

## **Bushwalking NSW Inc.**

### **Policy on Natural Areas (Adopted 1998)**

**1. Definitions:** For the purposes of this Policy.

**1.1 Biological Diversity (Biodiversity):** The variety of life forms, the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, the genes they contain and the ecosystems they form. This is usually considered in three levels: genetic diversity; species diversity, and ecosystem diversity (NSW draft Biodiversity Strategy Feb 1997)

**1.2 Ecological Objective:** Criteria (in the case of management decisions) which at their core are concerned with sustaining and protecting ecological values.

**1.3 Long Distance Walking Track:** An identified, publicised and officially recognised route intended to allow recreational walking between points of greater than one day or weekend's travel apart. May feature signage, construction works, intermediate track head points and designated camping sites.

**1.4 National Park Estate:** Areas gazetted or declared under the National Parks and Wildlife Act (1967 and 74) and/or Wilderness Act (1987); and areas acquired by the National Parks and Wildlife service and awaiting formal gazettal. Includes National Parks, Nature Reserves, Wilderness Areas, State Recreation Areas, Regional Parks and other natural or cultural sites reserved under the NP&W Act.

**1.5 Natural Area:** Any area with predominantly intact native indigenous vegetation cover and containing suitable habitat for its dependent fauna.

**1.6 Precautionary Principle:** Provided with limited information or uncertainty, to only take decisions which do not foreclose on future options for the effective protection of natural values present.

**1.7 Protected Area:** Recognised term for lands reserved either in the National Park Estate, Crown Reserves, Flora Reserves or Forest Preserves in State Forests, Special Water Catchment areas and freehold title lands under a Voluntary Conservation Agreement (VCA). Private or commercial wildlife sanctuaries are not considered to fit this definition, as their long term tenure and land use is uncertain. Neither, due to the same limitations, are freehold lands presently zoned by Local Government for nature conservation (unless subject to a VCA).

**1.8 Public Reserve:** A subset of Protected Area including only those which are publicly owned.

**1.9 Special Water Catchment:** Areas within the hydrological catchment of a water storage which are zoned for protection of drinking or potable water, by acting as a natural buffer around the storage.

**1.10 Wilderness Area:** An area of land that is, or is capable of restoration to be, of sufficient size to enable long term protection of its natural systems and biodiversity; that is substantially undisturbed by modern technological society, and largely remote from points of mechanised access and other evidence of colonial or modern society. Includes, but not limited to, areas identified, declared or assessed as wilderness capable under the NSW Wilderness Act (1987).

**2. Objectives:** For responsible bodies

**2.1** To protect, rehabilitate and manage natural areas to ensure the long term sustainability of their native biodiversity.

**2.2** To provide a range of opportunities for self reliant recreation in natural areas.

**2.3** To encourage activities by land managers and all visitors/users of natural areas to conform to Bushwalking NSW's policies.

**3. Values:**

High value is given to:

- Protection of native biological diversity and the maintenance of ongoing ecological and geomorphological processes and systems
- Provision of opportunities for spiritual reward associated with remoteness, solitude and self reliance in natural areas.
- Provision of opportunities for non-motorised, self reliant recreation in natural areas, especially bushwalking.

**4. Application to Natural Areas:**

Resolution of conflicting objectives and values will be determined by evaluation of their local, regional and state significance, with precedence given to the protection of native biological diversity and ecological objectives. Where doubt exists or information is insufficient, the precautionary principle should apply.

For example, bushwalking and other related activities should be allowed only if scarce natural attributes such as state listed threatened species/communities are not impacted upon or wilderness values not degraded.

**4.1 The following policy principles should apply to all natural areas:**

- Protection under legislation such as the NP&W Act or Wilderness Act for all publicly owned areas with suitable conservation values.
- Protection of privately owned natural areas with conservation values sought through acquisition from a willing vendor or Voluntary Conservation Agreements (VCAs).

