within Mummel Gulf National Park. These roads do not form part of the gazetted area of the planning area and were created by the *Forestry and National Parks Estate Act 1998* to meet access arrangements which existed immediately before the reservation of the national park and state conservation area (primarily for timber hauling and private property access).

2. MANAGEMENT CONTEXT

2.1 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

The management of national parks and state conservation areas in NSW is in the context of the legislative and policy framework, primarily the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (NPWS Act) and Regulation, *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* (TSC Act), the *Wilderness Act 1987* and the policies of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

Other legislation, international agreements and charters may also apply to management of the area. In particular, the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EPA Act) may require the assessment and mitigation of the environmental impacts of works proposed in this plan. The Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) also applies in relation to actions that may impact on threatened species listed under that Act.

A plan of management is a statutory document under the NPW Act. Once the Minister has adopted a plan, no operations may be undertaken within Mummel Gulf National Park and State Conservation Area except in accordance with this plan. This plan will also apply to any future additions to Mummel Gulf National Park and State Conservation Area. Should operations be proposed for Mummel Gulf National Park and State Conservation Area or any additions that are not in accordance with this plan, an amendment to this plan or a new plan will be prepared and exhibited for public comment.

2.2 MANAGEMENT PURPOSES AND PRINCIPLES

National parks are reserved under the NPW Act to protect and conserve areas containing outstanding or representative ecosystems, natural or cultural features or landscapes or phenomena that provide opportunities for public appreciation and inspiration and sustainable visitor use.

Under the Act (section 30E), national parks are managed to:

- conserve biodiversity, maintain ecosystem functions, protect geological and geomorphological features and natural phenomena and maintain natural landscapes;
- conserve places, objects, features and landscapes of cultural value;
- protect the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for present and future generations;
- promote public appreciation and understanding of the park's natural and cultural values;
- provide for sustainable visitor use and enjoyment that is compatible with conservation of natural and cultural values;
- provide for sustainable use (including adaptive reuse) of any buildings or structures or modified natural areas having regard to conservation of natural and cultural values; and
- provide for appropriate research and monitoring.

State conservation areas are reserved under the NPW Act to protect and conserve areas that contain significant or representative ecosystems, landforms or natural phenomena or places of cultural significance; that are capable of providing opportunities for sustainable visitor use and enjoyment, the sustainable use of buildings and structures, or research; and that are capable of providing opportunities for uses permitted under other provisions of the Act.

Under the Act (section 30G), state conservation areas are managed to:

- conserve biodiversity, maintain ecosystem functions, protect natural phenomena and maintain natural landscapes;
- conserve places, objects and features of cultural value;
- provide for the undertaking of uses permitted under other provisions of the NPW Act (including uses permitted under section 47J such as mineral exploration and mining), having regard to the conservation of the natural and cultural values of the state conservation area;
- provide for sustainable visitor use and enjoyment that is compatible with conservation of the area's natural and cultural values and with uses permitted in the area;
- provide for sustainable use (including adaptive reuse) of any buildings or structures or modified natural areas having regard to conservation of the area's natural and cultural values and with other uses permitted in the area; and
- provide for appropriate research and monitoring.

The NPW Act requires a review of the classification of state conservation areas every 5 years in consultation with the Minister administering the *Mining Act 1992* (Mining Act). The first review was occurred in 2008 with no change in classification for Mummel Gulf State Conservation Area. In the long term it is intended for Mummel Gulf State Conservation Area to be added to Mummel Gulf National Park, and so management will also be guided by the management principles national parks where possible.

An area of 11,736 hectares within Mummel Gulf National Park has been declared **wilderness** under the Wilderness Act (refer to Map 2). Wilderness areas are large natural areas of land that, together with their native plant and animal communities, are essentially unchanged by human activity. Wilderness areas provide opportunities for solitude and appropriate self-reliant recreation, however, protection of natural values has priority over providing for recreational use.

Management of natural and cultural heritage, of introduced species and of fire is carried out in wilderness areas in the same manner as other parts of the planning area, with special attention to minimising impacts on wilderness values.

In accordance with section 9 of the Wilderness Act, wilderness areas are managed according to the following management principles:

- to restore (if applicable) and to protect the unmodified state of the area and its plant and animal communities;
- to preserve the capacity of the area to evolve in the absence of significant human interference; and
- to provide opportunities for solitude and appropriate self-reliant recreation.

2.3 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Mummel Gulf National Park is considered to be of significance for the following reasons:

Biological Values:

- It contains two plant and seventeen animal species listed as vulnerable under the TSC Act.
- It contains extensive areas of old growth forest and is large enough to support space dependant top order predators such as the spotted-tailed quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus*), powerful owl (*Ninox strenua*), sooty owl (*Tyto tenebricosa*) and masked owl (*Tyto novaehollandiae*).
- The park supports key populations of the parma wallaby (*Macropus parma*) and common wombat (*Vombatus ursinus*).
- It is part of a large continuous tract of undisturbed-forested land including various areas managed by NPWS, Forests NSW, freehold and leasehold country extending along the edge of the eastern escarpment of the New England Tableland and plateau from Dorrigo to the upper Manning Valley.

Wilderness Values:

- An area of 11,736 hectares has been declared as the Mummel Gulf Wilderness Area.

Mummel Gulf State Conservation Area is considered to be of significance for the following reasons:

Biological Values:

- It protects large areas of rainforest in pristine condition and provides habitat for several plant species of conservation significance.
- Despite a long history of logging on the plateau and upper slopes, most of the vegetation is still in good condition with only the more accessible areas of open forest showing signs of disturbance.
- There are relatively few weeds present and very few management issues need addressing to ensure the long-term maintenance of its biodiversity values (Copeland, 2007).
- The reserve provides a valuable corridor for wildlife.

2.4 SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT DIRECTIONS

This plan aims to conserve the natural and cultural values of the planning area. Visitor opportunities that are compatible with and promote the understanding and enjoyment of these values are also a key emphasis. This will be achieved through the following:

- Protection of the old growth forest;
- Conservation of rare, threatened and/or isolated plant species and communities;
- Protection of threatened and isolated animal species and communities and their habitat;
- Conservation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage values, including relics of past logging and mining activities;

- Management of the planning area as part of the system of protected lands along the eastern escarpment, with particular emphasis on maintenance of the ecological relationships with other reserves; and
- Provision of opportunities for self-reliant recreation in a remote natural setting consistent with the protection of the areas natural and cultural values, including wilderness values.

