Department of Environment and Science

White Mountains National Park

Management Statement

2013

Queensland Government

Prepared by: **Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS), Department of Environment and Science**

The Department of Environment and Science acknowledges Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land. We recognise their connection to land, sea and community, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

The department is committed to respecting, protecting, and promoting human rights, and our obligations under the Human Rights Act 2019.

This management statement does not intend to affect, diminish, or extinguish native title or associated rights.

Disclaimer
All due diligence and care has been taken in the preparation of this document based on the information in the 2013 management statement. The department holds no responsibility for any errors or omissions within this document. Any decisions made by other parties based on this document are solely the responsibility of those parties.

The White Mountains National Park Management Statement 2013 has been extended in 2023 in line with the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (s120G). Minor amendments have been made. There has been no change to the statement's original management intent and direction.

If you need to access this document in a language other than English, please call the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) on 131 450 and ask them to telephone Library Services on +61 7 3170 5470.

This publication can be made available in an alternative format (e.g. large print or audiotape) on request for people with vision impairment; phone +61 7 3170 5470 or email < library@des.qld.gov>

Park size:	112,200ha
Bioregion:	Desert Uplands (ecotone with Einasleigh Uplands)
QPWS region:	Central
Local government estate/area:	Flinders Shire and Charters Towers regional councils
State electorate:	Mt Isa and Dalrymple

Legislative framework

✔	*Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003*
✔	*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cwlth)
✔	*Nature Conservation Act 1992*

Plans and agreements

✔	Bonn Convention
✔	China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
✔	Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
✔	Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

Thematic strategies

✔	Level 2 Fire Management Strategy

Vision

White Mountains National Park will be managed to conserve its natural and cultural values, with particular emphasis on maintaining the high diversity of its plants.

The visitor experiences and recreational opportunities are largely self reliant and in keeping with the remote and undeveloped natural environment of the area. Recreation will focus on day-use and self-reliant camping in the Burra Range and Warang sections of the park.

Conservation purpose

White Mountains National Park has been gazetted in stages, commencing in 1990, to conserve biological communities' representative of the Alice Tableland Province of the Desert Uplands Biogeographic region. It is one of inland Queensland's most botanically diverse parks.

Heavily dissected with sandstone gorges and gullies, the northern section is very inaccessible. The southern section is better suited to recreational use, with easy access to wildflower displays and sandstone gorges which are of high scenic value.

White Mountains National Park has extremely important catchment protection values. It conserves the headwaters of the Flinders River which flows north to the Gulf of Carpentaria, the Cape River which flows into the Burdekin River catchment and onto the east coast, and Torrens and Bullock creeks which flow west into Coopers Creek and Lake Eyre Basin.

The park is also a recharge area for the Great Artesian Basin.

Protecting and presenting the park's values

Landscape

White Mountains National Park straddles the Great Dividing Range. The geology of the park is extremely complex, and is comprised largely of a mosaic of sandstones of varying ages. Sandstones from the Triassic era dominate. Thick sections of siltstone and mudstone also occur, and minor areas of basalt are evident.

The topography slopes away to the south. Larger sandstone gorges in the north diminish slowly to the southern sections of the park. The maximum elevation is 783m in the northern section of the park and is a minimum of 450m in Warrigal and Bungaree creeks in the south-east.

With the exception of the transport and utility corridor which crosses its southern section, most of the park is remote from roads or other impacts.

Park management roads are very steep in some locations and, where soils are friable and water movement is not controlled, erosion is continual. Areas of major concern at present include the Ellimeek boundary which is currently inaccessible by four-wheel drive vehicles, and the many creek crossings in the Poison Valley and Cann's Camp Creek area.

White Mountains Resources Reserve adjoins the park to the east. Cattle grazing occurs on surrounding properties and mining occurs in the broader area.

Regional ecosystems

Forty-five regional ecosystems are mapped in White Mountains National Park. Most of these are unique variants on the more widespread regional ecosystem types. Thirteen are listed as of concern communities under their biodiversity status (Table 1). The remaining 32 are considered to be not of concern at present.

The complex of native vegetation communities reflects the underlying geology, the topography and the unusual microclimates that exist. In general, vegetation communities are dominated by eucalypt, acacia and melaleuca woodlands, and a mass of heathland species. The diversity of habitats is very high due to the many ecotones between these vegetation communities.

General threats to the regional ecosystems include repeated large-scale fire events, and pest plant and pest animal species.