- All users of natural areas conform to Bushwalking NSW's Code of Ethics.
- Walking tracks may be established provided they are sited and constructed to minimise environmental degradation and enhance visitor enjoyment
- Facilities such as established campsites, roads and tracks located on the edge of natural areas.
- No dwellings for private or exclusive commercial use.
- No built accommodation provided in public reserves.
- Vehicle access provided only for short distances from a natural area's edge on roads of two wheel drive standard. Through roads not provided or maintained.
- Roads suitable only for four wheel drive vehicles not provided because of the erosion, pollution and disruption of quiet enjoyment this usage causes.
- Horses excluded from protected areas due to the erosion, pollution and ecological disturbance they cause, their general intrusion onto native habitat and their social impact.
- Bicycles permitted only on public roads and maintained management roads. No bicycles should be ridden on walking tracks or revegetating roads.
- No mining or mineral exploration in protected areas.
- No grazing of livestock in protected areas.
- No timber harvesting in protected areas.
- Land managers to actively pursue eradication of all introduced animal species. Control or eradication of introduced plants to receive a high priority by land managers and through community involvement.
- All natural bush regeneration activities encouraged.
- Users of natural areas to be educated about ensuring the long term protection of biodiversity.

#### **4.2 The following additionally apply to wilderness areas:**

- Roads, including management roads should be progressively excluded from identified wilderness through closure and revegetation. Thus in the long term, wilderness areas should be managed as roadless natural areas.
- Walking tracks of a more formal nature confined to the edges or threshold of identified wilderness.

- No new walking track construction and no upgrade work other than to protect sensitive features from existing (not potential) usage patterns, or to address essential safety issues.
- Management and recreation entry only by self reliant means such as walking, canoeing or skiing (exceptions during emergency activities).
- Self reliance of users encouraged.
- Minimal and non-specific public promotion. In particular no through route guides.
- No new structures and no maintenance of existing structures.
- Where wilderness is divided by power lines these should be rerouted in the long term.

#### **4.3 The following apply to water supply Special Catchment Areas:**

- Land Management to be carried out by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.
- Transfer of tenure from water corporation/board to NPWS estate at no cost.
- Funding of land management and ongoing voluntary acquisition of inholdings provided to NPWS via an annual catchment levy from water rates.
- Sydney Water's multiple barrier approach to water quality protection is supported.
- Restrictions on recreational activities resulting from the multiple barrier approach are supported.

#### **4.4 Long distance walking routes policy**

The establishment of major extended walking routes through natural areas are subject to the following policies:

- Use of tracks or roads within National Parks for long distance walking routes should be conditional on being consistent with the area's plan of management policies for levels and type of use.
- Tracks are routed to avoid areas of wilderness (including identified), sensitive natural or cultural features or critical habitat.
- Long distance routes are inappropriate in Nature Reserves and Flora Reserves.

- The provision of accommodation infrastructure to support such tracks should be provided off-park in nearby or adjoining areas so as to protect the park's natural values and provide a benefit to surrounding communities.
- Where existing long distance routes pass through declared wilderness, they should not be sign posted except at the wilderness boundaries.

#### **4.5 Conservation Corridors Policy**

High value is placed on achieving the addition to the National Park Estate areas of State Forest, Crown Land, leasehold and freehold (by acquisition) which, in addition to protecting important natural values, also provide linkages between major existing reserves such as those along the Great Eastern Escarpment, coastal areas or key western areas.