Map 2. Declared Wilderness areas within Mummel Gulf National Park.

3. VALUES

The location, landforms and plant and animal communities of an area have determined how it has been used and valued. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people place values on natural areas, including aesthetic, social, spiritual and recreational values. These values may be attached to the landscape as a whole or to individual components, for example to plant and animal species used by Aboriginal people. This plan of management aims to conserve both natural and cultural values. For reasons of clarity and document usefulness, various aspects of natural heritage, cultural heritage, threats and on-going use are dealt with individually, but their inter-relationships are recognised.

3.1 GEOLOGY, LANDSCAPE AND HYDROLOGY

The planning area is a wild and rugged landscape of steep gorges and valleys, cliffs and ridges on the south-eastern edge of the escarpment of the New England Tableland, which falls away steeply into the Upper Manning and Macleay valleys.

The planning area encompasses a dramatic altitudinal gradient from tableland rim to valley floor, centred on the wild and rugged Mummel River, a significant tributary to the Manning River. High points along the north west boundary of the park form a feature known as the Panhandle and include Porters Camp (1449 metres above sea level) and Dennes Sugarloaf (1360 metres above sea level) which dominate the landscape. The planning area ranges in altitude from 450 metres above sea level where the Mummel River leaves the southern boundary of the national park, to 1449 metres at Porters Camp.

The Mummel River, which has formed a deep V-shaped gorge, or gulf, between high ridges, runs through the middle of the national park.



Figure 1. Part of the central catchment of the Mummel River.

The Mummel and Walcrow Rivers run into the Nowendoc River before flowing into the Manning River. Whilst, the state conservation area drains from Burns Creek into Rowleys River and then into the Manning River.

The area receives a moderate annual rainfall of 900 to 1200 millimetres. The wettest period is between January and March. Mean daily temperatures range from 24-28 degrees Celsius in the summer, to 10-14 degrees Celsius in winter. Frosts occur frequently between April and November. Snow occurs on higher areas during winter.

The geology of the area relates to Gondwana times showing evidence of drifting and rifting with shallow marine beds, felsic volcanic and low grade metamorphism. The area forms part of the New England Fold Belt and is characterised by highly metamorphosed Palaeozoic sedimentary rocks, intruded by granites of the Devonian age, as well as particulate covered Tertiary basalt flows. Rocks of the Devonian Sandon Association, sandstone, slates, schist, chert and jasper underlie the southern section of the park. The rest of the planning area is underlain by lithology of the Carboniferous Coffs Harbour Beds, sandstone, shales and schists. More recently, lava flowed over much of the landscape and covered some of the central part of the planning area. Volcanic rocks include Tertiary basalt, dolerite and bole (Packham, 1969).

3.2 NATIVE PLANTS

The most extensive forest ecosystems represented in the planning area are open sclerophyll forests, including substantial areas of undisturbed old-growth forest. Areas with a basalt substrate, generally occurring at higher altitudes in the north of the planning area, carry forests dominated by messmate (*Eucalyptus obliqua*), Northern Tablelands manna gum (*E. nobilis*) and brown barrel (*E. fastigata*). Snow gum (*E. pauciflora*), mountain gum (*E. dalrympleana*) and black sally (*E. stellulata*) occur in frost hollows on the basalt.

Open forests on soils derived from sedimentary rocks are dominated by a mixture of species including New England blackbutt (*E. campanulata*), silvertop stringybark (*E. laevopinea*), diehard stringybark (*E. cameronii*), Sydney blue gum (*E. saligna*), narrow-leaved peppermint (*E. radiata*), broad-leaved stringybark (*E. caliginosa*) and rough-barked apple (*Angophora floribunda*).

Warm temperate rainforests dominated by mixtures of coachwood (*Ceratopetalum apetalum*), corkwood (*Caldcuvia paniculosa*), sassafras (*Doryphora sassafras*), prickly ash (*Orites excelsa*) and crabapple (*Schizomeria ovata*) occupy the moister, fire-sheltered gullies particularly in the lower altitude sections of the planning area. On drier sites, brush bloodwood (*Baloghia inophylla*) and socketwood (*Daphnandra* sp.) are common dominants, while subtropical rainforest dominated by red cedar (*Toona ciliata*), yellow carabeen (*Sloanea woollsii*), black booyong (*Heritiera actinophylla*) and/or rosewood (*Dysoxylum fraserianum*) is present on some lower altitude sites, presumably in areas with richer soils (Copeland, 2007).

Two threatened flora species have been identified within the planning area (refer to Table 1).

Table 1: Threatened flora recorded within the planning area.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Legal Status
Elegant greenhood	<i>Pterostylis elegans</i>	Vulnerable*
Barrington Tops Ant Orchid	<i>Chiloglottis platyptera</i>	Vulnerable*

* Status under TSC Act

Source: NPWS ATLAS of NSW Wildlife

The mosaic of high elevation moist and dry open forest ecosystems supports varied flora. There is potential habitat for other significant plant species, including the vulnerable herb *Euphrasia ciliolata* and the endangered liana *Cynanchum elegans*.



Figure 2. A typical moist forest ecosystem of Mummel Gulf NP.

Under the TSC Act recovery plans may be prepared to identify actions and priorities for threatened species, populations or ecological communities. Additionally, a threatened species Priorities Action Statement (PAS) has been prepared which outlines broad strategies and detailed priority actions in NSW to promote the recovery of threatened species, populations and Endangered Ecological Communities and to manage key threatening processes. The PAS includes detailed actions for the Barrington Tops ant orchid and will be used to guide management of threatened species in the planning area.

3.3 NATIVE ANIMALS

The planning area is part of a major wildlife corridor that links Mummel Gulf through Enfield State Forest to Cottan–Bimbang National Park, Mount Seaview Nature Reserve, and Werrikimbe, Oxley Wild Rivers, Cunnawarra and New England

National Parks. This connectivity is strongest around the northern section of Mummel Gulf National Park and is particularly important for the ecological processes of vertebrate fauna of wet escarpment and eastern tablelands environments. Major landscape linkages from the planning area also extend west around the fringe of the tablelands through Riamukka State Forest and Ngulin Nature Reserve to Nowendoc and Tuggolo State Forests, Nowendoc National Park and Tuggolo Nature Reserve and then to Giro State Forest and Barakee National Park and Bretti Nature Reserve.

The planning area provides important habitat for a range of vertebrate fauna including several threatened species (see Table 2). It also potentially provides habitat for species recorded within 1 kilometre of the planning area (see Table 3) as well as containing areas of predicted habitat for the endangered Booroolong frog (*Litoria booroolongensis*), and the vulnerable New England tree frog (*Litoria subglandulosa*) and long-nosed potoroo (*Potorous tridactylus*). Of particular significance are the populations of three species of forest owls: the powerful owl (*Ninox strenua*), sooty owl (*Tyto tenebricosa*) and masked owl (*Tyto novaehollandiae*). These owls, as well as the yellow-bellied glider (*Petaurus australis*), have the potential to be important indicator species for the health of the planning area. They require large areas over which to range and represent faunal groups dependent on old-growth forest.

Table 2: Threatened fauna recorded within the planning area.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Legal Status
Brown treecreeper	<i>Climacteris picumnus</i>	Vulnerable*
Eastern bent-wing bat	<i>Miniopterus schreibersii oceanensis</i>	Vulnerable*
Eastern false pipistrelle	<i>Falsistrellus tasmaniensis</i>	Vulnerable*
Eastern freetail bat	<i>Mormopterus norfolkensis</i>	Vulnerable*
Glossy black cockatoo	<i>Calyptorhynchus lathami</i>	Vulnerable*
Golden-tipped bat	<i>Kerivoula papuensis</i>	Vulnerable*
Greater broad-nosed bat	<i>Scoteanax rueppellii</i>	Vulnerable*
Koala	<i>Phascolarctos cinereus</i>	Vulnerable*
Large-eared pied bat	<i>Chalinolobus dwyeri</i>	Vulnerable* [#]
Large footed Myotis	<i>Myotis macropus</i> (formerly <i>Myotis adversus</i>)	Vulnerable*
Masked owl	<i>Tyto novaehollandiae</i>	Vulnerable*
Parma wallaby	<i>Macropus parma</i>	Vulnerable*
Powerful owl	<i>Ninox strenua</i>	Vulnerable*
Sooty owl	<i>Tyto tenebricosa</i>	Vulnerable*
Spotted-tailed quoll	<i>Dasyurus maculatus</i>	Vulnerable* Endangered [#]
Stuttering barred frog	<i>Myxophyes balbus</i>	Vulnerable*
Yellow-bellied glider	<i>Petaurus australis</i>	Vulnerable*

* Status under TSC Act

[#] Status under the EPBC Act

Source: NPWS ATLAS of NSW Wildlife

Table 3: Endangered and vulnerable fauna recorded within 1 kilometre of the planning area.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Legal Status
Hastings River mouse	<i>Pseudomys oralis</i>	Endangered ^{*#}
Eastern pygmy possum	<i>Cercartetus nanus</i>	Vulnerable [*]
Sphagnum frog	<i>Phyllorhina sphagnicola</i>	Vulnerable [*]
Davies tree frog	<i>Litoria daviesae</i>	Vulnerable [*]
Brown tree creeper	<i>Climacteris picumnus</i>	Vulnerable [*]
Speckled warbler	<i>Pyrrholaemus sagittatus</i>	Vulnerable [*]
Hooded robin	<i>Melanodryas cucullata</i>	Vulnerable [*]
Diamond firetail	<i>Steganopleura guttatum</i>	Vulnerable [*]

* Status under TSC Act

Status under the EPBC Act

Source: NPWS ATLAS of NSW Wildlife

The Threatened Species PAS contains actions and strategies to promote the recovery of threatened fauna species and populations. In addition, a recovery plan has been prepared for the Hastings River mouse. Priority actions and recovery plans will be used to guide management of threatened species in the reserves.

The planning area is a core area for the conservation of the dingo (*Canis lupus dingo*) under Schedule 2 of the Wild Dog Control Order made under the *Rural Lands Protection Act 1998* (RLP Act). The RLP Act requires a wild dog management plan to be prepared for these areas to address the control of wild dogs and conservation of dingoes (further information in Section 4.1).

3.4 ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

Aboriginal communities have an association and connection to the land. The land and water biodiversity values within a landscape are central to Aboriginal spirituality and contribute to Aboriginal identity. Aboriginal communities associate natural resources with the use and enjoyment of foods and medicines, caring for the land, passing on cultural knowledge and strengthening social bonds. Aboriginal heritage and connection to nature are inseparable from each other and need to be managed in an integrated manner across the landscape.

The planning area is primarily in the traditional land of the Biripai people but borders the country of several other Aboriginal peoples including that of the Anaiwan to the west, the Nganyaywana people of the southern New England Tablelands and the Dunghutti of the hinterland valleys. The planning area is largely within the area covered by the Biripai, Purfleet and Amaroo Local Aboriginal Land Councils.

Evidence from studies on the New England Tablelands shows that Aboriginal groups have been in the area for at least 4,200 years; however, it is not specifically known how the planning area was utilised by Aboriginal people. A small number of artefacts have been located in the former Dicks Hut Lease area. The area would have provided a wide variety of fruits and edible plants as well as a range of fauna species.

While NPWS has legal responsibility for the protection of Aboriginal objects and places, the NPWS acknowledges the right of Aboriginal people to make decisions about their own heritage. It is NPWS policy to encourage the Aboriginal community to participate in the management of Aboriginal cultural heritage and NPWS actively consults with relevant persons for cultural heritage information and advice.

3.5 HISTORIC HERITAGE

John Oxley was the first explorer to venture through the area, in 1818, and wrote favourable reports about the region.

European settlement of the Tablelands began in the 1830s. By 1842 a road had been built using convict labour which linked Walcha and Port Macquarie, providing access to the forested country.

Cedar getters began logging of the general area in the 1860s, with several small mills established on the southern New England Tablelands. Many of the current roads and trails in the area follow original routes associated with logging operations that opened up the area. The area which is now Mummel Gulf National Park was previously part of Enfield State Forest. General purpose logging of rainforests accelerated from 1945 until it was phased out in 1974, with selective logging continuing until 1985. New Country Swamp (now just within the eastern boundary of the national park) was the focal point of a protest action against the logging of old growth forests in the area in 1992 by the North East Forest Alliance.

Cattle grazing greatly expanded after the area was opened up by initial logging efforts and by the early 1900s, cattle and sheep grazing were well established in the area.

The rich geology within the area led to mining for gold and manganese. The main mining periods were 1890-1900, the 1920s and 1930s during the Depression, and 1954-1966. The mines were not very successful and were generally small claims exploring surface veins and alluvial traces. There is anecdotal evidence that there may be old mine shafts and other evidence of mining activity in the planning area.

The Dicks Hut Lease area contains the remains of two huts and some artefacts of mining activity which require assessment to determine their heritage values and conservation requirements.

3.6 RECREATION, EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Visitor facilities provide opportunities for visitors to enjoy, appreciate and understand the value of our natural and cultural heritage. Visitor opportunities provided in national parks should be ecologically sustainable and contribute to visitor understanding and appreciation of the park.

Day use and camping facilities within the planning area are provided at New Country Swamp, including picnic tables, barbecues, a short walking track and a toilet. The facilities were initially constructed by the Tamworth 4WD Club with assistance from

Forests NSW but have since been upgraded by NPWS. Day use and camping facilities are also provided at nearby Mooraback within Werrikimbe National Park and at Apsley Falls and Tia Falls in Oxley Wild Rivers National Park.

Mummel Forest Road provides the main public vehicle access through the national park and is accessed off Enfield Road to the east and Brackendale Road to the west (see Map 1). Porters Camp Road also provides access to the national park. Daisy Patch Road provides access to the state conservation area.

The Bicentennial National Trail (BNT) passes just to the east of the national park along Enfield Road and then along Grants Trail through a small section of the southern part of the park. An alternate BNT route follows Mummel Forest Road. The BNT is available for trekkers using various forms of non-motorised transport including walkers, horse riders and cyclists. Management and use of the BNT occurs under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the BNT Board and NPWS. Management and use of the BNT within this park will be consistent with this plan of management and with general NPWS policies. Users of the BNT, including horse riders, are permitted to camp at New Country Swamp, which also caters for walkers and vehicle based campers (see Map 1). Horse riding in the planning area is restricted to the BNT. The impact of BNT use on the facilities at New Country Swamp will be monitored and ameliorated as necessary. (A small holding yard may be constructed in the vicinity of the existing facilities if necessary)

Commercial and non commercial 4WD and registered trail bike use occurs on a number of roads and trails in the planning area. Any commercial operators are required to hold a Commercial Recreation Operators Licence.

A large part of Mummel Gulf National Park (10,654 hectares) was declared as the Mummel Gulf Wilderness in March 2007 (see Map 2). No vehicle access is permitted in the wilderness but the area is available for bushwalking and remote walk-in camping.

The planning area is rugged and remote and provides opportunities for solitude and self-reliant recreation activities. The diversity of landscapes and forest types provide opportunities for bushwalking, nature observation and remote camping. Table 4 (following) identifies permissible recreation activities and their location within the planning area.

Table 4: Permissible recreation activities, their location and conditions of use.

Permitted recreational activities	Location/s where activity is permissible	Conditions applying
Picnicking	Facilities provided at New Country Swamp.	Picnicking permitted elsewhere provided no fires are lit.
Car-based camping	New Country Swamp.	Must be in the designated camping area and camping is limited to a maximum of 1 week.
Remote area camping	Throughout the planning area.	Not within 200 metres of an existing visitor facility or public road. No fires permitted.

		One night in one location only.
Scenic driving – 2WD vehicle	Mummel Forest Rd is the only road suitable for 2WD vehicles.	Access is from Enfield and Brackendale Roads. No public vehicle access permitted on management trails.
Scenic driving – 4WD vehicle	Mummel Forest Rd, Porters Camp Rd and Panhandle Fire Trail only.	No public vehicle access permitted on management trails. No public vehicle access permitted in declared Wilderness area.
Scenic driving – motor bikes	Permissible on Mummel Forest Rd, Porters Camp Rd and Panhandle Fire Trail - dry weather only.	Registered bikes only. No public vehicle access permitted on management trails. No public vehicle access in declared Wilderness area.
Quad bikes	Not permitted even with recreation registration.	N/A
Nature study, photography and/or cultural awareness	Throughout the area.	Commercial activities must be licensed.
Horse riding	Bicentennial National Trail only. Camping with horses and other pack animals only permitted at New Country Swamp.	Horse riding and camping with horses and other pack animals must be conducted in accordance with the NPWS Horse Riding Policy.
Cycling	All unsealed roads and management trails.	Must be on designated roads and management trails – not permitted on walking tracks.
Remote area bushwalking	Throughout the area.	No camping within 200 metres of an existing visitor facility or public road. No fires permitted. One night in any one location only
Fossicking	Not permitted.	N/A
Car Rallies	Transport stages only on Mummel Forest Rd.	Must have consent under the NPW Act, and additional conditions will apply.
Adventure activities – abseiling, rock climbing etc.	Permissible subject to NPWS approval.	Must have consent under the NPW Act, and additional conditions will apply.
Group activities (including military)	Permissible subject to NPWS approval.	Must have consent under the NPW Act, and additional conditions will apply.
Commercial recreation	Permissible subject to NPWS approval and a commercial licence.	Must have a licence under the NPW Act and additional conditions will apply.
Other activities not listed	Permissible subject to NPWS approval.	May be required to have consent under NPW Act.



Figure 3. View from New Country Swamp Day Use and Camping Area.

4. ISSUES

4.1 INTRODUCED PLANTS AND ANIMALS

The planning area is generally free of major weed infestations; however, small scattered areas of blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*) and crofton weed (*Ageratina adenophora*) are known to occur (NPWS, 2007). Blackberry is of concern because of its ability to invade intact native vegetation in addition to colonising disturbed areas such as roadsides and former logging areas. Annual control programs for blackberry and other weeds are conducted.

Coolatai grass (*Hyparrhenia hirta*) was discovered along the Oxley Highway in 2004. This weed has the potential to invade undisturbed forest areas and to dramatically affect biodiversity values. St Johns wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), recorded along the Oxley Highway, and nodding thistle have also been recorded in the planning area, however there are no substantial infestations in either the national park or state conservation area (NPWS, 2007).

Phytophthora cinnamomi (root rot fungus – a slime mould) was confirmed at one location in the planning area during 2004, along a section of Dog Trap Creek Management Trail. The planning area does not fall into one of the climatic zones listed in the Threat Abatement Plan for *Phytophthora cinnamomi* as being an area of

most concern. It does fall into a climatic zone where localised damage might occur on disturbed sites. There is concern about *P. cinnamomi* in other nearby areas where it has been recorded, such as in Werrikimbe and Barrington Tops National Parks.

There are small areas within the planning area where Bell Miner Associated Dieback appears to be affecting some eucalypt species. Lantana, which is usually associated with Bell Miner Associated Dieback, is not present in these locations.

Wild pigs (*Sus scrofa*), wild dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*), dingoes (*Canis lupus dingo*) and their hybrids have been recorded in low numbers throughout the planning area. The impact of these species can vary seasonally.

Wild dogs, including dingoes, have been declared as pest animals under the RLP Act throughout NSW. Hence, the NPWS has a statutory obligation to control wild dogs on its estate. Under the RLP Act, however, public lands which are identified as significant habitat for dingoes in Schedule 2 of the Wild Dog Control Order will be managed with the dual objectives of managing wild dogs while at the same time conserving dingoes. Mummel Gulf National Park is a Schedule 2 area, requiring public land managers, such as the NPWS, to assist in the preparation of a local wild dog management plan in accordance with the RLP Act. These plans are to identify methods for the control of wild dogs and the conservation of dingoes. A wild dog management plan covering the planning area has been approved by the Yarrowitch Wild Dog Association.

Deer (*Cervidae* family), feral cats (*Felis catus*), feral cattle (*Bos taurus*), rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), hares (*Lepus capensis*) and foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) are also present in the planning area but their extent is unknown (NPWS, 2007). Fox and feral cat predation are listed as key threatening processes to Australian wildlife under the NSW TSC Act and the Federal Government's EPBC Act.

The control of all pest species within the reserve is undertaken in accordance with the Northern Tablelands Regional Pest Management Strategy (NPWS, 2007). This strategy identifies appropriate control mechanisms and management strategies for all pest species throughout the Region. In particular, it identifies ground trapping for pig control and ground baiting for wild dog control as the most effective feral animal mechanisms for these reserves.

4.2 FIRE

The NPWS recognises that fire is a natural feature of many environments and is essential to the survival of some plant communities and animal species. The frequency of fire, its intensity, and the season in which it occurs are collectively known as the fire regime and are some of the major factors influencing the distribution of vegetation communities and fauna species. An inappropriate fire regime may contribute to a significant loss of biodiversity, and high frequency fires have been listed as a key threatening process under the TSC Act. Any fire has the potential to damage cultural features and infrastructure in the park and may pose a threat to neighbouring properties.

The primary fire management objectives of the NPWS are to protect life and property and community assets from the adverse impacts of fire, whilst managing fire regimes to maintain and protect biodiversity and cultural heritage (NPWS, 2006).

The NPWS has little information on the fire history of the area prior to its gazettal. It appears that the southern sections of the planning area have been subject to frequent fires burning from neighbouring properties. The Panhandle section of the national park has been burnt for hazard reduction purposes on an infrequent basis. The core area does not appear to have experienced many fires. Little is known about the impact of fire on the species of plants and animals found in the planning area.

A separate (map-based) fire management strategy has been prepared for the planning area (NPWS, 2007). The fire management strategy outlines the recent fire history of the planning area, key assets within and adjoining the planning area including sites of natural and cultural heritage value, fire management zones which may include asset protection zones, and fire control advantages such as management trails and water supply points. Hazard reduction programs, ecological burning proposals and fire trail works are submitted annually to the New England Zone Bush Fire Management Committee.

5. ISOLATION AND FRAGMENTATION

The area surrounding the planning area, particularly to the north-west, has been extensively cleared which has resulted in a high loss of biodiversity and fragmentation of habitat in the region. Long term conservation of biodiversity depends upon the protection, enhancement and connection of remaining habitat across the landscape, incorporating vegetation remnants on both public and private lands. Nearby vegetated areas contribute to the habitat values of the planning area and provide ecological corridors to other vegetated areas. Maintaining the integrity of the remaining habitat within the planning area and, where possible, linking this to adjacent areas of vegetation to facilitate wildlife corridors is important in ensuring long term viability of the area's biological values.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change has been listed as a key threatening process under the TSC Act. Projections of future changes in climate for NSW include higher temperatures, increasing sea levels and water temperatures, elevated CO₂, more intense but possibly reduced annual average rainfall, increased temperature extremes and higher evaporative demand. These changes are likely to lead to greater intensity and frequency of fires, more severe droughts, reduced river runoff and water availability, regional flooding, increased erosion and ocean acidification.

It has been suggested that the greatest detrimental impact will be on the cover and diversity of woody species. The warm to cool temperate sclerophyll forests and woodlands typical of the planning area will see an increased fire risk resulting from

more droughts with a decline in shrub species and potentially an increase in invasive grasses (Bradstock, 2007).

Climate change may significantly affect biodiversity by changing population size and distribution of species, modifying species composition, and altering the geographical extent of habitats and ecosystems. The potential impact of climate change is difficult to assess since it depends on the compounding effects of other pressures, particularly barriers to migration and pressure from weeds and feral animals. Species most at risk are those unable to migrate or adapt, particularly those with small population sizes or with slow growth rates.

Programs to reduce pressures arising from such threats, such as habitat fragmentation, invasive species, bushfires, pollution and urban expansion will help reduce the severity of the effects of climate change.

7. MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS AND OTHER USES

7.1 GENERAL MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS

There are four Ministerial roads in the planning area that provide access to adjoining state forests and private property. The Ministerial roads are: Mummel Forest Road, Porters Camp Road; sections of Panhandle Fire Trail and Mummel Fire Trail. These roads were vested in the Minister administering the NPW Act to ensure the continuation of access arrangements, which existed immediately before the gazettal of the national park. While these roads do not form part of the gazetted park, the management of these roads is subject to the provisions of this plan.

In addition to the Ministerial roads, there is a network of management trails within the planning area (see Map 1). The primary purpose of the management trail system is to provide access for fire and pest species management and research activities. These management trails are for use by authorised vehicles only. There are also several boundary access trails which will be retained for management purposes only (see Map 1). There are no roads or management trails within the state conservation area, however Daisy Patch Road provides access along the northern boundary of the state conservation area.

As a result of past forestry management there are a large number of “snig” trails within the planning area, many of which are partially or completely overgrown with vegetation and fallen timber. These trails are not required for management purposes and have been closed and allowed to revegetate.

There are four quarries in the planning area which existed prior to gazettal of the park, located on the Oxley Highway, Mummel Forest Road, Devils Delight Management Trail and Jackeys Creek Management Trail. These quarries will be used for the essential maintenance of park roads, management trails and Ministerial roads. All quarries will be managed according to the NPWS Quarry Safety Management System and relevant policies and guidelines.

The following table lists the roads and trails in the planning area which will be retained and identifies management responsibility where the road or trail is not managed by NPWS. It also identifies which roads and trails are available for public use, which management trails are for management use only and which management trails can be used for horse riding.

Table 5: Vehicle Access within the Planning Area

NAME OF ROAD/ TRAIL	PUBLIC 2WD	PUBLIC 4WD	MGT ONLY ACCESS ONLY	HORSE RIDING	COMMENTS
Dicks Hut Fire Trail	N	N	Y	N	Section of Ministerial road within park to be gazetted as park. The section of this road within the park is in the declared Wilderness area and is closed to public vehicle access.
Grants Trail	N	N	N	Y	Private road - part of the Bicentennial National Trail. Only small section in park.
Mummel Fire Trail	N	Y	N	N	Ministerial road. Road mostly in State Forest and private property. Only a small section is on park.
Mummel Forest Rd	Y	Y	N	Y	Main public access through park. Alternative route for the BNT. Ministerial road.
Panhandle Fire Trail	N	Y	N	N	Also part Ministerial road to provide access to small section of Enfield State Forest.
Porters Camp Rd	N	Y	N	N	Ministerial road.
River Rd	N	N	Y	N	Management use only on section in park. Western end of trail is in State Forest. The section of road within the declared Wilderness area is closed for vehicle public access.
All other trails shown on Map 1 as being "Management Trails"	N	N	Y	N	Are to be used for management purposes only.
Any other closed or partially closed trails and snig tracks	N	N	N	N	Treated as closed. May be temporarily reopened for fire management purposes and rehabilitated after use.

A number of the trails in Table 5 run partly on State Forest estate. This plan does not make decisions regarding future use or appropriate recreational use of those trails or sections of trail on State Forest.

Some trails enter private property. Permission from landholders is required before accessing private lands or accessing the planning area through those lands.

7.2 MINING AND MINERAL EXPLORATION

The last known mining in the planning area occurred during the early 1970s. There are three inactive areas of mining activity but no current mining leases or exploration licences in the planning area.

The Department of Primary Industries (DPI Minerals) is the lead authority for mining, mineral exploration and mine site rehabilitation. DPI (Minerals) is required under the EPA Act to undertake environmental assessments for mining and exploration activities in all state conservation areas. The existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between NPWS and DPI (Minerals) describes the management and consultative arrangements associated with exploration and mining in state conservation areas.

Exploration licences and assessment leases may be granted within state conservation areas without the concurrence of the Minister administering the NPW Act, but approval must be obtained before any rights under that lease or licence can be exercised. Likewise, the concurrence of the Minister administering the NPW Act must be obtained before any mining lease is issued. In the case of exploration licences and other prospecting titles, an access agreement under the Mining Act will also be required between the titleholder and the NPWS in order for the titleholder to conduct prospecting operations within a state conservation area.

7.3 COMMUNICATIONS TOWER & TRANSMISSION LINES

There are three telecommunication towers and associated facilities at Porters Camp in Mummel Gulf National Park. These uses predate gazettal of the park. The Airservices Australia facilities and the Country Energy facilities were subject to Occupation Permits previously granted by the Forestry Commission of NSW. These occupancies have now been formalised with licences under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974. There is no occupancy agreement in place for the Telstra tower and facilities. Access to Porters Camp is via Porters Camp Road (refer to Map1).

A Country Energy transmission line runs from east to west through the section of the park to the north of the Oxley Highway. A transmission line also provides power to the facilities at Porters Camp. These transmission lines are subject to an Occupation Permit previously granted by the Forestry Commission of NSW. This permit is now administered by the DECCW on DECCW managed lands.

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9. IMPLEMENTATION

Current Situation	Desired Outcomes	Management Response	Priority*
<p>9.1 On-Park Ecological Conservation</p> <p>Soil erosion hazard is a minor problem on steep slopes and disturbed areas such as old log dumps, mine sites, gravel pits, quarries, roads and trails.</p> <p>The Planning Area is covered by the Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Management Plan.</p> <p>The planning area contains habitat and potential habitat for a number of threatened plant and animal species.</p> <p>A Priorities Action Statement has been prepared that identifies strategies and actions to promote the recovery of threatened species, populations and ecological communities and manage key threatening processes.</p> <p>The planning area has been identified as being significant core habitat for dingoes.</p> <p>The area demonstrates values that warrant investigation for its nomination for World Heritage listing as part of Gondwana Rainforests World Heritage Area.</p> <p>Climate change has been identified as a key threatening process under the TSC Act.</p>	<p>Soil erosion is minimised.</p> <p>Water quality and health of streams in the planning area is maintained or improved.</p> <p>Native plant and animal species and communities are conserved.</p> <p>Biodiversity is maintained and threatened species in the park are not further threatened.</p> <p>Values of the park are protected, conserved, preserved and where necessary rehabilitated.</p> <p>Core dingo populations are conserved while</p>	<p>9.1.1. Implement relevant actions in the Threatened Species Priorities Action Statement and recovery plans for threatened species in the planning area.</p> <p>9.1.2. Continue existing fire, pest and weed management programs to protect wilderness values and increase the planning area's ability to cope with future disturbances, including climate change, and encourage research into appropriate indicators to monitor the effects of climate change.</p> <p>9.1.3. Undertake or encourage surveys and DNA sampling of dingo populations to determine the degree of hybridisation of dingoes in the planning area.</p> <p>9.1.4. Assist the Livestock Health and Pest Authority and Wild Dog Associations in the implementation of the wild dog management plan for the control of wild dogs and the conservation of dingoes in the planning area (refer to Section 4.1).</p> <p>9.1.5. Investigate nomination for addition to the Gondwana Rainforests World Heritage Area.</p> <p>9.1.6. Encourage and/or facilitate appropriate research that allows identification and documentation of the values of the park, including threatened plant and animal species, species that have been poorly</p>	<p>High Ongoing</p> <p>High Ongoing</p> <p>Medium</p> <p>Medium Ongoing</p> <p>Medium Ongoing</p> <p>Medium Ongoing</p>

Current Situation	Desired Outcomes	Management Response	Priority*
<p>The Wilderness area includes a small area of cleared and disturbed country.</p>	<p>ensuring wild dogs are controlled.</p> <p>The effects of climate change on natural systems are reduced.</p> <p>Wilderness areas restored where necessary and are managed to preserve the capacity of the area to evolve in the absence of significant human interference.</p>	<p>represented in previous surveys such as frogs, and potential World Heritage values.</p> <p>9.1.7. Work with Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority to implement the Hunter Central Rivers Catchment Management Plan.</p> <p>9.1.8. Close former log dumps and trails no longer required for management and allow to naturally regenerate.</p> <p>9.1.9. Monitor natural regeneration of disturbed areas within the declared wilderness area. Implement revegetation works if required.</p>	<p>Medium Ongoing</p> <p>Low</p> <p>Low Ongoing</p>
<p>9.2 Cultural Heritage</p> <p>The planning area is part of a landscape associated with the Biripai, Anaiwan, Nganyaywana and Dunghutti Aboriginal people.</p> <p>A small number of Aboriginal sites have been recorded in the planning area.</p> <p>The planning area has a history of mining, grazing and timber harvesting.</p> <p>Knowledge about Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural heritage values within the planning area is limited. There have been only minimal systematic surveys undertaken.</p>	<p>Cultural heritage sites are identified, conserved, recorded and managed in accordance with their significance.</p> <p>Aboriginal heritage values of the planning area are managed in partnership with the Aboriginal community.</p> <p>Understanding of the cultural values of the park is improved.</p>	<p>9.2.1. Consult with relevant Aboriginal communities, Elders, individuals and land councils about management of Aboriginal sites, places and values, including the recorded Aboriginal artefact scatter.</p> <p>9.2.2. Undertake or encourage cultural heritage surveys (Aboriginal and historic) within the planning area. Enter identified sites into the appropriate heritage register.</p> <p>9.2.3. Undertake an assessment of the huts and mining artefacts within the Dicks Hut area, and reported mining remnants elsewhere, to determine their cultural heritage significance and appropriate management.</p> <p>9.2.4. Provide information on the cultural heritage of the area at New Country Swamp.</p>	<p>High Ongoing</p> <p>Medium</p> <p>Low</p> <p>Medium</p>

Current Situation	Desired Outcomes	Management Response	Priority*
<p>9.3 Visitor Use and Services</p> <p>Public vehicle access to the planning area is provided by the Oxley Highway and through State Forest via Mummel Forest Rd, Daisy Patch Rd, Enfield Rd, Walcrow Rd and Porters Camp Rd.</p> <p>The park receives a low level of visitor use. Visitors are predominantly involved with self-reliant recreational activities such as camping and bushwalking. Much of the national park is declared wilderness.</p> <p>Day use and camping facilities and a walking track are provided at New Country Swamp.</p> <p>The Bicentennial National Trail (BNT) traverses the park (see Map 1).</p> <p>Commercial and non-commercial 4WD and registered trail bike use occurs within the park and adjoining State Forest.</p>	<p>Visitor use is appropriate and ecologically sustainable.</p> <p>Negative impacts of visitors on park values are stable or diminishing.</p> <p>Visitor use and services encourage appreciation of the park's values.</p> <p>Minimal visitor facilities are provided in the park.</p>	<p>9.3.1. Maintain public vehicle access within the planning area as identified in Map 1 and Table 5. Public vehicle access will not be permitted on management trails.</p> <p>9.3.2. Permit recreation activities as identified in Table 4.</p> <p>9.3.3. Maintain existing day use and camping facilities, at New Country Swamp.</p> <p>9.3.4. Provide minimal impact use information at New Country Swamp as well as information on natural and cultural values, fire, and pest management.</p> <p>9.3.6. Allow horse riding along the BNT only. Allow overnight camping at New Country Swamp only. All horses and other pack animals will be required to be yarded, fed and watered away from designated camp sites.</p> <p>9.3.7. Undertake monitoring of visitor use levels and impacts, including at New Country Swamp. Implement actions if necessary to control impacts such as provide small yard for BNT pack animals near or adjacent to the existing New Country Swamp camping area.</p>	<p>High Ongoing</p> <p>High Ongoing</p> <p>High Ongoing</p> <p>Medium Ongoing</p> <p>Medium Ongoing</p> <p>Medium Ongoing</p>
<p>9.4 Weeds and Pest Animals</p> <p>Introduced plant species recorded in the</p>	<p>Introduced plants and</p>	<p>9.4.1. Manage introduced pest species in accordance</p>	<p>High</p>

Current Situation	Desired Outcomes	Management Response	Priority*
<p>planning area include crofton weed, blackberry, coolatai grass, St Johns wort and nodding thistle</p> <p>Seasonal weed control programs are conducted within the planning area.</p> <p>Feral cats, wild dogs and pigs are known to occur within the planning area. Other feral animals, including deer and cattle may be present.</p> <p>Trapping, poisoning and or shooting currently controls wild pigs.</p> <p>The national park is identified as significant core habitat for dingo management. Wild dogs are controlled along the boundaries of adjoining properties in conjunction with park neighbours as part of an annual ground-baiting program.</p> <p><i>P. cinnamomi</i> has been recorded within the planning area.</p>	<p>animals are controlled and where possible eliminated.</p> <p>Negative impacts of weeds on park values are stable or diminishing.</p> <p>Negative impacts of pest animals on park values are stable or diminishing.</p> <p>Pest control programs are undertaken where appropriate in consultation with neighbours.</p>	<p>with the Northern Tablelands Regional Pest Management Strategy, in association with neighbours and other control authorities.</p> <p>9.4.2. Monitor environments currently free of introduced species and treat any outbreaks.</p> <p>9.4.3. Encourage the construction and maintenance of boundary fences. Fencing assistance may be provided in accordance with NPWS policy.</p> <p>9.4.4. Undertake control of wild dogs in strategic locations along the planning area perimeter utilising ground control baiting techniques in accordance with the Wild Dog Management Plan. Cooperate with Yarrowitch Wild Dog Association in localised control programs. Encourage neighbouring landholders to erect dog proof fencing.</p> <p>9.4.5. Restrict or prohibit access in areas found to be infected with <i>Phytophthora cinnamomi</i> and implement management protocols for plant and equipment. Monitor affected areas and take additional action as required</p> <p>9.4.6. Undertake surveys to determine the extent of introduced species in the planning area including deer, cats, goats, cattle and foxes.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>High Ongoing</p> <p>High Ongoing</p> <p>High Ongoing</p> <p>High Ongoing</p> <p>Medium Ongoing</p>
<p>9.5 Fire Management</p> <p>Fire is a natural feature of many environments but inappropriate fire regimes can lead to loss of particular plant and animal communities. High frequency fires have been listed as a key threatening process under the TSC Act.</p>	<p>Life, property and natural and cultural values are protected from bushfire.</p>	<p>9.5.1. Implement the Reserve Fire Management Strategy including undertaking prescribed burning as necessary and as opportunities arise.</p>	<p>High Ongoing</p> <p>High</p>

Current Situation	Desired Outcomes	Management Response	Priority*
<p>A Reserve Fire Management Strategy has been prepared for the planning area.</p> <p>The planning area contains fire sensitive rainforest and old growth forest communities. Further information on the effects of fire on native species and communities and appropriate fire regimes is required.</p> <p>Fire and fire related activities may damage cultural features in and adjoining the planning area.</p>	<p>Fire regimes are appropriate for conservation of plant and animal species and communities.</p> <p>Negative impacts of fire on natural and cultural heritage values are stable or diminishing.</p>	<p>9.5.2. Participate in the New England Bush Fire Management Committee. Maintain coordination and cooperation with Rural Fire Service, Forests NSW and neighbours regarding fuel management, fire suppression and notification procedures.</p> <p>9.5.3. Collate information on fire history including frequency and identified fire paths within and adjoining the park and use of prescribed burning operations on neighbouring properties.</p> <p>9.5.4. Encourage further research into the ecological affects of fire in the park and appropriate burning regime.</p> <p>9.5.5. Undertake minimal environmental impact fire management practices in the identified wilderness. Prescription burning may be undertaken in wilderness areas if required.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Medium Ongoing</p> <p>Medium Ongoing</p> <p>Medium Ongoing</p>

Current Situation	Desired Outcomes	Management Response	Priority*
<p>9.6 Infrastructure and Maintenance</p> <p>The network of roads and management trails in the planning area has been assessed for their suitability for public access, fire control, and other management purposes.</p> <p>Quarries on Oxley Hwy, Mummel Forest Road, Devils Delight Management Trail and Jackeys Creek Management Trail are used for park maintenance works.</p> <p>The Airservices Australia facilities and the Country Energy facilities at Porters Camp are licenced under the NPW Act. There is no occupancy agreement in place for the Telstra tower and facilities.</p> <p>A Country Energy transmission line runs from east to west through the section of the park to the north of the Oxley Highway. A transmission line also provides power to the facilities at Porters Camp. The Occupation Permit for these lines is now administered by the DECCW on DECCW managed lands.</p>	<p>Management facilities are adequate for management needs, and have minimal impacts on natural and cultural values.</p> <p>Non-NPWS uses are managed in accordance with formal agreements.</p> <p>Infrastructure and assets are routinely maintained.</p>	<p>9.6.1. Maintain the network of roads and management trails identified on Map 1, in accordance with NPWS Policies, being mindful to minimise erosion and water pollution.</p> <p>9.6.2. Work cooperatively with neighbours to establish vehicle access arrangements where needed for management purposes.</p> <p>9.6.3. Identify old mining and quarry sites within the planning area, and develop and implement management plans as required.</p> <p>9.6.4. Gate/signpost management trails to restrict unauthorised access.</p> <p>9.6.5. Manage existing non NPWS uses at Porters Camp in accordance with Occupational Permits and licences.</p>	<p>High Ongoing</p> <p>Medium</p> <p>Medium Ongoing</p> <p>Medium</p> <p>Medium</p>

* **High** priority activities are those imperative to achievement of the objectives and desired outcomes. They must be undertaken in the near future to avoid significant deterioration in natural, cultural or management resources.

Medium priority activities are those that are necessary to achieve the objectives and desired outcomes but are not urgent.

Low priority activities are desirable to achieve management objectives and desired outcomes but can wait until resources become available.

Ongoing is for activities that are undertaken on an annual basis or statements of management intent that will direct the management response if an issue that arises.