Native plants and animals

White Mountains National Park is currently known to protect 14 species of state or national conservation significance (Table 2). Eight birds recorded from the park are listed in international agreements (Table 3), and several species have specific management actions identified through the following national action plans:

Action Plan for Australian Birds 2000 – black-throated finch (white-rumped subspecies) *Poephila cincta cincta*, grey falcon *Falco hypoleucos*, square-tailed kite *Lophoictinia isura* and brown thornbill *Acanthiza pusilla*

1996 Action Plan for Australian Marsupials and Monotremes – spectacled hare-wallaby *Lagorchestes conspicillatus* and koala *Phascolarctos cinereus*.

An endemic damselfly *Eurysticta reevesi* occurs on White Mountains National Park. This species only occurs in moist gorges in this park. Another species that only occurs in the national park is a butterfly, the dark opal *Nesolycaena medicea*.

The maze of sandstone outcrops and gorges and connecting 'Denna' tablelands provide habitats for a wide variety of animals—a large number of which are of bioregional significance. Many plant species form disjunct populations or are at the extremes of their distribution limits. Numerous species are strongly affiliated with other areas, particularly the sandstone country in the Central Highlands.

While White Mountains National Park has an extensive plant species list, additional species are being regularly identified. Similarly, the animal species list is continually being increased through incidental fauna surveys as rangers and researchers go about their other duties. This indicates that species lists are not yet comprehensive for the park, and that survey work and field collections need to be continued.

Aboriginal culture

A native title application exists over the western section of the park (QC06/020 – Yirendali People Core Country). A native title application QC05/006 (Gudjala) has been lodged to the north of the park.

Sites of material Aboriginal culture, such as rock art sites, have been recorded on White Mountains National Park. Given the size and ruggedness of the park, there are expected to be many other unrecorded sites also exist.

Very few cultural sites are currently open to public use. Due to the significance of these places Traditional Owners will be involved in decisions regarding visitor access to these sites.

Shared-history culture

Relics of European pastoral heritage that demonstrate the practices of pastoral settlers and graziers occur in the Poison Valley and Warang sections. They include cattle and horse yards, a cattle dip and a number of old fences and buildings. The majority of these structures are progressively deteriorating.

The Warang Hut, originally a railway cottage in Torrens Creek, was relocated to the park just prior to gazettal. It is used by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) staff as a base when undertaking park management activities.

A grave site is located near the Warang Hut. The family of the deceased access the site on occasion to maintain the grave and show their respects. A large dead tree in close proximity to the site may damage the grave when it falls.

The Cobb and Co track traversed the park with Canns Camp representing that heritage.

Tourism and visitor opportunities

Most visitor use to the area occurs during the winter months, when the climate is most favourable and the wildflowers are generally blooming. Park users are from the self-drive market and primarily middle-aged to elderly individuals and couples. Few family groups camp on the park.

The southern section of White Mountains National Park is the only section of the park which is accessible by conventional vehicles. The Burra Range lookout, which is located where the Flinders Highway dissects the park, receives an estimated visitation of 7,500 visitors per annum. Most tourists briefly stop at this point en-route to another location.

Approximately 50–100 people camp on the park each year. This is likely to be due to the park's isolation from provincial centres. Very few visitors are known to use White Mountains National Park itself, but access the scenic views over the park's landscape and the wildflower displays from the Flinders Highway.

Access to other areas of the park via designated tracks is suitable for four-wheel drive vehicles and mountain

bikes. Self-sufficient bush camping experiences are available in the Poison Valley section.

White Mountains National Park is not accessible by caravans. However, caravans can be accommodated in the nearby townships of Torrens Creek and Pentland.

Opportunities for hiking and camping in remote sections of the park are also available, but it is rugged and remote country, with little water available.

Recreational clubs from Townsville visit the park every couple of years, to explore the park and to appreciate and learn about the diversity of its wildflowers.

A tourism audit of the area has been undertaken with QPWS, Townsville Enterprise and local authorities. It reviewed the spectrum and management implications of available opportunities with a recommendation to improve visitor opportunities at Poison Valley section and explore opportunities within the Warang section.

Education and science

Knowledge gained from research and monitoring programs is an integral part of adaptive park management. The collation of existing information and conduct of ongoing monitoring and survey work improves staff knowledge. It also guides future park management and should be a priority for QPWS.

The heathlands and associated plant communities and geological formations are of educational and research interest. Occasional interest is shown by the James Cook University to undertake studies in the park.