## Appendix 1

### Guide to the Application of the Policy for Recreation Management

	<b>Natural Areas</b>	<b>Wilderness</b>
<b>Facilities</b>		
<b>Marked Routes</b>	Marked routes are permissible in places where safety is an issue or where navigation is difficult (such as to locate a cliff pass)	No new routes should be marked and existing markings should be removed except where safety would be critically affected
<b>Walking pads and cut tracks</b>	Permissible provided they don't result in erosion. Eroded tracks should either be closed and revegetated, repaired or converted to a constructed track.	Walking pads are tolerable providing they don't cause erosion. Existing cut tracks may be retained but new cut tracks should not be permitted. Eroded tracks should be closed and revegetated.
<b>Constructed walking tracks</b>	Permissible and encouraged in popular areas outside wilderness to provide broad access while protecting against human impacts. Such tracks should not detract from the natural surroundings.	Existing constructed tracks may be retained. No new tracks should be constructed nor existing ones modified.
<b>Roads</b>	Kept to a minimum, based on the need for reasonable public access and park management. Surplus fire trails should be closed and revegetated. Access roads should be suitable for ordinary vehicles to provide access for all.	Close and revegetate all roads. Access for management should be by foot or by air.
<b>Kind of Activity</b>		
<b>Bushwalking</b>	Bushwalking is generally permissible if minimum impact practices are employed. In certain localities bushwalking access may be limited or controlled to meet conservation objectives.	Minimum impact, self reliant bushwalking permitted. In some places, access may be prohibited or restricted for conservation purposes or the preservation of spiritual values.
<b>Canoeing and Rafting</b>	As for Bushwalking.	As for Bushwalking.
<b>Bicycling</b>	Permitted on maintained roads only.	Prohibited except on roads (the presence of which is contrary to this policy).
<b>Rockclimbing, abseiling and canyoning</b>	Permissible if there is no significant environmental damage.	Permissible if there is no significant environmental damage and conducted without the installation of permanent anchorages.
<b>Horse riding</b>	Opposed in National Parks and	Generally prohibited.

	Nature Reserves.	
<b><i>Motor Vehicle Recreation</i></b>	Permitted on public roads only. Vehicle travelling speeds and noise generation should be tempered as much as possible in natural areas.	Generally prohibited.
<b>Miscellaneous</b>		
<b><i>Signposting</i></b>	Signs should be erected only on routes which are popular with inexperienced people.	Signs should not be erected except on the periphery at access points.
<b><i>Printed guides</i></b>	Detailed route guides are permissible so long as they give due regard to protection and conservation.	Limited to general description of the terrain, etc. with only broad suggestions concerning route possibilities. Where a well established route passes through wilderness, supportive material should contain sufficient detail to guide the walker through.

**Communication**

Electronic devices may be carried by bushwalkers at their discretion but use should be confined to emergencies.

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### Kosciusko Huts

The general policies on natural areas and wilderness state that there should be no built accommodation or other structures retained. Bushwalking NSW has recognised the dilemma posed by the existence of huts in Kosciusko National Park. In 1977 this organisation adopted a specific policy on huts in the park. The fundamental points of this are set out below for retention as official Bushwalking NSW policy.

#### Values

- a) **Historic.** A hut may be said to possess historic value if it represents an example of building techniques and styles, or of land use practices which are no longer used and which are unlikely to become normal practice in the future.
- b) **Management.** A hut may be said to possess management value if its existence results in less impact though overuse of a popular locality. *This value is acceptable only to the extent that other visitor management options to reduce impacts have been fully explored.*
- c) **Survival.** A hut may be said to possess survival value if it is located in an area where, due to a lack of sheltered campsites, the probability of death from exposure is greatly increased over the average probability in the park. *Mitigating against this value is the evidence that a number of fatalities have occurred where people were reliant on reaching a hut in extremes of weather, rather than using self reliant methods of shelter, e.g. snow cave or quality 4 season tent.*
- d) **Training value.** A hut may be said to possess training value if it is situated such that it is easily accessible by novice bushwalkers and ski tourers, and can form a base for an introduction to an area or activity.

#### General Policy

The conflict between the above values and the general policy on built accommodation in natural areas and structures of any sort in wilderness can be resolved when it is recognised that in the longer term huts are not permanent structures. Eventual collapse from general decay is an inevitability which maintenance will greatly postpone but not prevent. There is also a strong probability that natural or human introduced fires will forestall the process of natural deterioration. Thus all huts have a finite life which, with care, will be measured in decades rather than years. On this basis the following policy statements can be made:

1. Removal of existing huts should be carried out if consistent with the park's plan of management.

2. No existing hut should be replaced in the event of its destruction, regardless of the untimeliness of its loss.
3. No new huts should be built.
4. Maintenance of huts should not venture beyond general upkeep of the basic structure. There should be no upgrades of shelter from basic to more elaborate accommodation.

### **Retention zone**

One area of the park has been identified where a number of the outlined values of huts are high and wilderness values relatively low. This is in the near vicinity of the Snowy Scheme hydroelectricity infrastructure between Guthega and Whites River. As such it is suggested that in this narrow corridor, hut values would predominate and warrant retention, provided such huts are not used for exclusive or commercial private accommodation.