Partnerships

QPWS staff maintain working relationships with neighbouring pastoralists, state and local government agencies, local catchment groups and other stakeholders to ensure the values of White Mountains National Park are managed appropriately.

Where possible, fire and pest management activities are coordinated with park neighbours.

Other key issues and responses

Pest management

As White Mountains National Park is located at the headwaters of three major catchments, the management of pest plant species is a high priority.

Rubbervine *Cryptostegia grandiflora* occurs in Flinders River gorge in White Mountains National Park. In places it is dense and overgrowing the natural vegetation. Rubbervine infestations also exist in upstream areas.

A number of introduced grasses have been recorded on the park. Urochloa *Urochloa* sp. was seeded around the Poison Valley area prior to the 1990s. While it is reasonably well established, it does not appear to be spreading. Buffel grass *Cenchrus ciliaris* is prevalent around the Burra Range rest stop area. It also occurs sporadically along some boundary fence lines where neighbouring landholders have seeded their properties.

Sicklepod *Senna obtusifolia* has recently been discovered at the truck stop adjacent to the Flinders Highway on the Burra Range. Surveys of the surrounding area and catchment have not yet been undertaken to determine its distribution in the park.

The impacts of cattle *Bos* sp. and, to a lesser degree, pigs *Sus scrofa* are mostly concentrated in the Flinders River gorge and Poison Valley areas. Cattle enter Flinders River gorge from neighbouring properties and they impact river banks and water quality.

Cats *Felis catus* and rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* are scattered throughout the park in low numbers.

Fire management

If not managed appropriately, fire poses the most serious threat to the park's natural environment and, as such, it is a very high priority for park staff. Planned burns are conducted on White Mountains National Park to reduce hazards, protect life and property and to maintain the floristic diversity and structure of the park's vegetation communities.

Frequent wildfires reduce vegetation diversity by preventing seed set in slow growing communities. Broad-scale fires simplify the structure of the heath and acacia communities. High or low intensity fires at the wrong time of the year alter the composition and structure of vegetation communities (e.g. heaths).

Vine thickets on basalt outcrops and extrusions within the park are fire sensitive. The vine thickets are somewhat naturally protected from the impacts of fire due to the surrounding bare basalt rock and boulders.

Buffel grass has the potential to create high intensity fires. Invasion by buffel grass into the understorey of forest and woodland areas may potentially change their structural integrity.

Park access roads double as firebreaks. Regular and ongoing maintenance is required to ensure they do not erode and remain accessible.

Other management issues

Safety

White Mountains National Park contains many safety hazards for park visitors and managers, especially in isolated gorge environments and other areas remote from vehicle-based access points. Extreme temperatures and the limited reliability of ground water make most of the park inhospitable.

Communications are unreliable in many areas of the park, and rescue response is complicated by terrain and accessibility limitations. However mobile phone and wireless internet coverage is very reliable in areas adjacent to the Flinders Highway.

These hazards and the need for park users to be self-sufficient is emphasised on the department's website and all relevant departmental publications.

Transport and utility corridor

A transport and utility corridor passes through the Burra Range section of White Mountains National Park. This corridor is the priority to monitor the introduction and dispersal of weeds.

Two power transmission lines run through the park. Line maintenance and access conditions are yet to be negotiated and formalised. Security of this power network is critical in any fire management adjacent to the lines

A railway line is located on an easement which is adjacent to the Flinders Highway. Negotiations with Queensland Rail relating to easement access tracks need to be formalised.

A dam on the park is currently used by the Dalrymple and Flinders shire councils and Queensland Rail for road works and construction near the park. QPWS staff also uses the dam during pest and fire fighting operations. Due to the presence of a directional sign on the Flinders Highway, this site has become a camping area by default. The continued access, use and maintenance of this water facility by non-departmental organisations needs to be negotiated and formalised.

Management directions

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
Native plants and animals The health and diversity of plant and animal communities on the park are maintained.	Implement fire regimes that will maintain the current health and diversity of plant and animal communities, with an emphasis on heaths, wattles, grassy woodlands and spinifex grasslands. Focus pest plant management on the truck stop in the Burra Range section, Flinders River Gorge and at visitor sites such as campgrounds. Address new pest plant infestations while it is still possible to eradicate or contain them. Exclude stock from the park by installing and maintaining effective boundary fences.
Landscape Park operations have minimal impact on the quality of the park's ground and surface water or on catchment values.	Minimise disturbance of the soil surface, especially in sandstone escarpment areas. Install water diversion drains on tracks and fire breaks where significant soil erosion is identified or anticipated.
Tourism and visitor opportunities White Mountains National Park offers a range of recreational opportunities which are appropriate to the remote character of the park.	Review the feasibility of tourism audit recommendations with relevant stakeholders. Promote White Mountains National Park as a wild and remote destination largely free from the impacts of visitors. Focus visitor use around day-use opportunities accessible from the Flinders Highway such as scenic lookouts, four wheel driving, mountain biking and provide for self-reliant, vehicle-based camping in the Burra Range and Warang sections of the park during the dry season. Manage the remainder of the park as a remote natural area suited to remote bushwalking. Ensure that all written materials relating to the park emphasise the hazards and risks presented by the natural environment, and the need for visitors to be self-sufficient and take appropriate precautions before and during park visits.
Aboriginal and shared-history culture Sites of cultural and historical significance are appropriately protected and presented.	In consultation with relevant Traditional Owner groups, determine the appropriateness of allowing visitor use of places of material culture and areas of spiritual significance such as rock art sites. Allow relics of pastoral history and mining to deteriorate naturally, where they have no feasible management use or other significance.
Management issues Formal arrangements are in place for interests over the park.	Negotiate and formalise access, use and maintenance arrangements for infrastructure on park.

Tables – Conservation values management

Table 1: Of concern regional ecosystems

Regional ecosystem number	Description	Biodiversity status
9.3.1	*Eucalyptus camaldulensis* or *E. tereticornis* +/- *Casuarina cunninghamiana* +/- *Melaleuca* spp. fringing woodland on channels and levees. Generally on eastern flowing rivers	Of concern
9.3.12a	River beds and associated waterholes	Of concern
10.3.13 (a, b)	*Melaleuca fluviatilis* and/or *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* woodland along watercourses	Of concern
10.3.14 (c, d)	*Eucalyptus camaldulensis* and/or *E. coolabah* open woodland along channels and on floodplains	Of concern
10.3.15 (c, g)	Grasslands, sedgelands, ephemeral herblands and open woodland in depressions on sand plains	Of concern
10.5.9 (a, b)	*Eucalyptus quadricostata* open woodland on sandy plateaus	Of concern
10.7.4	*Eucalyptus persistens* low open woodland on pediments below scarps	Of concern
10.7.9	*Eucalyptus exilipes* with or without *Corymbia leichhardtii* low open woodland on the perimeter of sandy plateaus	Of concern
10.9.7	*Melaleuca uncinata* dwarf open shrubland on Cretaceous sediments	Of concern

Table 2: Species of conservation significance

Scientific name	Common name	*Nature Conservation Act 1992* status	*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* status	Back on Track status
Plants				
Acacia ramiflora	-	Endangered	Vulnerable	Low
Aristida burraensis	-	Near threatened	-	Low
Bertya opponens	-	Least concern	Vulnerable	-
Boronia eriantha	-	Near threatened	-	Low
Desmodium macrocarpum	-	Near threatened	-	Low
Kardomia squarrulosa	-	Vulnerable	-	Low
Peripleura scabra	-	Near threatened	-	Low
Animals				
Acanthophis antarcticus	-	Near threatened	-	Medium
Falco hypoleucos	grey falcon	Near threatened	-	Data deficient
Geophaps scripta scripta	squatter pigeon (southern sub species)	Vulnerable	-	Medium
Lerista wilkinsi	-	Near threatened	-	Low
Lophoictinia isura	square-tailed kite	Near threatened	-	Low
Petrogale mareeba	Mareeba rock-wallaby	Near threatened	-	Low
Phascolarctos cinereus	koala	Least concern	Vulnerable	Low
Poephila cincta cincta	black-throated finch (white-rumped subspecies)	Endangered	Endangered	High

Table 3: Species listed in international agreements

Scientific name	Common name	Bonn	CAMBA	JAMBA	ROKAMBA
Falco longipennis	Australian hobby	✓	-	-	-
Falco cenchroides	nankeen kestrel	✓	-	-	-
Anas gracilis	grey teal	✓	-	-	-
Tringa stagnatilis	marsh sandpiper	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hirundapus caudacutus	white-throated needletail	-	✓	✓	✓
Ardea modesta	great egret	-	✓	✓	-
Merops ornatus	rainbow bee-eater	-	-	✓	-
Haliaeetus leucogaster	white-bellied sea-eagle	-	✓	-	-

Bonn – Bonn Convention

CAMBA – China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

JAMBA – Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

ROKAMBA – Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement