



Watarrka National Park

Draft Joint Management Plan September 2009



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Making a submission on the Draft Plan

Submissions may be made on-line at <http://www.nt.gov.au/nretas/consult/>. Every submission is important but those that give reasons for concern with supporting information and constructive suggestions are most useful.

Please include your name, contact details and area of interest. Be clear what parts of the draft Plan you disagree with, as well as what you especially support. Refer to sections and page numbers.

The draft Plan is available for public comment for a minimum of one month.

In keeping with the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*, the joint management partners will consider all public comment and amend the draft as appropriate. Completed draft joint management plans are tabled in the Legislative Assembly by the Minister for Parks and Wildlife and come into effect after seven sitting days of the Assembly.



*“Watarrka” is the Luritja name for the Umbrella Bush *Acacia ligulata*.*

Watarrka National Park
Draft Joint Management Plan

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Message from the Minister

Watarrka National Park is undoubtedly one of the Territory's most important tourist destinations and makes an important contribution to the Territory economy.

The Park's conservation values rate highly with any national park in Australia. Its unique geology, which fascinates and inspires so many visitors, is a key factor behind its biological diversity. The Park's habitats support a fantastic range of species that, may one day, play a major role in threatened species reintroductions.



This draft Plan recognises Martutjarra-Luritja Traditional Owners' connection to country under both Territory and traditional law. It also identifies meaningful ways for them to be involved in the Park's management. The cooperative development of this Joint Management Plan is evidence of positive relationships developing between the partners and is a strong start to joint management.

Visitors will gain an improved understanding of the land and its people. The Park's core values will be improved by combining the experience and skills of both joint management partners.

I am confident the public will welcome the Park's future as outlined in this Plan and share the vision of the joint management partners.

I congratulate the Traditional Owners of Watarrka National Park and the Parks and Wildlife Service of the Northern Territory for their work completing this plan. I also extend my sincere thanks to the Central Land Council for their contribution in helping to bring this plan to fruition.

Karl Hampton MLA
Minister for Parks and Wildlife

Vision for the Park

“Both partners, both ways – making decisions and working together on country.”

The joint management partners of Watarrka National Park will work together and support each other in ways that encourage respect for each other and the land, resulting in:

- Country being looked after properly
- Anangu involvement and employment
- Strong culture shared with visitors.



Joint Management at Watarrka

“The Government send messages through. National Parks are working for NT Government. Anangu Rangers work side by side Park Rangers – equal, working on behalf of Aboriginal people. Pink are European people, blue is a table, putting answers on the table, black is Aboriginal people, putting answers on the table. The one down the bottom is all of us together, putting our answers on the table. The picture is about the National Park, the trees, the grass, the animals, everything. It’s got Spinifex, turkey, kangaroo, emu, bilby, mala.”

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How this Plan was Developed

Planning for joint management of the Park began with a large meeting of Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife Service staff, facilitated by the Central Land Council in November 2007. The meeting established a planning team of representative Traditional Owners, CLC staff and Parks and Wildlife Service staff.

During 2008, the Parks and Wildlife Service and Traditional Owners worked together to develop this Plan through a number of participatory planning meetings. Tourism industry stakeholders contributed to the planning process during a workshop in September 2008.

Central Land Council staff assisted the joint management partners throughout the planning process and provided much valued input into the preparation of this Plan. Traditional Owners reviewed and approved the Draft Plan in December 2008.

This Plan supersedes the 1991 Plan of Management for Watarrka National Park. It will be in operation for a minimum of five years unless amended or replaced by a new plan.

This Draft Plan will come into effect following consultation with the broader community, passage through the Legislative Assembly, and subsequent gazettal and publication of this document by the Minister.



Traditional Owners, Parks and Wildlife, Central Land Council Staff and sectors of the Tourism Industry meet to work on the Draft Plan (2008).

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Summary of this Plan

The rugged landscape, deep gorges and secluded rockholes of the western George Gill Range provide refuge for many rare plants and animals. Ancient sandstone features that include the spectacular Kings Canyon make Watarrka National Park an important conservation area and major tourist attraction of Australia's Red Centre.

Visited by approximately 215,000 visitors in 2008, this 105,700 ha Park will continue to be managed and developed as:

- one of Australia's most important tourist destinations
- an internationally significant conservation area and
- a place with a rich and vibrant Indigenous culture.

Responsibility for making management decisions for the Park will be shared by the joint management partners, guided by this Plan. Most decisions will be made by a Joint Management Committee that will convene twice each year, or as required. In recognition of the Park's contribution to the Territory's economy, the partners will continue to manage and develop the Park in close consultation with the tourism industry, in particular, local tourist operations. Governance structure and processes will continue to develop. By monitoring joint management, the equitable and effective partnership that is sought after should be achieved.

Protection of the Park's natural character and aesthetic values that attract visitors will be afforded the highest priority. Visitor management strategies will aim to ensure safe, informative and enjoyable experiences. Visitors will have opportunities for a wider range of experiences and activities, with particular focus on authentic cultural experiences. Visitor information services will reflect changing visitor interests and communication technologies. Infrastructure improvements will include new and upgraded access and facilities. Effective resource use and public-private partnerships will be pursued where appropriate.

Conservation of the Park's biodiversity will be a major focus of management. Ongoing survey and monitoring of the Park's biological resources including Indigenous ecological knowledge will not only increase the knowledge base; these activities also aid understanding of the impacts of feral animals, weeds and fire and are integral to developing strategies to reduce these impacts.

The Park's cultural assets will also be afforded high management priority. The presentation and interpretation of the Park's Aboriginal heritage is a part of visitors' experience of Watarrka that will continue to be built upon during the term of this Plan. Traditional Owner involvement in all aspects of Park management, especially cultural heritage management will be encouraged and supported. As joint managers of the Park, the Parks and Wildlife Service will support and facilitate training, employment and commercial enterprise development for Traditional Owners with the support of the Central Land Council and the Northern Territory tourism industry.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Values of the Park and its Purpose

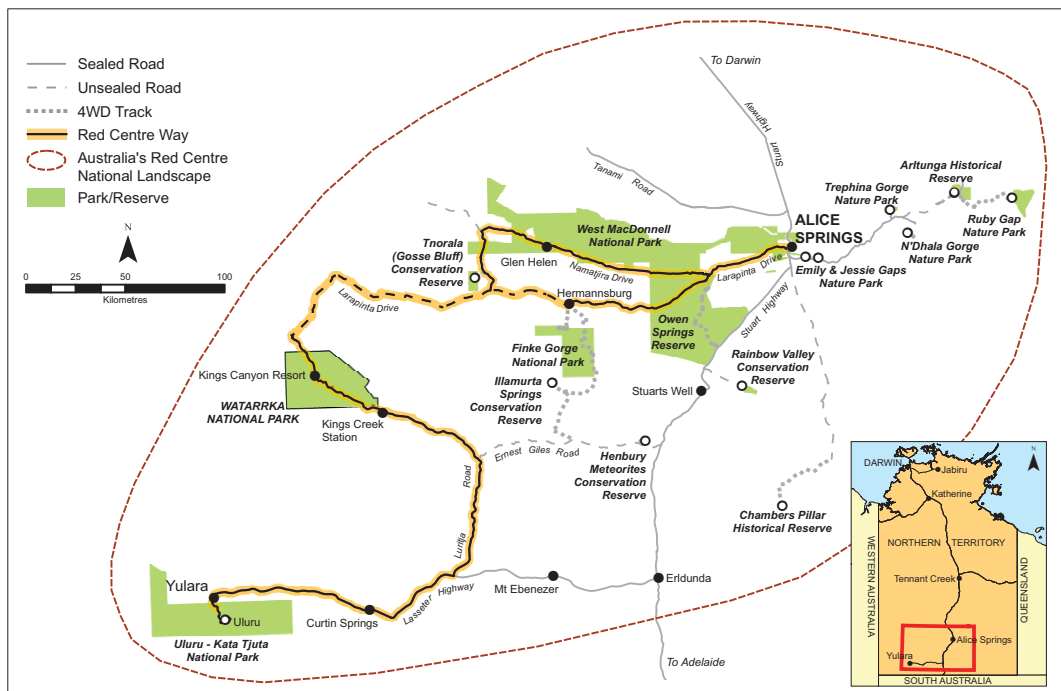
“There’s more to this place than just the Canyon.”

Traditional Owner

At Watarrka National Park, the vast red sandhill country of the western desert abruptly meets the ancient ranges of Central Australia. Encompassing the western end of the George Gill Range, the 105,700 ha Park is located mid-way between Alice Springs and Uluru, within Australia’s Red Centre National Landscape. See **Figure 1**.

Watarrka protects one of Australia’s most stunning natural and cultural environments and contributes significantly to biodiversity conservation and the Territory economy. Managed as a park since 1983 and formally declared in July 1989, the Park is a focal point of regional tourism with significant potential for employment of local Aboriginal people.

Figure 1. Park Location



Value 1: A World Class Tourist Attraction

King's Canyon is a world class tourist attraction offering spectacular scenery, high quality nature based tourism activities and opportunities to experience authentic Indigenous culture. The six kilometre walk around the Canyon is one of Central Australia's best walks, exposing visitors to a range of habitats including waterholes, intriguing rock formations and stunning views.

Approximately 215,000 people visited the Park in 2008. While somewhat remote, the park is accessible; visitors can be comfortably accommodated at the Kings Canyon Resort¹ or nearby Kings Creek Station. The tourism industry has lobbied the government for several years to seal the Red Centre Way tourist drive between Alice Springs and Uluru. Visitor numbers are expected to increase markedly when sealing takes place, although there is no certainty that the road will be sealed during the term of this Plan.

Value 2: An Internationally Significant Conservation Area

Time has carved great buttresses out of the colourful sandstone of the George Gill Range, providing refuge to a variety of unique native flora and fauna amongst domed rock formations, range-top "perched dunes", flood-out areas and sheltered spring-fed gullies.

Containing the upper catchments of a number of major creeks and a diversity of sandy desert and central rocky range habitats, the Park is important for threatened species management and potential reintroduction of species such as the Mala. It is an internationally significant conservation area providing refuge for over 600 species of plants and many native animals, including ecologically and evolutionary important populations of aquatic invertebrates.

Value 3: A Living Cultural Landscape

For the Traditional Owners, Watarrka is a cultural landscape imbued with cultural, spiritual and historical significance that forms part of their contemporary identities. The Park contains many places of spiritual significance and a number of dreaming trails that traverse the Park, linking the area culturally to places far away.

Rich archaeological remains bear testimony to many generations and over 13,500 years of Aboriginal use and occupation. Many Traditional Owners maintain strong connections to their country and culture by living on or close to the Park².

The relationship of people with the land changed in 1872 when the explorer Ernest Giles passed through naming many of the prominent features. Giles subsequently applied for the first pastoral leases in the area. The area was stocked with cattle by the Tempe Downs Pastoral Association from 1889 to 1982. A small number of historical sites associated with the contact period and early pastoralism are located in the Park. Aboriginal and post-settlement connections with the land are of interest today and are a major interpretive theme of the Red Centre Way tourist drive.

1. Kings Canyon Resort was excised from the Park in 1992.

2. Three Aboriginal living areas of approximately 50 ha each were excised from the Park in 1985.

Purpose

The area was first managed as a park following the surrender of 105,900 ha (NT Portion 2214) by the Tempe Downs Pastoral Lease to the Conservation Land Corporation in September 1983. It was formally declared a national park in July 1989. A 33,700 ha southern portion was subsequently leased back to Tempe Downs Pty Ltd. In 2009 this area reverted to National Park.

As a result of a High Court decision affecting many Territory Parks and Reserves, Watarrka was re-declared under Section 12 of the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act* in November 2002. In 2003, the Park was listed on Schedule 2 of the *Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Act*, enabling transfer to Aboriginal ownership as NT Parks freehold title. The Park is leased from the Watarrka Land Trust by the Northern Territory Government for 99 years to be jointly managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service and the Traditional Owners of Watarrka.

Under these joint management arrangements, Watarrka will continue to be managed as a significant conservation area and developed as a major tourist destination for the benefit of both the Traditional Owners and the wider community. A connected community and collaborative approaches to management will ensure effective protection of resources and sound tourism development. Priorities will be to:

- Protect the outstanding natural and cultural values of the Park.
- Provide exciting, transformative experiences for visitors.
- Meet the needs of Traditional Owners to maintain their connection to country.

It is likely that the Park's natural and cultural values are significant enough to qualify the park for inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List. If the Northern Territory Government's hopes to inscribe the West MacDonnell National Park are eventually realised, the addition of Watarrka to this listing may be possible, with consequent tremendous community benefit.

1.2 The Plan

This Plan has been written for the joint management partners, to guide and support them in joint management. It is also a public document by which the public may learn about the Park, its values and management.

This Plan explains how the joint management partners will work together to look after the Park. It provides direction for operational planning and day-to-day programs. It provides for the ongoing conservation of the Park's significant natural and cultural values and continued public use and enjoyment. It shows how public interests in the Park will be best served while recognising the significance of the area to the Traditional Owners.

This Plan sets management objectives against which the Parks and Wildlife Service, Traditional Owners and the general public may measure progress. The Plan presents both general and specific management directions with respect to the Park's purpose and current management issues. It also outlines measures that will ensure that future development of the Park is appropriate.

This Plan supersedes the 1991 Plan of Management for Watarrka National Park. It will be reviewed after five years and remain in effect until amended or replaced by a new plan. The Lease and Indigenous Land Use Agreement provides further background to joint management arrangements and should be read in conjunction with this Plan.

1.3 Joint Management

Joint management is about Traditional Owners and the Parks and Wildlife Service working together in partnership to manage the Park. It is about the partners sharing their knowledge, values and interests, along with the values and interests of the wider community, to jointly make decisions in relation to all aspects of the Park's management.

In 2005 the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act (TPWCA)* was amended to provide for joint management of 27 parks and reserves that were subject to the *Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Act 2003*. The "Framework Act" provided for the settlement of land and/or native title claims over these areas and created the framework for their joint management. Watarrka is one of the parks subject to these joint management arrangements.

The land subject to this Joint Management Plan is NT Parks Freehold land that will be held by the Watarrka Land Trust on behalf of Traditional Owners and leased back to the Northern Territory Government for 99 years. The terms of joint management for the Park have authority in law under the *TPWCA*, the Watarrka Lease and an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) registered under the *Native Title Act*. Selected parts of the *TPWCA* are given in **Appendix 1**. A copy of the Lease and ILUA are given in **Appendix 2**. This Plan complies with all of these legal instruments.

The *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*, defines the joint management partners as the Park's Traditional Owners and the Parks and Wildlife Service (on behalf of the Northern Territory Government). Section 25AB of the Act states:

The objective of joint management of a park or reserve is to jointly establish an equitable partnership to manage and maintain the park or reserve as part of a comprehensive and representative system of parks and reserves in the Territory and for the following purposes:

- (a) Benefiting both the traditional Aboriginal owners of the park or reserve and the wider community;*
- (b) Protecting biological diversity;*
- (c) Serving visitor and community needs for education and enjoyment.*

The Act also establishes the requirements of joint management plans and the role of the Central Land Council in assisting joint management by representing and protecting the interests of the Traditional Owners in relation to the Park's management.

Traditional Owners

“We call ourselves Anangu.”

Traditional Owner

Watarrka has a long history of human occupation and adaptation by its Traditional Owners - the *Martutjarra* people. Country within and beyond Watarrka National Park is central to their identity. They refer to themselves as *Anangu* and their language as *Luritja*, a Western Desert language.

Under Aboriginal Law the Traditional Owners of the Watarrka National Park belong to certain places and dreamings of Martutjarra-Luritja Land. Each landholding group belongs to a country which is named after an important site. The country or *ngurra* of a group comprises a set of significant sites which are associated with one or more dreamings. Traditional Owners think of their country in terms of these sites and dreamings, not as a clearly bounded entity. They say “the whole country is special, inside and outside the Park.” On the Park the countries *Ulpanyali*, *Watarrka*, *Lilla* and *Wanmarra* are identified with predominant dreaming tracks and particular families. These countries extend beyond the Park’s boundaries.

Luritja people refer to people belonging to a certain country as *ngurraritja*. *Ngurraritja* means “belonging to country”, “owner/holder of land” as well as “spirit of the land.” Generally, the Traditional Owners belong to land through their *mama* (father), *tjamu* (father’s father, mother’s father), *ngunytju* (mother) and *kami* (mother’s father and mother’s mother), as well as through their birthplaces and death/burial sites of relatives. While people affiliated with a country through/by descent seem to have the strongest connections to a country, knowledge, in particular ritual knowledge, and long-term residence, enhance the status of a *ngurraritja* significantly.

The *ngurraritja* of a country are complemented by people who are called *ngurra kutju ngurrara* meaning “people who are likely to share a camp” or “one’s countrymen.” These people belong usually to a neighbouring country, a shared dreaming track or both and are notionally also *ngurraritja*. They are important in assisting decision-making concerning country, in the maintenance and performance of ceremonies and the transmission of ritual knowledge.

Permanent spring waters of the George Gill Range provided an important refuge area.



Traditional Owners of the Park have strong connections to *Yankunytjatjara* and *Pitjantjatjara* people in the south and *Pertame Arrernte* in the east. Religious and social ties allowed people from surrounding regions to visit Watarrka for short ceremonial and recreational gatherings or for extended periods during droughts.

Features of the Park, like the remainder of the Central Australian landscape, are the physical representation of the dreaming, called *Tjukurpa*. Tjukurpa among other things refers to a mythological era, in which the ancestral beings brought the world into existence. Paths or *iwara* of ancestral beings weave over, under and upon the land creating the landscape and inscribing on it life governing laws.

Tjukurpa includes the proper way of gaining knowledge and teaching it, restrictions on the use of land and its resources, rules of marriage, what is public and what is secret knowledge in ceremonial life, the responsibilities of people towards each other and the significance of things and events in the world. Traditional Owners explain Tjukurpa “it’s not just in ceremony. It’s all the time we talk about it. Just driving from one place to another we talk about places we see, the dreamings. Older people are always talking Tjukurpa to younger ones.”

The events both secular and sacred that took place during this era provide the foundation of the spiritual beliefs, ecological knowledge and identity of the Traditional Owners. Most religious aspects pertaining to this area are restricted. Therefore only public aspects of Martutjarra religion and governance have been included in this Plan.

The places associated with these beings are often named and have been brought together into a complex array of stories and songs. Many dreaming stories are connected to the Park. Some of these stories are more significant than others. Some are local traditions while others traverse hundreds of kilometres, linking people religiously and socially together.

The *Kuningka* dreaming track crosses the Park from the south to the north. Much of the information belonging to this dreaming is restricted to initiated men. According to Traditional Owners “Watarrka is a big ceremony place. Kuningka came up Kings Creek and had ceremony here. All that’s young native cats, sitting there. That one is really important. That dreaming is still there. There’s a lot that’s secret here.”



Kunigka or western quoll is an important animal for Anangu. Photo: © Barritt & May 2008.

The *kungka kutjarra* (two women dreaming) is of great importance to Central Australian Aboriginal women and is said to traverse the whole continent from the south to the north. Narrative relevant to this dreaming starts at Kata Tjuta, enters the Park on its western boundary and travels in a north easterly direction to *Ulpanyali* and *Kutjinti* before leaving the Park and continuing to Alice Springs.

There are many more sacred narratives connected to this area. While many aspects such as ecological knowledge are public, other aspects are restricted and pertain only to men's or to women's only religious practices. This type of information, according to traditional law and custom, should not be heard by anyone other than senior and initiated people.

To appreciate Traditional Owners' persistence in pursuing involvement in management of the Park, it is necessary to understand their deep connection to country and the dislocation they suffered through the occupation of the area by Europeans in the late nineteenth century through to the present day.

Diaries and journals kept by Ernest Giles as he passed through the area in 1872 indicate his awareness of Aboriginal people by constant sightings of camp fire smoke. These reports are confirmed by Traditional Owners who recall grandparents telling stories of "hiding from strange people who came on horses and camels."

Further European expeditions occurred during the 1870's, the most notable led by William Gosse in 1873 to assess the value of recent discoveries west of the Overland Telegraph Line. Throughout these accounts references are made to the sightings of Aboriginals and campfire smoke, but contact appears to have been limited.

The establishment of pastoralism in the area in 1889 had a severe impact on the Luritja people and their culture. They were often attacked and forced into the relative safety of the George Gill Range, accessing permanent rockholes under the cover of darkness. One Traditional Owner recalls "My father told us that at one time when he was young, his father and grandfather took him into the hills behind Lilla to hide from a white man who was shooting Luritja people around Kings Canyon. The Watarrka mob were sitting down there and policemen came and shot them. Just like that. My father told me that."

Luritja people suffered greatly during pastoral settlement.



Pastoral activity severely reduced food, animal and foraging resources, effectively displacing people from their country. Areas such as *Wanmarra* (Bagot Springs), *Lilla* (Reedy Rockhole) and *Watarrka* (Kings Canyon) were especially affected. Some people eventually obtained work on pastoral leases but many moved further away from their traditional lands.

The people who survived these times found themselves living in a wide range of towns, missions and camps throughout the central region, including Hermannsburg, Alice Springs and Jay Creek. Today, Traditional Owners of the Park reside on or in its vicinity. They live at Ulpanyali, Lilla, Wanmarra (on the Park) and at Ukaka, Akanta and Imanpa (outside the Park). Others live at Areyonga and Hermannsburg as well as at Mutitjulu.

Traditional Owners are looking forward to the new opportunities afforded by joint management and regaining title to their land. They are keen to be involved in all management programs on the Park and spend time on country to pass on important knowledge to young people, each other and Park staff.



Traditional Owners are committed to making joint management work for the future of their families.

The Parks and Wildlife Service of the Northern Territory

The Parks and Wildlife Service is a division of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment the Arts and Sport. It is a field-based organisation with approximately 120 Park rangers supported by scientific, planning, management and administration staff. The Service is dedicated to conserving the natural and cultural values of parks while providing high-quality nature-based tourism and recreation opportunities for visitors. The Service is committed to engaging the public and working with the interests of the community.

The Territory's park system includes 87 parks and reserves covering nearly 4.7 million hectares. Parks provide a vital contribution to biodiversity conservation and the social and economic well-being of the Territory.

The Service has entered an exciting new era. Joint management arrangements now apply in Territory law to a third of the parks estate. The Service is building on valuable lessons learned from joint management at Garig, Nitmiluk and Tnorala (Gosse Bluff). They are responding with new ways of thinking, training and other programs to develop rangers' capacity to be effective joint managers.

The Parks and Wildlife Service is committed to seeing that joint management partnerships grow and become truly equitable and that Traditional Owners benefit culturally, socially and economically from joint management.

This draft Joint Management Plan has been developed by the joint management partners in a very positive spirit. Like the Traditional Owners of the Park, the Parks and Wildlife Service is optimistic about the future.

The Service is developing its capacity as an effective joint management partner.



2. Governance – making joint management work

“Working together and supporting each other.”

- Traditional Owner

Introduction

Joint management is about Traditional Owners and the Parks and Wildlife Service working together to “look after country properly – both partners, both ways.” This includes solving problems together, sharing decisions and exchanging knowledge and expertise.

This section of the Plan sets out a governance framework for the Park and describes how the partners will organise themselves to work towards their vision. The partners refer to this process as “staying on the straight road.” It also addresses the business of operational planning and managing resources to support the implementation of actions identified in this Plan.

Important joint management activities include indigenous employment, training and enterprise development. Business management activities include administration of permits and commercial operations and stakeholder engagement.

Checking progress and satisfaction of the partners against the aims of this Plan is integral to improving and building effective joint management. Monitoring and evaluation is therefore addressed in this section.

Joint management of the Park will be consistent with this Plan and:

- *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act.*
- *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act;*
- *Aboriginal law associated with Watarrka National Park;*
- *Bushfires Act (NT)*
- *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act;*
- *Heritage Conservation Act (NT);*
- *ICOMOS ‘Burra Charter’;*
- *Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA);*
- *Lease of the Park to the NT Government;*
- *Native Title Act;*
- *NT Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act.*

Principles for Effective Governance

- Decision-making and accountability should be equally shared.
- Time spent together on country is important for developing mutual trust, respect and understanding between the partners.
- Indigenous decision-making processes must be respected.
- Management priorities will be guided by the Park's key values.
- Planning and decision-making must incorporate risk identification and minimisation.
- Engagement and employment of Traditional Owners in management operations is central to joint management success.
- Resources are limited and must be efficiently used.
- Joint management has to be checked to see that it is working well. It is important to keep improving.
- Public support for joint management is very important.

2.1 Planning and Decision-making

“Ngura and Tjukurpa are number one – follow that one.”

- Traditional Owner

Background

Joint management provides opportunities to make better management decisions based on a combination of indigenous principles and western approaches to land management. For the purpose of this Plan, “governance” means how the partners organise themselves to work together towards their shared vision for Watarrka. It includes all aspects of partnership, communication, planning and decision-making.

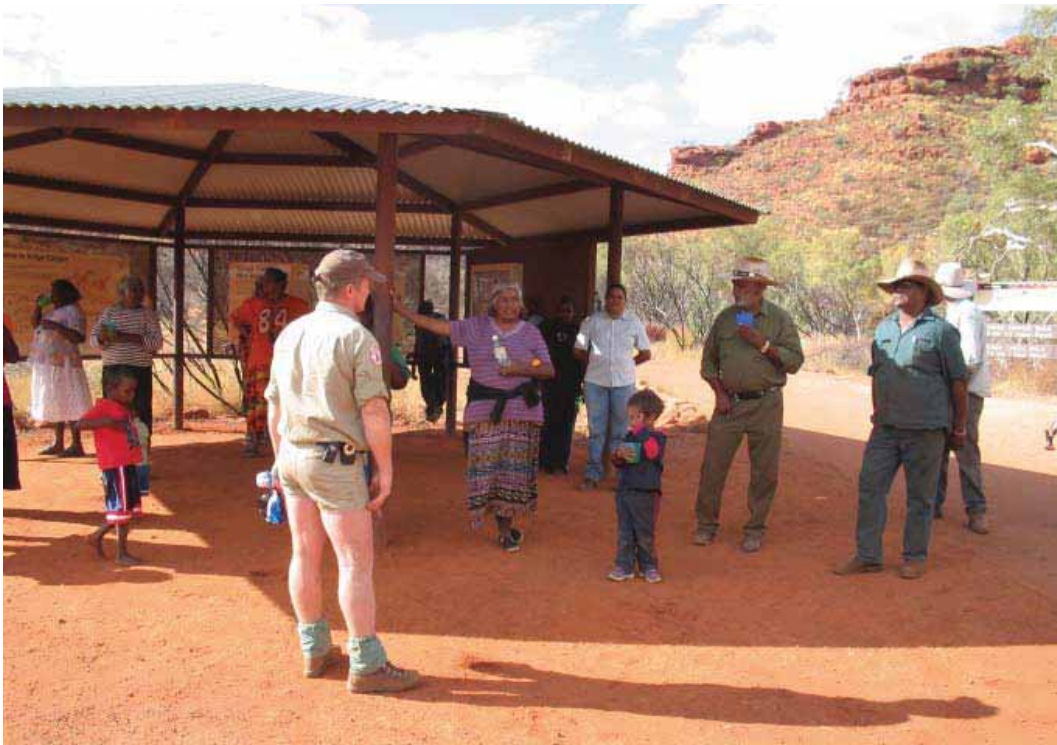
A Partnership Approach

A positive working relationship based on mutual understanding and respect is essential for joint management and decision-making. Traditional Owners use the term “ngapartji – ngapartji” to describe this reciprocal, co-operative approach to joint management.

The partners recognise the need for relevant training to build effective governance. Traditional Owners are willing to teach rangers and visitors cross cultural skills, language and Aboriginal land management techniques. Rangers are prepared to share their knowledge of planning, budgeting, organisational structures and resource management with Traditional Owners.

Working in a cross-cultural environment requires mutual trust and respect as well as clear communication at all levels. A shared understanding of *ngura* (country), *tjukurpa* (law and culture) and indigenous decision-making principles are fundamental to making good joint management decisions.

Both Traditional Owners and rangers talk about “looking after country” but each sees this in somewhat different ways. What Traditional Owners perceive as maintaining country and what they value (law and culture, extended family), may not correlate precisely with protecting the Park from weeds, fire and feral animals. Respecting this difference and committing to understanding each others concepts of “caring for country” will make for a strong relationship and provide the basis for effective governance and joint management of the Park. This will best be achieved by the partners spending time together on the Park, engaging in two-way learning.



Time together on country is important for building relationships and mutual understanding.

Sharing information and asking permission are fundamental to successful joint management. Parks employees are required to have a sound understanding of cultural protocols relating to:

- Decision-making: The usual protocol among Luritja people is to consult and ask the appropriate senior people of a landholding group about issues relating to their country. Under traditional Aboriginal law, senior male and female *nguraritja*³ and their main *ngura kutju ngurara*⁴ have the authority and knowledge to make decisions on behalf of their group. Both must be consulted in relation to issues affecting their country or *ngura*.
- Accessing country: Visitors, including Aboriginal people from other language groups, must let Traditional Owners know when they are coming and where they want to stay on country. Under Aboriginal law it is proper, even when the issue is trivial, to ask, acknowledge and consult core members of a landholding group.

Significant and restricted areas occur throughout the Park. Many of these places were and are not accessed by all Traditional Owners due to religious practices or were entered with great care and respect observing strict rituals. In the course of colonisation over the last century, many of these areas have been violated, a fact with which many Traditional Owners today are not reconciled.

- Information sharing: While many aspects of Luritja sacred narratives are public other aspects are restricted, pertaining to men's only or to women's only religious practices. This type of information, according to traditional law and custom, should not be heard by anyone other than senior and initiated people. When talking publicly about country Luritja people will always request the presence of other people with traditional ties to land or refer to them.
- Use of language: Traditional Owners consider it not only to be courteous to use the language of a country when residing or visiting it, but also lawful under traditional law. When the partners talk to each other, the use of plain English and *Luritja* (a Western Desert language) will assist with clarity, understanding and respect between the partners. The use of an interpreter is important for clear communication and understanding between all parties, especially in relation to decision-making.

During the planning process, a Traditional Owner said: "It's important for us to get together and plan fire because it's a Park and [Aboriginal] people can't just go out and burn when they need to, like on Aboriginal land." This powerful statement demonstrates cross-cultural awareness, leadership and the willingness, understanding and respect required from each of the partners for successful joint management.

3. Luritja people refer to people belonging to a certain country as *nguraritja*. *Nguraritja* means 'belonging to country', 'owner/holder of land' as well as 'spirit of the land'.

4. *Ngura kutju ngurara* meaning 'people who are likely to share a camp' or 'one countrymen'. These people belong usually to a neighbouring country, a shared dreaming track or both and are notionally also *nguraritja*.

Clear Roles and Decision-making Process

The joint management partners have a legal and moral responsibility to manage Watarrka National Park together. It is important that Traditional Owners and the Parks and Wildlife Service equitably share responsibility for making decisions about the Park. A Traditional Owner describes the process as “all of us putting our answers on the table.” This infers an open, transparent approach to problem solving and making management decisions together.

Clear roles and responsibilities are essential for joint management to ensure: the values of the Park are protected; visitors continue to have a safe and enjoyable experience; stakeholders are informed and involved in decision-making; and proposals are considered in a consistent and efficient manner.

A **Joint Management Committee** (JMC) is required to ensure governance is administered equitably at the Park level of planning and decision-making. The partners have agreed to a small informal committee consisting of Parks and Wildlife staff, Central Land Council and representative Traditional Owners as the principal decision-making body for the Park. In forming the Committee, Traditional Owners said “it’s not about numbers, it’s about representation.” They have agreed to the Committee and its functions “as long as they [Aboriginal members] report back to family.”

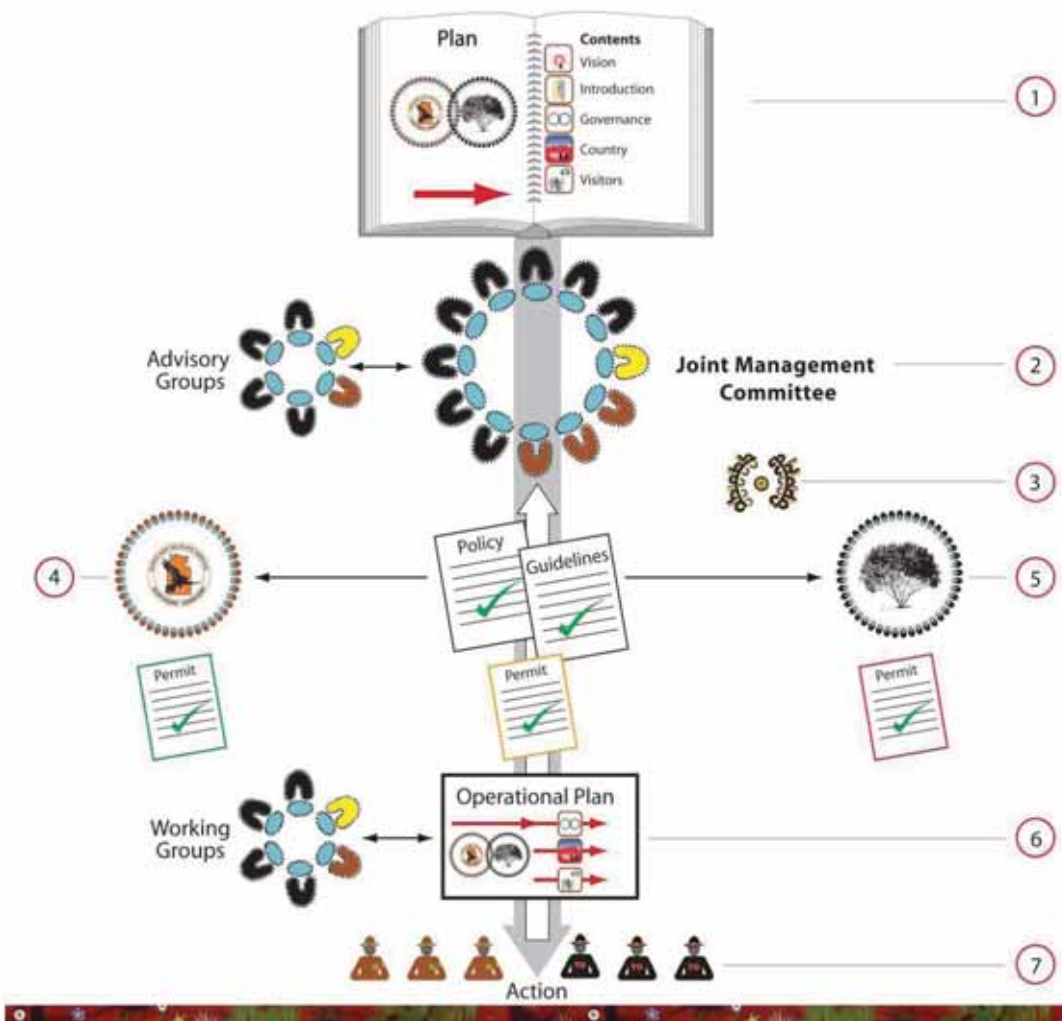
The **Parks and Wildlife Service** (PWS) resource and finance the Park’s ongoing day-to-day management including administrative functions, staffing, infrastructure and services. Parks employees are responsible to the Minister for Parks and Wildlife and the Northern Territory Government and the local Joint Management Committee.

Traditional Owners (TOs) provide essential contribution to the direction and management of the Park. Core members of landholding groups have responsibilities for decision-making and overseeing cultural protocol. Traditional Owners also have responsibilities for managing traditional knowledge and passing it on to the right people, looking after the land and its resources, maintaining sacred sites and keeping the country alive. Traditional Owners are responsible to the land, their law and culture.

Central Land Council (CLC) is an independent statutory body created under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act*. The *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act* defines the CLC’s role as representing and protecting the interests of the Traditional Owners in relation to the Park’s management, in particular to: represent and support Traditional Owners’ interests and facilitate consultations; assist with monitoring joint management processes and; facilitate resolutions between Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife, if needed.

Decision-making structures aim to incorporate indigenous decision-making principles and streamline the process (see **Figure 2**). Traditional Owners have requested that they are involved in all aspects of Park management, including operational planning. They want to be involved in making decisions at the same level as the Chief District Ranger. The Chief District Ranger has the responsibility for decisions relating to permit applications and approving annual Operational Plans.

Figure 2: How Shared Decision-making and Planning Will Work.



Shared decision making and planning

- 1 Joint Management Plan**
An agreement between the Joint Management Partners about managing the Park together.
- 2 Joint Management Committee**
A representative decision making body that will meet twice a year to: approve local policies and guidelines to guide decision making; approve annual Operational Plans and; approve special permits with input from **Advisory Groups**, as needed.
- 3 Central Land Council**
Central Land Council is responsible for consulting with and protecting the interests of Traditional Owners.
- 4 Parks and Wildlife Service**
Senior Park Staff will approve standard permits that require no special access and are consistent with Traditional Owners' wishes.
- 5 Traditional Owners**
The full Traditional Owner group will be consulted for large, complex and culturally sensitive permits, or those that cannot be approved by the Joint Management Committee.
- 6 Operational Plans**
Annual plans which set out activities agreed by the Joint Management Partners, reviewed each year. Small **Working Groups** of interested Traditional Owners and Parks staff will develop policies, guidelines and information as needed.
- 7 Action**
Rangers and Traditional Owners carry out agreed management under the Joint Management Plan and Operational Plan.

Monitoring Joint Management and Building Effective Governance

The Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife Service know that the partnership will need to keep growing and improving through commitment and new skills in governance. Monitoring the partnership and progress against the aims in this Plan is important to build effective joint management and a strong partnership. Since 2007, the partners, with assistance from the Central Land Council, have been working with Charles Darwin University to develop a participatory monitoring and evaluation process that will help the partners build strong governance over time.

Aims

- Effective governance through a committed and effective partnership based on strong communication and understanding between Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife Service staff.
- Partners that are satisfied with the processes and outcomes of joint management.

Management Directions

2.1 Joint Management Committee – a committee consisting of three PWS staff member, one CLC staff member and a core group of representative Traditional Owners (living inside and outside the Park) will be established as the principal decision-making body for the Park. The Committee will meet twice each year. The role of chairperson will be rotated. Traditional Owner committee members will be paid for their service. (High)

2.2 Making decisions – The joint management partners will share decision-making equitably and responsibly according to the framework outlined in **Table 1**. Decisions regarding operational planning and permit approvals will be made by consensus, based on the directions of this Plan, the Park Zoning Scheme, PWS policies and locally developed policy and guidelines. (Ongoing)

2.3 Dispute resolution – The joint management partners will aim to resolve disputes through open discussion and consensus at the Joint Management Committee level. However, should a dispute arise between the joint management partners which cannot be resolved, the partners will jointly appoint an independent mediator to help facilitate a decision, as outlined in the Lease. (Medium)

2.4 Supporting and building effective governance – The partners and CLC recognise that joint management will be a process of continuous learning and growth. Support and training will be provided to the partners in communication, partnership, planning and governance. The partners will be pro-active in engaging the local community and key stakeholders.

- **Governance training** – Governance training will be provided to the joint management partners to give them the tools and skills to work effectively in the partnership, with attention given to needs identified by the participatory monitoring and evaluation program. (High)
- **Professional development** – Professional standards and staff competencies will be supported by ongoing training in all aspects of Park management with special emphasis on cross-cultural training run by Traditional Owners and other providers. Kings Canyon Resort staff will be encouraged to attend locally developed cross-cultural training. See 2.9 and 3.22. (High)
- **Information exchange** – Joint Management Committee members will be responsible for two way communication with the wider Traditional Owner group, local community and key stakeholders. CLC will provide support if required. (High)
- **Performance monitoring** – A monitoring and evaluation program will be developed and will inform actions to develop effective governance. (High)
Performance will be measured annually using indicators relating to:
 - The effectiveness of the joint management partnership (including decision-making processes).
 - The implementation of annually agreed priorities.
 - Achievement towards longer-term Aims stated in this Plan relating to country, culture and visitors.

Table 1: Decision-making Framework

	Joint Management Committee	Parks Staff
Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise authority and accountability granted to it by the PWS and wider group of Traditional Owners. • Set direction for Park management programs for Parks staff to implement. See 2.5. • Endorse annual allocation of budgets to programs. • Set policy and procedure. See 2.9. • Endorse commercial and development proposals See 2.9. • Monitor and evaluate management performance. See 2.4. • Engage as necessary with other stakeholders. See 2.4. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day to day management of the Park. • Implement programs, policy and procedure as approved by the committee. • Maximise on-ground participation of Traditional Owners in management of the Park.
Types of Decisions and how they will be made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve each year operational plans relating to biodiversity, fire, feral, weeds and visitor management programs. See 2.5. • Consultation with community stakeholders and wider group of Traditional Owners as appropriate. • Committee may delegate tasks to working / advisory groups. • The wider Traditional Owner group may need to be consulted from time to time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routine activities and program implementation in line with approved. • Issue permits according to policy and procedure.

2.2 Business Operations

“More than just talk - real outcomes on the ground.”

- Traditional Owner

Background

Successful joint management is about looking after Watarrka in a way that meets the values and aspirations of both partners and the wider community. This jointly prepared Plan represents the first step towards “getting joint management right.”

Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife staff acknowledge that joint management is new to Watarrka and it may take time to build a strong partnership and effective relationships with neighbours and stakeholders.

If the partnership is working well, tangible outcomes should include healthy country, jobs and training for Traditional Owners and opportunities for authentic cultural experiences for visitors. Meaningful participation of Traditional Owners in all aspects of Park management is essential for an equitable partnership and successful joint management.

A Connected Community

Joint management provides a chance for Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife Service staff to develop a close working relationship to look after Watarrka and ensure the Park is promoted accurately and appropriately. It also provides an opportunity to raise awareness of Park management issues and encourage wider participation and co-operation amongst local landowners and stakeholders.

Watarrka National Park is in an enviable position to benefit from the rich and diverse communities that have existed within and developed around it. Local indigenous, pastoral, ranger and resort communities have a common interest to see the natural and cultural values of the Park protected for future generations. Shared responsibility for conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the Park can be encouraged by ensuring the vision for Watarrka incorporates their interests.

The size and remoteness of the Park reinforces the importance of working closely with neighbours and other stakeholders. Watarrka National Park has a number of different tenures within its boundaries. Kings Canyon Resort and the three Aboriginal Living Areas – Ulpanyali, Lilla and Wanmarra are on freehold land within the Park. Access to the Park is through Aboriginal land to the west and Kings Creek Station to the East.

Watarrka is unique as many Traditional Owners live on the Park, or in close proximity at Ukaka to the east and other outstations on surrounding Aboriginal Land.⁵ Some Traditional Owners have expressed the desire to “live on country.”

5. The Park is surrounded by Aboriginal Land including the Haasts Bluff Aboriginal Land Trust (NTP 1635) in the north, the Urrampinyi Iljtjitarri Aboriginal Land Trust (NTP 4307) in the east, the Petermann Aboriginal Land Trust (NTP 1634) to the west and by Kings Creek Station (NTP 3293) and several Aboriginal Land Trusts in the south.

This is encouraged so they can actively contribute to natural and cultural resource management at Watarrka.

There are no immediate proposals to expand the Park. The vision of a “greater park” linking Watarrka, Finke Gorge National Park and the West MacDonnell National Park has been investigated from time to time over the last three decades. Through co-operative arrangements with neighbouring Aboriginal landholders, in time such a vision may become a reality.

Effective Resource Use

Watarrka is a relatively large Park with significant natural and cultural values and high visitation. However, practically all funding for management and development is provided by the Northern Territory Government and is shared with other parks and reserves across the whole parks system. Major works and funded works programs are subject to broader government priorities. A relatively large number of service providers and government programs operate across the region. The Watarrka community can benefit from a co-ordinated, whole of government approach to program delivery.

Parks and Wildlife Service staff reside on the Park in government housing and manage Watarrka as part of a larger administrative area. They operate from a modest office and workshop that has no direct interface with the public.

An increase in staffing levels may be justified during the term of this Plan. Traditional Owners express a strong desire to have their people employed as rangers and trainees. Local employment will meet the aspirations of Traditional Owners to live and work on country, without creating a need for additional staff accommodation.

Volunteers occasionally supplement labour in the Park. The partners are keen to continue this arrangement, providing it does not reduce Traditional Owners’ work opportunities.

Both partners recognise the need for appropriate infrastructure to manage this high profile Park into the future. Plans to develop a visitor centre as a focal point for rangers and park information have been discussed over a number of years. There may be opportunities through Commonwealth tourism funding programs linked to the Red Centre National Landscape and the Red Centre Way tourism route from Alice Springs to Uluru, via Watarrka. Traditional Owners have said for many years they would like a facility at which they can display cultural information and run tourism enterprises.

Ranger work programs are based on annually developed programs for weeds, fire, feral animals, biodiversity conservation, visitors, cultural heritage and administration. Program planning will be guided by this Plan and two to five year strategies. The biodiversity protection programs developed in collaboration with Traditional Owners, should set direction for the weed, fire and feral management activity in an integrated way. Co-ordination and integration of programs into a prioritised, annual operational plan, based on protection of core values is essential to maximise resource use and efficiency.

The joint management partners have a statutory obligation to protect the values of the Park and a duty of care to Park visitors. Risk identification, assessment, prioritisation and abatement should be incorporated into annual Operational Plans.

Indigenous Work and Business Opportunities

It is vital that joint management helps support sustainable livelihoods for Traditional Owners and their families, particularly the families who reside permanently on the Park.

During the planning process, Traditional Owners clearly expressed they would like to be employed permanently by Parks and Wildlife and trained on the job. They say “we want to work with rangers and as rangers, proper way, to show visitors we can work together and support each other.” They acknowledge that training and ongoing support will be required, and that they have a responsibility to support their young people, saying “we need to talk to young ones, to support them and get them jobs and tell them where the stories are in the land.”

Whilst park specific training and employment helps Traditional Owners acquire management skills it is important to note the broader employment aspirations of Traditional Owners and their families cannot be met by joint management alone. Consequently, employment and training plans developed by the partners will need to be developed within a local and regional context and involve other groups and organisations.

Throughout the planning process, Traditional Owners have highlighted the importance of accredited training and employment for their families. They look forward to new opportunities for working on country and applying their skills and knowledge. Traditional Owners identify a range of employment opportunities they could pursue, using their ecological knowledge of the area and performing their duties towards land according to their own laws. These include: working as rangers in the Park and as community rangers, tour guiding, working at the resort, running family businesses and supervising volunteers during approved activities on the Park.

Since March 2005, Traditional Owners at Watarrka have engaged in paid project work “working side by side with the rangers, being trained up.” For participants, this flexible, project-based employment provides many benefits including work experience, skills exchange and accredited training. It also helps build working relationships between the partners. Skills gained can potentially be applied in contract work or a community ranger group servicing the Park and surrounding Aboriginal land.

Working on country opportunities may lead to service contracts for Traditional Owners.



While most maintenance on the Park is carried out by rangers, contractors are occasionally engaged for works such as cleaning, sign and facility repairs and maintenance, walking track construction and maintenance and fencing. Traditional Owners are willing to be involved in contract work. They say “If there’s work here, we want to see it going to Aboriginal people. Traditional Owners should get the opportunity to be involved in work as well as making decisions.” The Lease provides for preference to be given to local Aboriginal people and businesses applying for contract work. Where capacity is lacking, the partners will encourage interested Traditional Owners to undertake training and pursue apprenticeships, helping them gain the skills and accreditation required. Potential contracts for the Park include construction, fencing, track work, weeding, repairs, campground management and maintenance.

Watarrka National Park is a popular tourist destination and provides an excellent opportunity for Traditional Owners to present their living culture from their perspective, to visitors from all over Australia and the world. Successful Indigenous tourism ventures have operated in the past at Watarrka. Joint management and liaison with the tourism industry can assist in developing ideas identified by the partners and tourism industry, including a visitor/culture centre, an interpretive shelter, cultural tours, bush camping and Mala enclosure tours.

Permitting Special Activities

Permission is required for special access or activities including commercial activities. Permits are required under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation By-laws* for research, public gatherings, special access, commercial tours, commercial photography and aircraft landing in the Park. These permits state the rules and regulations by which permit holders must abide to ensure that their activities do not negatively affect the values of the Park.

It is important that the permit application and approvals process is clear, consistent and efficient. The zoning scheme and a process for approving permits has been developed by the joint management partners (see **2.9** and **2.12**). The Joint Management Committee will be responsible for reviewing and endorsing permits for commercial activities. Some permits may require supervision. Traditional Owners have requested that permit holders meet Park staff and Traditional Owners before commencing their activity. This will be accommodated as far as practicable.

With the approval of the joint management partners, this Plan also provides for the Northern Territory Government, as the lessee, the right to sublease or license portions of the Park for the purposes of public infrastructure. A small Telstra lease expires in 2087.

Concession permits have been issued in the past for businesses to operate in the Park. Lessees must give preference to the participation of the Aboriginal Traditional Owners of the Park in any commercial activities conducted under the Lease, subject to any applicable laws.

Research, Survey and Monitoring

Effective management decisions need good information about the Park's values, visitor use, environmental trends and the effectiveness of management actions. Most research, survey and monitoring programs are carried out as internal projects by the Parks and Wildlife Service. However, several permits are issued to external researchers each year in accordance with the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation By-laws*. Recent research permits have related to fish fossils, old growth *Callitris*, insects, rock art, water sampling and marsupial moles. Traditional Owners are interested in participating in research, survey and monitoring projects, providing their cultural and intellectual property rights are protected.

The partners are keen to engage scientists, other Aboriginal people and locals skilled in land management to complement their knowledge and skills base. Where knowledge is imparted to others, they request acknowledgement and return of the information to them for future learning.

Monitoring of visitor numbers, demographics, behaviour and satisfaction has taken place in the Park since the mid 1980s. The data gathered guides aspects of visitor management including planning and design of facilities and interpretation programs. It can also be used to inform Traditional Owners interested in developing tourism enterprises.

Two-way learning is important.



Aims

- The Directions in this Plan achieved with adequate resources used effectively and efficiently.
- Traditional Owners benefiting economically through employment and business relating to the Park.
- An improved knowledge base for strong decision-making.
- A community that is engaged in, and supportive of joint management.

Management Directions

2.5 Operational Plans – Prioritised operational plans will be developed annually based on protection of the Park’s core values and assessment of risks or threats to them. See **Table 2**. (Ongoing)

The joint management partners will have an equal role in the annual planning and review of management programs and operational plans for the Park. See **2.2**. Operational Planning will pay particular attention to:

- The vision, principles, core values, aims and directions of this Plan.
- The partners’ roles and responsibilities.
- Regional priorities, available resources and external funding options.
- Paid Traditional Owner participation in on-ground programs.
- Listening and responding to concerns raised by the partners and the public.
- Integrating management programs.
- Encouraging and supporting local business.

2.6 Financing – Parks and Wildlife will finance and resource the Park’s ongoing management including administrative functions, staff, infrastructure and services. Partnerships with private industry in provision of infrastructure and visitor services will be encouraged and considered by the partners. See **3.21**. External funding may be sought for culturally based projects of Traditional Owner interest that are not directly related to Park management. See **3.7**. (High)

2.7 Living areas, subleases and expansion of the Park – Proposals for living areas, subleases or expansion of the Park will be considered initially by the joint management partners through the Joint Management Committee. Wider consultation and full consideration of the issues will take place as appropriate. Decisions will be endorsed by the Joint Management Committee. See **3.21**. Living Areas and subleases will be subject to environmental impact assessment. (Medium)

2.8 Indigenous training, employment and enterprise development – A program for training, employment and enterprise development will be determined by the partners each year and reviewed annually, based on Traditional Owners’ interests and capacity. See **2.4**. The Parks and Wildlife Service will ensure that where it cannot directly assist, accredited training and business development support is provided to Traditional Owners through coordination with relevant agencies.

- **Direct and indirect employment opportunities** – The partners will continue to identify and provide opportunities for flexible and direct employment and training for Aboriginal people. The Parks and Wildlife Service Aboriginal ranger training schemes will provide opportunities for local people to become rangers. (High)
- **Contract services** – Traditional Owners and Aboriginal organisations they support will be preferred contract service providers where capacity to meet contract requirements is demonstrated. Other contractors providing training and employment to local Aboriginal people will be regarded favourably. Local Indigenous cross-cultural training providers will be supported. See **2.4**. (High)
- **Tourism enterprises** – Traditional Owners will continue to be encouraged to take up commercial tourism opportunities including camp fire talks, picnic area maintenance, cultural tours or other viable enterprises. Appropriate support will be provided and agencies such as the Central Land Council will assist with developing ideas and identifying service providers to help with business plans, skills and funding. The joint management partners will liaise with the tourism industry through established forums and organisations as required. See **2.11** and **3.21**. (High)

2.9 Permits – Delegated Senior Rangers can approve standard permit applications that involve an approved activity, require no special access, are low impact and in keeping with Traditional Owners wishes. The **Joint Management Committee** will approve local policies and guidelines for assessing special access or activity permits. (Ongoing)

- The Committee may be convened to consider applications if an activity or permit application involves special access or activities.

- Any proposal involving significant disturbance of new ground may be referred to the Office of Environment and Heritage to aid decision-making or set development guidelines.
- The Committee will decide if activities or proposals affecting a particular area of the Park require additional input from **Advisory Groups** based on special needs, Community Living Area and/or affiliation with country.
- Activities or proposals that are culturally sensitive, large or complex, or part of a major commercial project will require the Committee or member's delegates to fully consider all details before passing the application to the **full Traditional Owner group** for consideration.

2.10 Research, survey and monitoring

- **Scientific research, survey and monitoring** – Programs will be described in operational plans and be subject to annual review by the joint management partners. See 2.5. Participation by Traditional Owners and employment in research, survey and monitoring projects will be maximised. Indigenous knowledge components will be incorporated in project objectives and outcomes where appropriate. (High)
- **Visitor monitoring** – Visitor monitoring projects will be determined by the partners. Visitors will be counted with traffic counters or other reliable means. Qualitative surveys will be conducted at least every third year. Visitor comments sheets from the Giles Track will continue to be collected and filed. Data will be provided to the joint management partners for planning and decision-making. See 3.20. (Medium)
- **Park Reporting** – Every five years, the partners will review the implementation of this Plan and prepare a State of The Park Report, reporting on the condition of key values and recommending adaptive changes to management if appropriate. This process may also contribute to State of the Environment Reporting.

2.11 Community engagement – Neighbours and local stakeholders will be encouraged to work with the joint management partners in matters of mutual interest, planning strategically with the partners in conservation and tourism matters, resolving issues and developing opportunities including those that are related to the Park's interests, but lie outside its boundary.

- The established **volunteer** program will continue on the basis that it will not compromise or compete with Traditional Owners' aspirations or opportunities. See 3.21. (Medium)
- The partners will work with relevant agencies to ensure Park images and messages are accurate and appropriate. See 3.22. (Medium)

Table 2: An Example of Integrated Operational Planning Based on Key Values.

Main Value (sub value)	Selected Management Directions			
	Fire	Weeds	Ferals	Other
A world class tourist attraction (eg. The Kings Canyon Experience)	Reduce fuel around infrastructure. See 3.10	Control buffel grass and Mossman River Grass. See 3.11	Enforce Pets in Parks Policy. See 3.12	Develop Park Interpretation Plan. See 3.22
An internationally significant conservation area (eg. Mala Paddock)	Plan strategic breaks (high) and burn in cool months. See 3.10	Control buffel grass in priority areas. See 3.11	Monitor and maintain fencing. See 3.12	Raise public awareness of threatened species conservation with Mala tours. See 3.22
A living cultural landscape (eg. Rock Art)	Protect heritage sites. See 3.7	Reduce fuel around historical sites. See 3.10	Monitor heritage sites. See 3.7	Develop Cultural Heritage Plan. See 3.7

2.3 Zoning

Background

The Park is managed for multiple purposes, including nature conservation, protection of cultural values and provision for a range of visitor experiences. Different areas of the Park however, will be managed differently, usually with greater emphasis on one of these purposes. A zoning plan is a general summary of the purpose and focus of management for all areas of the Park based on the specific values of those areas and their level of visitor access and facility development.

Regardless of zoning, visitors require a permit for research, off-track bush walking, commercial filming and photography, aircraft landing and commercial enterprises operating on Park including tour operators and concessions. See 2.9.

The zoning plan indicates management intent at the time of this Plan’s preparation. It is not intended to be a basis for regulation of access or development and may be changed during the term of this Plan to provide for improved protection of values and/or enhancement of visitor opportunities.

Four management zones are identified for the Watarrka National Park:

- **Visitor Zone** – areas that provide for concentrated tourism experiences, while retaining unspoiled vistas and natural appearance of the Park.
- **Service Zone** – areas that provide for management infrastructure and services whilst minimising environmental impacts.
- **Conservation Zone** – areas that provide for nature/culturally-based recreational experiences requiring personal space and solitude, while sustaining natural ecological processes.
- **Special Protection Zone** – marks areas or sites of exceptional conservation and/or cultural significance. Unmarked areas may be equally sensitive but are not shown for reasons of protection. Boundaries are indicative only.

Aim

- Park values protected whilst providing for public access and enjoyment.

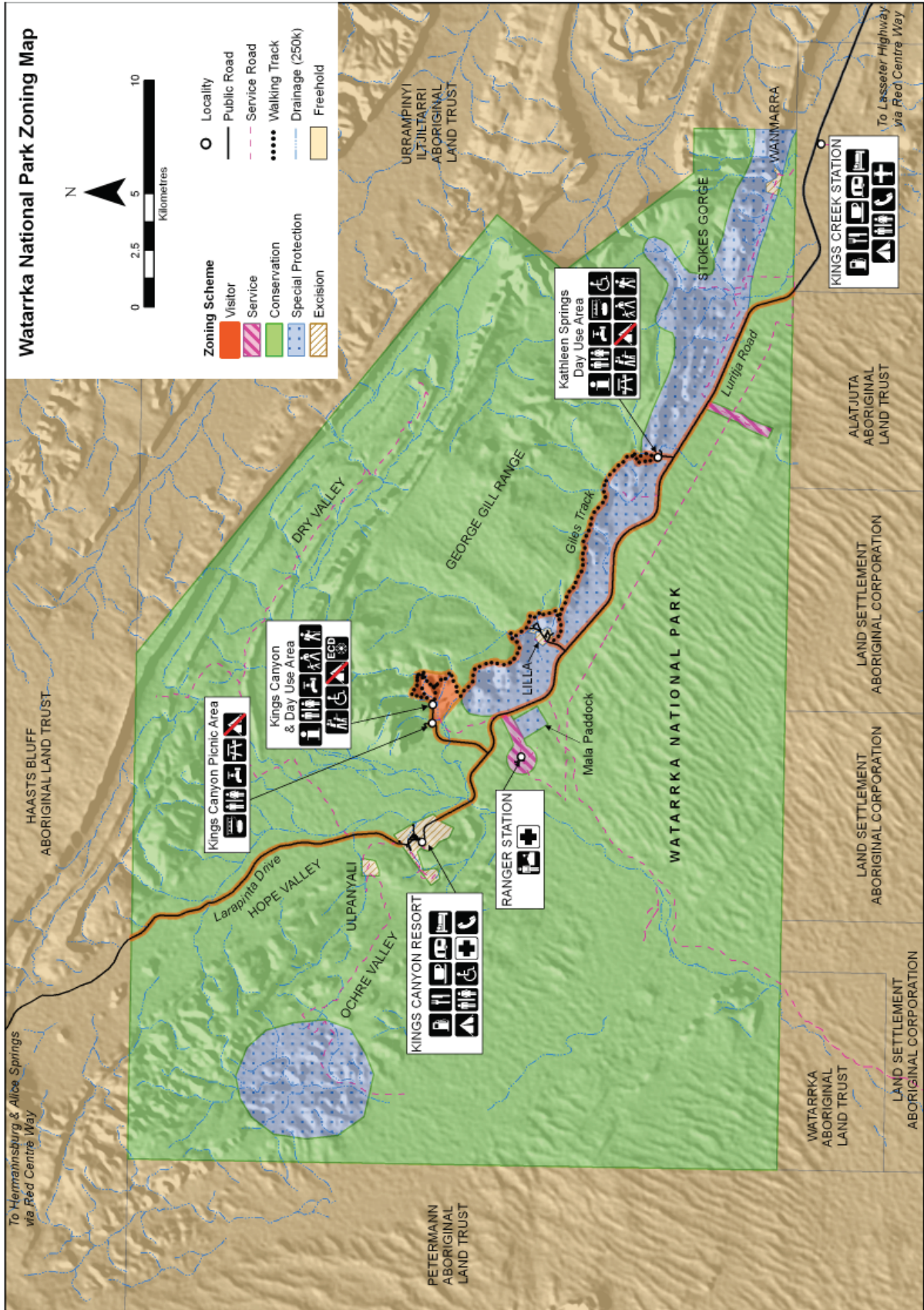
Management Directions

2.12 Zoning – Management of the Park will be in accordance with the zoning scheme outlined in **Table 3** and shown in **Figure 3**. Regardless of the designated zone all management and development will have regard to maintaining the Park's natural character and conservation values. Any new development will be subject to the approval of the partners and appropriate environmental, sacred site and cultural heritage protection measures. See **3.5, 3.6, 3.7 and 3.21**. (High)

Table 3. Zoning Scheme Summary

	Visitor Zone	Service Zone	Conservation Zone	Special Protection Zone
Purpose	Concentrated visitor use whilst minimising negative impacts.	Management infrastructure and services. Specific purpose leases eg. Telstra.	Controlled visitor use for experiencing remote undeveloped areas of the Park.	Protection of natural and cultural values.
Management Focus	Maintenance and presentation of high standard facilities, interpretation and visitor safety.	Maintenance of management facilities and services, minimising environmental impacts.	Land conservation programs; fire, weed and feral animal management. Minimising and monitoring visitor impacts.	Protection of culturally significant sites, threatened species and biodiversity hotspots from impacts of fire, weeds and feral animals.
Visitor Access	High standard access for conventional vehicles and coaches. High standard pedestrian access.	Public access for business or emergency contact only.	Overnight visitor access by permit only or in connection with approved concession.	Visitor access strictly controlled by permit only.
Visitor Activity	Orientation and interpretation, picnicking, walking, photography and nature appreciation. Overnight camping on Giles Track.	Business and emergency contact. Activities stated in a permit or lease agreement.	Self-reliant bush walking, research and commercial tourism (including bush camping) under permit.	Scientific research, survey and monitoring. Interpretation of specific values where appropriate.
Facilities	Parking areas, walking tracks, picnic facilities, shade shelters, interpretive signs, toilets, emergency facilities.	Management facilities only; office, workshop, staff residences. Facilities permitted under lease or permit.	Park management and environmental protection facilities. General provision for nature-based tourism development under terms of concession permit.	Facilities necessary to ensure protection of values, ie. Mala fence, vehicle barriers, interpretation.

Figure 3. Park Zoning Map



3. Managing the Park's Values

Watarrka National Park is valued by the joint management partners and the wider community for its internationally significant botanical diversity, rich cultural associations and dramatic scenery. This Plan encourages the joint management partners and the wider community to work together to conserve Watarrka's rich natural and cultural heritage. This section relates to the management of the Park's natural, cultural and recreational values, with particular focus on maintaining and enhancing Watarrka as:

- A living cultural landscape;
- An internationally significant conservation area; and
- A world class tourist attraction.

3.1 Managing Country

“We need to be working on and looking after the land - together.”

- Traditional Owner

Introduction

Joint management brings a new way of looking at managing country. Under customary law, Aboriginal people and land are seen as one, and country is defined by sites and dreamings not as clearly bound entities. Traditional Owners of Watarrka have an obligation to protect and maintain their ancestral homelands within the Park and beyond its boundary.

Laws laid down in the *Tjukurpa* or dreaming require Traditional Owners to respect the land and spirits that dwell on and in the land by performing ceremonies on country and passing religious and ecological knowledge onto their descendants. Caring also entails visiting and watching the country, moving appropriately on it, and passing knowledge about the land and its ecological resources onto family.

Caring for country in a joint management context requires cross-cultural awareness and shared information, to ensure that country is looked after properly in a way that involves “both partners, both ways – making decisions and working together on country.”

Principles for Managing Country

- Managing country means working together on country and managing natural and cultural values together.
- Management should protect and enhance Park values.
- Management of cultural knowledge and sites is the responsibility of Traditional Owners.
- Impacts of wildfire, weeds and feral animals should be minimised.
- The Burra Charter provides sound guidance for cultural heritage conservation.

3.1.1 Cultural Heritage Values

“Respect our ancestor’s country.”

- Traditional Owner

Background

The heritage values of Watarrka National Park are a combination of the physical landscape overlain with a rich layer of tangible and intangible cultural attributes. The Park contains a large number of comprehensive archaeological sites and several historical sites. When combined, these remind us of at least 13,500 years of human occupation, adaptation and innovation.

Prescribed Aboriginal Archaeological Places and Objects on the Park are protected under the *Northern Territory Heritage Conservation Act*. The majority of sites are relatively undisturbed and located in remote areas of the Park, inaccessible to the public. Several sites are considered significant, however there has been no proper assessment of their significance and heritage value, especially their significance to relevant Traditional Owners. It is important that archaeological sites are protected from visitor impacts and historical sites conserved until their heritage value is determined.

A Living Cultural Landscape

To the Luritja people, the entire Park and its surrounds are a cultural landscape vested with spiritual significance. Under the laws from the Tjukurpa, the Traditional Owners of Watarrka National Park are responsible for country and are obliged to maintain and protect it.

Many Traditional Owners of Watarrka reside on three Community Living Areas located within the Park’s boundaries. They and others living elsewhere continue to visit, camp and teach regularly on the Park. They maintain the integrity of their land by following and teaching religious and ecological knowledge from the Dreaming to their descendants. Children continue to learn how to hunt and gather bush foods, the names of places, where to go, how to behave on the country of their ancestors and are inducted gradually into the songs and rituals of the Tjukurpa.

To ensure that the country is properly cared for, they continue to hold ceremonies and attend meetings for spiritual and secular purposes relating to the area. Ceremonies, including initiation ceremonies, are held regularly to ensure the transmission of geographical and spiritual knowledge to the next generation. Restricted ceremonies are occasionally held on important sites within the Park.

Under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*, Traditional Owners have the right to hunt wildlife and gather bush foods and medicines. People continue to gather seasonal plant foods, small game, medicines, ochre and wood and to hunt kangaroos, emus and goannas on the Park.

Hunting and gathering are important activities for maintaining connection to country and passing knowledge on. As a Traditional Owner has described it: “everything is special; trees, animals, hunting and waterholes. We know we’re connected to country when we are hunting and collecting bush medicine, passing knowledge on through hunting, gathering and making tools.”

Arguli or bush plum is an important bush food that has great cultural significance.



Keeping Culture Strong

Access to the land and its resources is critical for Traditional Owners to exercise their responsibilities in relation to land, law and culture. They say “we need access for traditional uses. We want to camp and be able to bring kids.” Traditional Owners have access to all areas of the Park and have agreed to hunt away from the Visitor Zone and to minimise off-road driving. Ceremonial activities may require parts of the Park to be temporarily closed.

Joint management can provide opportunities for the transfer of knowledge to younger generations and rangers. Traditional Owners are willing to share information with rangers and the public to improve management of Aboriginal cultural sites and resources and to foster improved understanding of Aboriginal culture.

Passing knowledge on is important for keeping culture strong.



Rich Rock Art Assemblages

Rock shelters, caves and creek banks associated with the George Gill Range harbour a wealth of flaked stone artefacts, wooden implements, seed grinding implements and human remains. However, it is the rock art assemblages that are particularly rich, recording a long history of Aboriginal occupation and the arrival of Europeans to the region. They display a wide range of techniques including: stencils, dry pigment drawings, paintings, incised grooves and engravings.

Preliminary assessments suggest a few art sites to be significant at a national level for their style and several others for the European – Aboriginal influence (Ross 2003). Rock art studies at Watarrka have identified changes in media, technique, graphic structure and frequency of production associated with the arrival of Europeans (Frederick 1997, 1999). Pre-contact and contact rock art assemblages highlight the transitional nature of the contact process and reflect a “dynamic society engaged in a process of interaction and exchange” (Frederick 1999: 140)

A program to locate and record all art sites in the Park is well advanced. Over 170 art sites and 4,000 individual motifs across the Park have been identified and recorded and now require entry onto a Cultural/Historic Sites spatial database. It is essential that the right Aboriginal people access, control and manage these sites and information relating to them. Traditional Owners have expressed interest in re-painting some faded rock art, and working with, and learning about rock art preservation techniques from rock art specialists.

Visitor impacts pose the biggest risk to art sites, reinforcing the need to ensure visitors are educated, stay on walking tracks and understand the penalties that apply if sites are damaged. Fortunately, most sites are remote and difficult to access however, a site near the western end of the Giles Track has been irreparably damaged by the public. In the past, Traditional Owners of Lilla ran a cultural tourism venture that enabled visitors to safely view rock art. Similar ventures are encouraged.



Watarrka has been home to the Luritja people for many thousands of years.

Cultural Heritage Clearances

It is important to Traditional Owners that significant places, rock art and archaeological material in the Park are protected. These are vitally important cultural assets of the Luritja people. They also have high cultural value to the broader community. The *Heritage Conservation Act* gives specific protection to archaeological places and objects in the Northern Territory. Archaeological site clearance must be sought for any works, including conservation, to prescribed archaeological sites in the Park. Sacred site clearances should also be sought for all archaeological sites on the Park.

Sacred Sites

The Park contains many places of spiritual significance associated with dreaming trails that traverse the Park, linking the area culturally to places far away. Sixteen sites within the Park have been recorded by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA) as either “registered sites” or “recorded sites” according to their significance to Traditional Owners. Regardless of their classification, both are afforded the same level of protection.

Sacred sites are particular foci for culturally significant songs, dances, stories and knowledge, which are all an intrinsic part of Traditional Owners’ ways of identifying and connecting to country. These places are not accessed by all Traditional Owners due to religious practices, or are entered with great care and respect, observing strict rituals.

Traditional Owners pass on knowledge of sacred sites to the next generation during bush trips. They say “knowledgeable people pass information onto young people so they know about sacred sites and where to go, where not to go.”

Since European settlement, some sites have been compromised by visitors. It is possible that Traditional Owners may ask that this should be acknowledged and special respect requested from visitors at certain places on the Park. However, it remains critical that Parks staff and visitors understand the significance of sacred sites and behave respectfully in relation to all country in the Park.

Sacred Site Clearances

Protection for places that are of cultural significance in the Northern Territory is afforded under overlapping legislation. The Commonwealth *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (N.T.) 1976* (ALRA) gives legal recognition to areas which that Act terms “sacred sites” and defines as:

“a site that is sacred to Aboriginals or is otherwise of significance according to Aboriginal tradition, and includes any land that, under a law of the Northern Territory, is declared to be sacred to Aboriginals or of significance according to Aboriginal tradition”. The ALRA makes it an offence to enter or remain on land that is a sacred site.

Complementary Northern Territory legislation, the *Northern Territory Sacred Sites Act 1989* (NTASSA) also provides protection for all sites that fall within the scope of this definition. This protection is generally provided in the form of an Authority Certificate from the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA) in response to land use proposals. It means that the traditional Aboriginal owners have an enforceable right to say who enters their sacred sites, and what cannot happen on their sacred sites. Illegal entry, works on or use of a sacred site is an offence.

Strong joint management will ensure that sacred sites are protected in accordance with Traditional Owners' wishes. Under the *Aboriginal Land Right Act* the Central Land Council has a specific function to “assist Aboriginals in the taking of measures likely to assist in the protection of sacred sites” and under its established procedures will carry out this role in facilitating joint management.

Exploration and Colonisation Links

The Ernest Giles expedition of 1872 was the first European party to pass through the area, camping at several locations and naming prominent features including the George Gill Range, Carmichael Crag and Kings, Penny, Stokes and Bagot Creeks. Gosse passed through the following year and the Horn Scientific Expedition visited in 1894.

Tangible evidence of early European history is an important part of the region's heritage. The Park contains a small number of historic sites, directly associated with exploration, pastoralism and early tourism in Central Australia. Unfortunately, only a small amount of evidence exists today including:

- A rock cairn and the remains of a blaze⁶ made by Winnecke in 1894.
- Traces of a 1920s stock camp at Kings Creek and yards and other infrastructure at Reedy and Bagot Creeks dating approximately 1920 and 1940 respectively. The remains of yards are also found at Stokes and Kathleen Creeks.
- A well sunk by Billy Lang on Johnny's Creek in the 1930s.
- A wooden bridge on the top of the Canyon, constructed in 1963 by Jack Cotterill, the first tour guide at Watarrka.
- Discarded drill heads and bore casings north of the range from early oil exploration in the region, prior to the Park being declared.

6. The blaze has been held in storage by the Museum of Central Australia since 2000.

Winnecke's Cairn is one of the few tangible reminders of the early explorers.

Photo: © R. Gregory 2008.



Site Assessment and Protection

Although Pearce (1985) reported several sites as having historical significance, these sites have not been properly documented, or assessed for significance and heritage value in accordance with Burra Charter processes. The partners are required to consult with NT Heritage Officers and seek cultural heritage clearance for any proposed works at those sites.

Sustained connection to country means that Traditional Owners have detailed historical knowledge of the region's past, including interactions between the Luritja and European settlers. Significance of sites to relevant Traditional Owners should be incorporated as part of the site documentation and assessment process. This knowledge could also be of interest to visitors.

Fire and flooding are the main threat to historic sites within the Park. Damage by stock or rabbits, human interference, vegetation growth and termite damage are examples of other threatening processes. Sites should be properly documented and conserved until their significance is clarified.

Aims

- Significant sites and people's intellectual property protected.
- Traditional Owners fulfilling their cultural obligations.
- Indigenous knowledge, skills and experiences incorporated into management programs for the Park.
- Historic sites on the Park properly documented, assessed and conserved as appropriate.

Management Directions

3.1 Culturally sensitive areas – The PWS will uphold restrictions and guidelines for sacred sites and culturally sensitive areas of the Park as directed by Traditional Owners or the CLC as their representatives. (High)

3.2 Aboriginal cultural business – The PWS will respect Traditional Owners' advice and directions relating to cultural matters and customary obligations. These include; restricting access for ceremonial purposes, respecting their need to access country, maintain traditions, and respecting men's and women's sites' different management considerations. Access restrictions for cultural purposes are unlikely to affect the main visitor areas. Ample notice will be given to the public regarding temporary closures. See **3.18**. (High)

3.3 Traditional hunting and gathering – Rights in relation to hunting and harvest of plant materials and ochre from the Park for traditional purposes will extend only to Traditional Owners. Impacts will be reviewed every six months when the Joint Management Committee meets and if warranted, hunting activity changed by mutual agreement. A hunting and gathering policy will be developed by the Joint Management Committee and approved by all Traditional Owners. See **3.14**. (High)

3.4 Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) – Traditional Owners will retain ownership and control of their cultural and intellectual property consistent with policy agreed between the CLC and the Parks and Wildlife Service. (High)

3.5 Sacred site clearances – The Central Land Council will have sacred site clearance responsibility for all proposed work on the Park. However the joint management partners may agree from time to time that a proponent may require an Authority Certificate under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act*, issued by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority. (Ongoing)

3.6 Cultural heritage clearances – Clearance will be sought under the *Northern Territory Heritage Conservation Act* for works to prescribed Aboriginal Archaeological Places and Objects in the Park as well as any significant development requiring soil disturbance. Sacred site clearances through the CLC will also be sought for works to any archaeological sites on Park. See 3.5. (Ongoing)

3.7 Cultural heritage management – The joint management partners will develop a cultural heritage management program and guidelines for the Park. Parks and Wildlife Service resources will support Traditional Owners’ cultural interests and aspirations directly when appropriate and where they can be easily incorporated into existing management activities, without the need for additional resources. See 2.6. The partners and the Central Land Council will work together to identify other supporting resources if required. The cultural heritage program will provide for:

- “Back to Country” activities providing opportunities for the partners to spend time on country together, facilitating transmission of cultural knowledge and skills between Traditional Owner families, to the younger generation and to the rangers, as appropriate. The program will be supported by CLC. (Medium)
- Archaeological and historic site assessment. Sites will be properly documented and assessed for their significance and heritage value, incorporating significance to relevant Traditional Owners where appropriate. The Burra Charter principles and process will guide this assessment. (Medium)
 - Existing cultural heritage information will be consolidated and entered into the Cultural/Historic Sites Register.
 - Research, including recording oral histories and Indigenous knowledge, will be encouraged where resulting knowledge is expected to contribute to site assessment. Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property will be protected as per 3.10.
 - Sites of significance will be submitted for nomination to the NT Heritage Register under the *Northern Territory Heritage Conservation Act*. Conservation strategies and scopes of works will be developed for these sites. Conservation works will be subject to Territory wide prioritisation and funding.
 - Sites may be interpreted for the public, with the permission of the partners.
- Archaeological and historic site conservation. Sites will be maintained until they can be properly assessed for their significance and heritage value. (High)

- Sites containing rock art and wooden artefacts will be protected as part of the annual Fire Management Plan. See 3.9.
- Winnecke's blaze will remain at the Museum of Central Australia until it can be appropriately displayed at the Park.
- The partners will aim to monitor 10% of sites per year, effectively visiting all known sites over the term of this Plan. Priority will be given to sites deemed by the partners as most valuable or most at risk.
- Training will be provided for Traditional Owners in cultural site management including rock art preservation techniques.
- Archaeological sites may be made accessible to the public provided they are adequately protected.

3.1.2 Natural Heritage Values

“This place is special in many different ways.”

- Traditional Owner

Background

Watarrka National Park is defined by its dramatic landscape, especially that of the George Gill Range and its wild and stunning vistas. The Park's 105,700 ha of unique geology and catchments support a rich and rare diversity of habitats and species, making it a priority for biodiversity conservation in the Northern Territory's protected area estate.

The Park contains elements of starkly contrasting environments; the complex habitats of both the George Gill Range and the surrounding sandplains and dunefields. Over the ages, water has worn deeply incised creeks throughout the main Range, forming sheltered environments conducive to the survival of fragile plant and animal communities. These environments are found both across the top of the Range and along its base. The waterholes of the gorges are vital to these communities and the scientifically valuable aquatic invertebrates living in them.

Watarrka National Park has natural and ecological values of international significance. Their viability for long-term protection is relatively high due to the Park's large area and the fact that it is one of only a few parks in the Northern Territory that contains the upper catchments of major creek systems. This has especially positive implications for control of weeds management and threatened species programs, including reintroductions.

A Dramatic and Ancient Landscape

Scenic Character and Landscape

The Park's unspoilt, rugged and spectacular landscape draws thousands of visitors each year. In 2008, some 215,000 people from around the world visited the Park which features some of the most unusual and spectacular rock formations in Central Australia, in particular the sheer sided Kings Canyon itself and the sandstone dome formations on the George Gill Range. Carmichaels Crag at the western end of the Range creates a lasting impression on all visitors. South of the range are extensive dunefields containing fine, large stands of desert trees such as Desert Oak, Eucalypt and Mulga.

Geology

The Park's distinctive landforms have developed from a long and complex geomorphological history. The Park's regional geological setting is the Amadeus Basin, an intra-continental depression that filled with sediments that now form the foundation of this land. The Cambrian age Cleland Sandstone is the oldest sequence, overlain by the Goyder Formation laid down from 515 to 505 million years ago (mya). Overlying this is the Cambro-Ordovician Larapinta Group (505-435 mya) that includes the Carmichael Sandstone (445-435 mya). This in turn is overlain by the Ordovician-Devonian Mereenie Sandstone (440-360 mya). The entire sequence was gently folded, faulted and jointed some 400 to 300 mya during the Alice Springs Orogeny, the mountain-building event that created the Central Ranges. An extensive period of erosion has produced the landscape seen today.

Marine fossils are a reminder of incredible environmental change over time.

Photo: © Barritt & May 2008.



The most obvious rock type in the Kings Canyon area is sandstone. The lower rubble part of the Canyon cliff face is composed of red-light brown Carmichael Sandstone, which has obvious ripple marks, cross bedding and *cruziani*, the fossilized tracks of a creature similar in appearance to a Moreton Bay Bug. This strata is capped by an impervious layer of thin purple shale or mudstone that effectively traps water in the overlying Mereenie Sandstone. The white Mereenie Sandstone is typically cross-bedded and ripple-marked and features very rare fossilized worm trails. Jointing in this almost vertically sided sandstone has contributed to fascinating erosion features such as the domes on top of the range. It is the ability of this rock to hold water that sustains the permanent springs and rockholes associated with the George Gill Range.

Relict Springs

Surface waters are scarce in the arid climate of Central Australia. Springs of the George Gill Range are of special interest because they represent a significant group within the Central Ranges and are relatively pristine. The Range is the catchment for a number of creeks including Kings, Reedy, Kathleen, Stokes and Bagot Creeks.

Along the top of the range, these creeks are incised rocky channels that contain numerous rockholes that hold water long after rain. Along the base of the range they have permanent spring-fed waterholes. White et al (2000) identifies four waterhole areas on the Park as nationally significant based on the presence of plant species of high conservation value. These include the waterholes of Kings Canyon, Reedy Creek, Wallaby Gorge (near Lilla) and Penny Springs. Three others of bioregional significance are Bagot Springs, Stokes Creek and Kathleen Springs.



*Waterpenny are an important indicator of relict springs.
Photo: © Barritt & May 2008.*

Penny Springs and Stokes Creeks have very high ecological and evolutionary importance. Permanently fed by discharging groundwater along the base of the Range, they contain the most species-rich waterbodies of this type in the Central Ranges. Species of high conservation value such as mosses, ferns and aquatic macroinvertebrates including the waterpenny (*Sclerocyphon fuscus*) are found in these areas.

Waterpennys appear to be relictual stream fauna that have persisted since the interior of Australia was much wetter than it is today (Davis, 1997). Two invertebrate species collected from sheltered waterholes show specialised habitat requirements also characteristic of wetter climates. These are a Dragon-fly known from the Murray-Darling system and a Damsel-fly known from the Pilbara area.

Home To Many Rare Species

The flora and fauna of the area was first comprehensively described in 1981, prior to acquisition of land that is now the Park. The study confirmed the area to have the richest assemblage of plants of all the national parks in Central Australia (Latz et al 1981). Subsequent surveys, notably a land resource assessment in 1994 and biophysical mapping that commenced in 1998, have added a wealth of information to the Park's biological knowledge base. Systematic fauna survey and targeted monitoring of aspects of the 16 vegetation communities identified in the Biophysical Mapping project is a priority.

Native Plants

Watarrka National Park is one of the most important areas for the conservation of plants in Central Australia. Since the Park was declared, vegetation communities have been well documented, but further ecological study of rare and threatened species is needed to understand their management requirements.

Chenopod communities are poorly represented in the Park system.



Of about 2000 plant species recorded in Central Australia, 691 species have been confirmed within the Park with NT herbarium records and reliable data from the Biophysical Mapping program (Duguid et al, 2008). This figure represents approximately one third of the total species recorded for the southern part of the Northern Territory.

The Park's botanical richness is due to the coincidence of several geologically distinct Bioregions within the park. The different geological formations of the MacDonnell Ranges, Finke and Great Sandy Desert Bioregions have produced extensive clay plains, sand plains and dunes and sandstone ranges. These vastly different habitats each have their own distinct groups of plant species. Areas with some of the highest concentrations of species can be attributed to the diverse rock types underlying the sandstone ranges, which are exposed on the steep slopes. The same underlying formations are also the sites where occur the perennial springs which support another diverse group of plants which rely on permanent moisture.

Four communities are considered poorly represented in the reserve system. They include: the sparse Chenopod shrubland communities on the low hills and plains west and north of the George Gill Range; the sand dune communities associated with shallow rock and range country; the clay plains - wide clay drainages and clay pans with distinct shrub and grass species; Witchetty Bush on Silty sandstone with Black Gidgee and Spinifex.

The Park's floral diversity and high number of threatened and endemic plant species gives the Park the status of *Site of National Botanical Significance* (White et al, 2000). Several plant species of special conservation status have been recorded (Duguid et al, 2008) and are provided in **Appendix 3**. A summary of the significant flora includes:

- 1 species classified endangered at the Territory level.
- 1 species classified vulnerable at the Territory level.
- 10 species that are classified rare at the national level, and 33 species classified rare in the Northern Territory.
- 23 species whose status or distribution is poorly known.
- 28 species that have disjunct distributions, 3 species for which the local distribution is restricted to the Park.
- 14 species are known only from the Northern Territory of which 2 are endemic to Watarrka National Park.

Native Animals

The range and sand dune environments of the Park support a rich faunal assemblage. Following declaration of the Park, the number of fauna records has increased mainly from the observations of rangers and a small number of fauna surveys. More surveys are required, particularly in the poorly reserved vegetation communities and those that are more difficult to access.

To date 20 native mammal species, 126 birds, 71 reptiles, 7 frogs and 109 taxa of invertebrates have been recorded in the Park. The reptile fauna is thought to represent a scientifically important overlap between the southern sandy deserts and the central rocky ranges (Latz et al, 1981). It is likely that continuing fauna survey will see the Park confirmed as one of the richest areas for reptiles in the Australian arid zone. The aquatic invertebrate populations of the streams of the George Gill Range are considered unique and of ecological and evolutionary importance in the arid zone.

Birds are the most commonly observed fauna in the Park. Woodswallows, chats, finches, honeyeaters and native pigeons are the most commonly observed species whilst birds of prey can regularly be seen overhead. Emus and the Australian Bustard are occasionally observed in the open country of the sandplains, dunefields and flood-outs.

Dingoes are common in the Park, with their numbers frequently concentrated at artificial food sources including waste disposal sites. Nuisance dingoes have been controlled from time to time in accordance with the Parks and Wildlife Service Dingo Management Policy.

Threatened species currently known to exist on the Park include:

- Black-footed Rock-Wallaby, *Petrogale lateralis* listed as Vulnerable under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (Commonwealth) (EPBCA) and near threatened under the NT Wildlife Regulations (NTWR)
- Mala or Rufous Hare-Wallaby, *Lagorchestes hursuitus*, listed as Endangered (EPBCA) and Extinct in the Wild (NTWR). These are held in a predator proof enclosure.
- Southern Marsupial Mole, *Notoryctes typhlops*, listed Endangered (EPBCA) and Vulnerable (NTWR).
- Land Snail, *Pillomena aemula*, listed as Vulnerable (NTWR).

Endangered Itjarrijarri (marsupial mole) are being studied in the Park.

Photo: © J. Benshemesh 2008.



An Internationally Significant Conservation Area

Watarrka National Park is an important conservation area located along the boundary of the MacDonnell Ranges bioregion and the Great Sandy Desert bioregion. It is internationally significant for its natural and ecological values based on its unique botanical content, ecological diversity and endangered species management program. The Draft Northern Territory Parks and Conservation Masterplan (2006) identifies the Park as a priority site for biodiversity conservation.

The conservation status of the Park and wider area could be enhanced if links were made to existing and proposed reserves including the proposed Angas Downs and Katiti/Petermann Ranges Indigenous Protected Areas – thereby making the concept of a Greater Central Ranges National Park a reality. This proposal by the Northern Territory Government is supported by the Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM) Plan, would improve the adequacy and comprehensiveness of desert range country within the Territory's protected area system and possibly providing access to additional management resources.

Many mammals now extinct in the southern part of the Northern Territory once occurred in this region. Traditional Owners have strong connections to many of these through Tjukurpa or dreamings. In 2000 - 2001, a large predator-proof enclosure was constructed in the Park and stocked with Rufous Hare-Wallaby or Mala. These animals came from an enclosure in the Tanami Desert as part of a national species recovery plan.



A successful captive breeding program for Mala (Rufous Hare Wallaby) exists on Park.

The role of the captive population at Watarrka is to contribute to the mainland subspecies gene pool, provide animals for re-introduction and semi-captive programs and to facilitate community participation in threatened species conservation. The success of this program has supported the re-introduction of 24 Mala from Watarrka into a similar captive breeding program at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park in 2005. Biodiversity scientists and rangers conduct an annual Mala census. Traditional Owners will be encouraged to become more involved in this program.

A comprehensive understanding of habitat requirements is essential to biodiversity conservation to ensure more species do not become locally extinct. An Ecological Attributes Database has been developed to access and record ecological information on plant species requirements as they become known.

Biophysical Mapping of the Park at a scale of 1:50,000 commenced in 1998. Most of the Park has been mapped on the basis of distinct biophysical characteristics that include vegetation, soils, landforms, slope and aspect, using methods described by Pitts and Matthews (2000).

Ongoing fauna survey, monitoring of the 16 identified vegetation units and mapping of management activities can enhance management decision-making. Special attention should be given to understanding relict, endemic and threatened species ecology and requirements. The incorporation of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK) into recovery plans and threatened species management strategies is important. Working together on Park will assist with transfer of knowledge between the joint management partners.

Interpretation of biophysical data through the Park's Geographical Information System (GIS) is considered to be current best practice for biodiversity conservation. This approach enables Park managers to make better decisions in relation to flora and fauna management and to develop scientifically sound strategies aimed at reducing the impacts of fire, weeds, feral animals and humans.

Fire Management

Fire has long been part of the Central Australian environment and has played a major part in shaping the region's vegetation communities. The natural rocky barriers of the George Gill Range and a long history of Aboriginal burning practices have enabled many fire sensitive species to persist in sheltered gorges, on top of the range and in the swales of the dunefields.

Large uncontrolled wildfire represents a major threat to the Park over the longer term. In 1988, lightning started two severe wildfires that burned an estimated 75% of the Park. Both fires came from the sand dune country south of the Park and burnt most of those dune vegetation communities and some of the fire sensitive communities on the top of the George Gill Range. In 2001 to 2002, approximately 85% of the southern areas of the Park were burnt as a result of extensive wildfires.

The partners share similar views about fire management, recognising that patch burning and strategic breaks create diversity and reduce the incidence of damaging wildfires. According to Traditional Owners, they "sometimes burn in cold weather time before the rain, for bush tucker and when it gets old, to bring in the kangaroos."



Mangaertja (Quandong) is harvested by Traditional Owners for food and ornaments. It is affected by wildfires and camels. Photo: © Barritt & May 2008.

Although they are satisfied with the way rangers have managed fire during and after the wildfires. They are worried about visitors camping illegally on the Park and doing the wrong thing, especially in relation to fire, they are also worried about wildfire affecting bushtucker and lament “sometimes fire destroys bush tucker and we have to wait a long time for it to come back.”

Effective fire management involves cooperation with neighbouring landholders. The maintenance of firebreaks, prescribed burning for fuel reduction coupled with “patchy” and strategic ecological burns are the most important components of strategic fire management. Most of the Park boundary is accessible, allowing for strategic firebreaks along fencelines and effective wildfire response. Firebreaks are also maintained along vehicle tracks and natural barriers throughout the Park.

When properly managed fire is a powerful land management tool that can be used to maintain and enhance the Park’s biodiversity. Since the mid 1980s, rangers have conducted fuel reduction and ecological burns, mainly in the fire tolerant, spinifex dominated communities south of the George Gill Range.

The fire history of the Park has been recorded for several years. Detailed data on the Park’s GIS and Biophysical Mapping data is important for targeted monitoring of vegetation recovery and improving understanding of the effects of different fire regimes on various vegetation types.

Weed Management

Introduced plants pose a threat to the integrity of the Park's natural values, with the potential to displace native plant species and alter plant communities and animal populations. Twenty-eight introduced plants have been recorded in the Park, including several that are widespread throughout Central Australia (Duguid et al, 2008).

Buffel grass poses another major threat to the Park's biodiversity, mainly through increased risk of wildfire from increased fuel loads. Buffel displaces other species and depletes soils of nutrients. It has rapidly spread in the last ten years, despite considerable resources expended in its control. Methods employed have included physical removal, chemical application and burning.

The extent of infestation and ecological impact varies throughout the Park. The highest concentrations occur along watercourses and areas frequented by visitors, feral animals and stock including Kings, Reedy, Stokes and Bagot Creeks.

Biophysical Mapping information has been applied to predict the density of buffel grass and its potential impact on biodiversity. A buffel grass management strategy developed in 2008 identifies priority areas for control. See **Figure 4**. All control effort is recorded, including changes to buffel grass density and distribution to gauge the effectiveness of effort. This data becomes increasingly important over time to develop progressively more refined control strategies. Mossman River grass is also a concern in visitor areas and Aboriginal living areas within the Park. As a Class B weed landholders are required to prevent its spread.

Some introduced plants have been cultivated within Ranger residences, Aboriginal excision areas and the Kings Canyon Resort for amenity purposes. Neighbours and residents are encouraged to plant non invasive species and control weed spread.

Buffel grass is a major environmental threat to biodiversity of the Park.

*Photo: ©
Barritt & May
2008.*



Feral Animal Management

Introduced animals make a marked impact on the Park's aesthetic values, biodiversity and ecosystems. The major introduced animals recorded in the Park include camels, horses, cattle, yabbies, cats, foxes and rabbits.

Large grazing animals were largely excluded from the Park in the 1980s with strategic fencing and the active removal of horses. Camels and occasionally horses and cattle still enter the Park, particularly during dry years when camels breach boundary fences. Camels have the greatest potential to cause extensive and severe environmental impact and are becoming a major concern as their numbers increase. These animals can seriously alter and degrade native vegetation, pollute water resources, create soil erosion and may directly or indirectly introduce weeds.

Camels are mustered out of the Park or culled when their numbers warrant control. Traditional Owners have expressed that "if culling camels, the meat should be harvested." They have also said that they would prefer culls away from their view and hunting areas as "the smell makes kangaroos go too far away."

Foxes and cats are known to exist in the Park through sightings and track monitoring around the Mala enclosure. Their impacts are difficult to measure but are thought to be significant. These two predators were the main cause of failed attempts to reintroduce the Bilby, *Macrotis lagotis* to the Park in the early 1990s. There is no broadscale means of control yet developed for these animals that would not affect dingoes. The current impact of foxes on the Black-footed Rock-Wallaby population is unknown.

Rabbits have been abundant in the past but are now restricted in distribution and numbers and do not pose a significant threat to biodiversity. Some local control is necessary particularly around the Mala enclosure.



Camels frequently breach Park boundary fences and require control.

The Yabby, *Cherax destructor* was introduced many years ago to Stokes and Bagot Creeks. Studies indicate they are not impacting on relict stream microfauna (Davis et al, 1995).

A preventative education and monitoring program has commenced to guard against the accidental introduction of Big Headed Ants through plant or soil material. Bees are controlled in visitor areas.

Effective long-term control of introduced animals requires a strategic approach and commitment of resources. Removal and exclusion of large grazing animals has the most beneficial impact. Strategic fencing is very effective control providing they are well-maintained. By recording feral animal data and interpreting this with biophysical data through the Park's GIS, understanding of the nature of feral animal impacts and options for control is greatly assisted.

Managing Human Impacts

The Park zoning scheme provides a basis for managing activities within defined areas so that human activities do not compromise key natural and cultural values. See section 2.3. In zones allowing public access and facilities, land management activities need to focus on maintaining water quality, minimising soil erosion and protecting the cultural values of the Park. The streams of the George Gill Range are relatively pristine and are of high conservation value. Penny Springs and Stokes Creeks have the shadiest, coolest and most well-vegetated microhabitats containing high-value relict plant species. These sites are among the least impacted by people, cattle or feral animals and so have been zoned as special protection, restricting visitor access.

Waterholes in Central Australia are major visitor attractions, particularly in the warmer months of the year. Swimming is not promoted as a visitor activity anywhere on the Park. The only waterhole where visitors frequently swim is the Garden of Eden at the top of Kings Canyon. Testing for the presence of pathogens has been conducted when water levels are low.

The Northern Territory Government has conducted extensive investigations of the groundwater resources of the Park to determine the availability of potable water for park use, tourist development, Aboriginal excision areas and pastoral purposes. These studies indicate groundwater in abundant quantity but variable quality. The PowerWater Corporation maintain and manage several operational and monitoring bores within the Park, Kings Canyon Resort Lease and the Aboriginal excision areas.

Sewage systems within the Park include those associated with staff housing, the Sunset Viewing Picnic Area at Kings Canyon, the Canyon carpark and the Kings Canyon Resort. The Resort sewage treatment system is managed in conjunction with the PowerWater Corporation.

Visitors are encouraged to take their rubbish home. Rangers take their large rubbish to Alice Springs tip. Domestic waste is recycled or goes into landfill at the Kings Canyon Resort tip. Other rubbish tips exist at the Living Areas and are managed by an offsite Resource Centre.



Protection of significant waterholes is a management priority.

Minimising the effect of human activities on the local environment is best achieved by matching type and intensity of activity to land capability. Biophysical data can also be used to ensure threatened species and poorly represented habitats are protected. The land resources of the Park were comprehensively assessed and recommendations for their management made by Winstanley and Edgoose in 1994.

The soils of the plains surrounding the George Gill Range are unconsolidated with very shallow topsoils and are generally highly susceptible to erosion. These soil types will withstand only light development, if any and poorly sited or designed tracks or facilities are likely to create erosion. This is evident by a number of old and unofficial vehicle tracks within the Park and active gullies immediately north and west of Kings Canyon. Off road driving for hunting is a management concern for this reason.

Excavation, Mining and Exploration

From time to time, soil is removed from a small number of gravel pits in the Park for park management purposes. Several older gravel pits have been closed and rehabilitated.

The geological region around the Park is considered prospective for hydrocarbons and phosphate. Oil and low grade uranium exploration occurred prior to declaration of the Park. Traditional Owners continue to quarry ochre from an area near Ulpanyali for ceremony and medicinal purposes.

A mining Reserve from Occupation (RO 340) of 171 square kilometres centred on Kings Canyon has been in effect since 1971. The currently declared area does not adequately protect the most important values of the Park at the time of this Plan's preparation.

Aims

- The Parks natural character and aesthetic values protected.
- The most important biological values / areas protected from threats: including the springs and catchment areas most vulnerable to weeds (buffel grass), feral animals (camels) and wildfire.
- Indigenous knowledge and interests incorporated into management decisions and programs.

Management Directions

3.8 Scenery – Protection of the Park’s natural character and aesthetic values will be afforded the highest priority.

- Any development will be carefully sited and designed to be in harmony with the natural environment and significant sites, so as not to detract from the Park’s outstanding landscape and scenic values. See **3.21**. (High)
- Large stands of mature trees will be protected from wildfire. (High)

3.9 Biodiversity Conservation – Protection of the Park’s biodiversity will be a very high management priority including the integration and implementation of the Park’s biodiversity, fire, weed and feral animal programs into annual Operational Plans. See **2.5**. Particular emphasis will be placed on habitats and species vulnerable to buffel grass infestation and wildfires. See **Figure 3** and **3.11**.

- Systematic research, monitoring and recording of the Park’s biological resources, based on 16 vegetation units mapped and described by the Biophysical Mapping technique, will be a priority. See **2.10**. (High)
- At least one survey will be conducted each year during the warmer months, with the collaboration of the biodiversity scientists, Parks staff and Traditional Owners. Priority areas include the poorly surveyed Chenopod shrublands, communities on top of the range and the southern part of the Park. Surveys will collect new species for identification and research purposes and include invertebrates where possible. (High)
- Transfer and recording of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK) will be a focus of time spent together on country. Traditional Owners will retain ownership and control of their intellectual property. See **2.10** and **3.4**. (Medium)
- Annual Mala census will be conducted by the joint management partners in collaboration with departmental biodiversity scientists. (High)

- Repeatable monitoring programs will be developed and implemented for selected threatened species, taking into account relevant Species Recovery Plans. See **2.10**. Marsupial Moles, Land Snails, Bustards, Quandongs and Rock Wallabies will be priorities for monitoring programs. (Medium)
- External research projects will be encouraged. Research projects will be subject to a Research Permit in accordance with *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation By-laws*. See **2.10**. (Medium)

3.10 Fire management – The management of fire will be a high priority for protecting life, infrastructure and biodiversity from the effect of large, destructive wildfires. The Park’s biophysical databases and GIS resources will be the basis for mapping fire history, monitoring fuel loads and the effects of fire on different habitats.

- Strategic firebreaks will be created through prescribed burns mainly in fire tolerant communities. Long-term artificial fire-breaks will be maintained. (High)
- Fuel loads will be reduced around Park infrastructure and historical sites to ensure the protection of people, personal property, Park assets and heritage values. (High)
- Biophysical mapping data will be used to develop fire strategies that maintain the health and current diversity of the vegetation communities in the Park.
- Identifying and protecting Mulga and Quandong saplings recovering from the 2001-2002 wildfires will be a priority. Burns will be conducted over the cooler months and after rain. (High)
- Wildfires will be reported to Bushfires NT and action taken to control their spread whenever possible. Assistance will be given to neighbouring landholders to control wildfires that may threaten the Park and to reduce fuel loads on request. Graders and other heavy machinery will be used for wildfire suppression purposes only in extremely threatening circumstances, utilising existing tracks as much as possible. (High)
- Park visitors will be encouraged to use fuel stoves on extended overnight walks and campfires restricted to selected sites on overnight walking trails. See **3.19**. Campfires and visitor access may be affected during times of high to extreme fire danger. See **3.23**. (High)

3.11 Weed management – Management of weeds will seek to reduce the impact of buffel grass on the natural values of the Park. The Park’s GIS will continue to be used as a vital tool for planning, mapping, monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of weed control efforts.

- Regular survey and monitoring for the presence of buffel grass will be undertaken across the Park with particular emphasis on areas that have been identified as highly susceptible to invasion by buffel grass. (Medium)
- Buffel grass will be controlled in different areas according to the priority ratings in the Buffel Grass Control Strategy 2008 and subsequent updates. See **Figure 4**. Access to and within priority areas and biodiversity hotspots including Penny Springs, Ochre Valley, Wanya and parts of Kathleen Springs will be regulated. (High)
- Mossman River Grass will be controlled in visitor areas and where it occurs with buffel grass. (Medium)
- New weed species outbreaks will be targeted for elimination as soon as possible following detection. (High)
- The Parks and Wildlife Service will pursue agreements with Kings Canyon Resort and residents of the excised Aboriginal living areas regarding the introduction and control of non-native species. As far as practicable and as resources permit, assistance will be given to neighbours to control weeds (such as Mossman River Grass) to minimise the environmental threat to the Park. See **2.11**. (Medium)
- Roadside slashing and grading operators will be requested to clean machinery before commencing work. (High)

3.12 Feral animal management – The partners will seek to reduce the impact of introduced animals on native plants, animals and the environment by exclusion and removal of large grazing animals. The Park’s GIS will be used to map feral animal occurrences and record control actions.

- Camels, stock and campdogs will be removed from the Park according to locally developed guidelines. (Medium)
- Boundary fences will be regularly patrolled and maintained to prevent the entry of camels and stock. When funds allow, Parks staff will conduct aerial surveys of inaccessible areas of the Park. (Medium)
- New fencing will be installed on the north-west and southern Park boundaries. (High)

- Parks staff will liaise with neighbours to ensure pets and stock do not enter the Park. See **2.11** and **3.18**. (Medium)
- Quandongs and relict stream flora will be monitored at Kathleen Creek, Stokes Creek and Penny Springs. (High)
- The Mala enclosure fence will be regularly patrolled and maintained to ensure the exclusion of predators and monitoring of predator activity. Fox monitoring (and viable control methods) may be extended to areas of known rock wallaby populations. (High)
- Low key monitoring and control strategies will be developed for yabbies and rabbits as much as resources will permit, until such time as suitable broad scale control becomes available. Rabbits will be removed from the Mala enclosure. (Medium)
- Any tourism proposal for use of animals such as camels or horses on the Park will be considered by the Joint Management Committee against their potential threat to biodiversity and park values. (Low)
- Rangers will enforce the Parks and Wildlife Service Pets in Parks Policy and relevant Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation By-Laws. (High)

3.13 Water Quality – Maintaining water quality in the Park’s waterholes and other surface waters will remain a priority.

- Water quality will be periodically monitored at major visitor nodes and waterholes as required. (Medium)
- Waterholes may be closed to visitors under severe dry conditions or if water quality becomes a public health hazard. See **3.23**. (Medium)
- The use of insect repellents and detergents in the Park’s waterholes will be actively discouraged and communicated to visitors and tour operators through Tourism Central Australia (TCA) and in Park information. Swimming will be prohibited in the Garden of Eden waterhole. (High)
- Only non-residual, biodegradable herbicides will be used along creeklines. (High)
- Any toilets installed in the Conservation Zone as part of any concessionary operation will be of an environmental design that ensures no risk of contamination of surface or ground waters. (High)
- Feral animals will be managed in accordance with the feral animal control program. See **3.12**. (Medium)

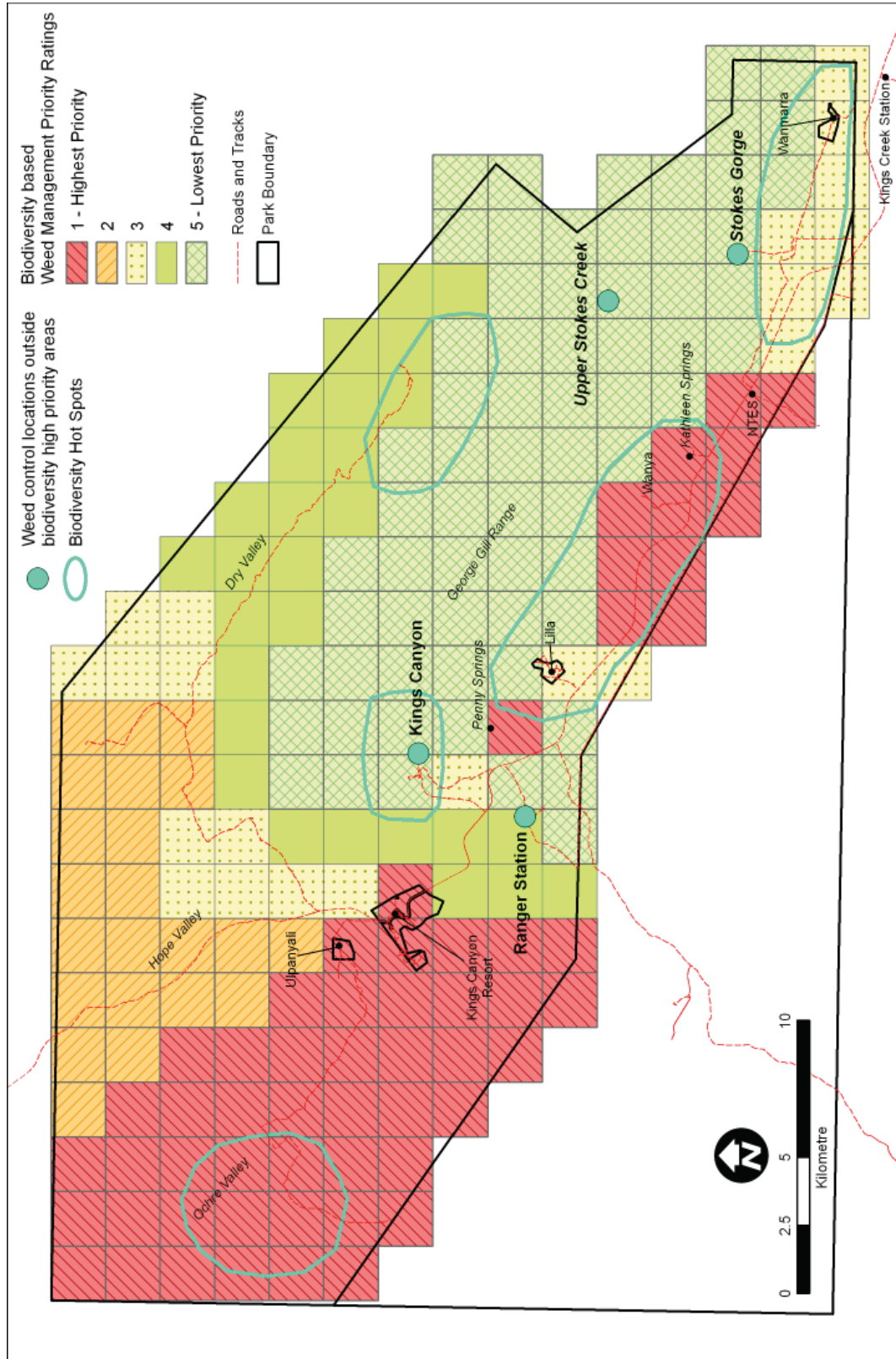
3.14 Soil conservation – Biophysical mapping data used in conjunction with the Park’s GIS will assist future Park development and management planning. A soil conservation plan will be developed implemented in collaboration with soil conservation experts. Expert advice will also be sought in consideration of any management activities that have the potential to cause erosion.

- Infrastructure design and installation will minimise soil disturbance and erosion potential. See 3.21. (High)
- Erosion control in the Dry Valley and Hope Valley areas, track realignment and closures will be pursued in accordance with the soil conservation plan for the Park. Driving off designated tracks for hunting and gathering will be discouraged, especially in Dry Valley. See 3.3. (Medium)
- Walking tracks, vehicle tracks, fencelines and other erosion prone areas will be assessed annually. (High)
- Healthy vegetation surrounding erosion areas will be used to seed rehabilitation areas. (Medium)

3.15 Excavation, mining and exploration – Soil and gravel will be extracted for soil conservation works in the Park with the approval of the partners. External requests will require a written application that will be subject to the approval of the joint management partners. The partners will apply for a Reservation from Occupation to protect the natural and cultural values of the Park. Fossicking will not be allowed. Traditional Owners’ right to extract ochre will continue to be upheld under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*. See 3.3. (Ongoing)

3.16 Stakeholder liaison – The partners will liaise with local community and relevant stakeholders to ensure a co-ordinated approach to weed, fire and feral animal control across tenures and neighbouring properties. See 2.11. Cooperative natural resource management will be encouraged, in particular with community ranger groups and adjoining landowners, including proposed Katiti/Petermann Ranges and Angas Downs Indigenous Protected Areas. (High)

Figure 4. Buffel Grass Priority Areas and Biodiversity Hotspots



3.2 Managing for visitors

“You have a chance to learn about country and culture.”

- Traditional Owner

Introduction

This section addresses how the Park will be managed for premium visitor experiences. It focuses on the Park’s inclusion in Australia’s Red Centre National Landscape and the community’s expectations for improved access, infrastructure, information and activities. Visitors include international and national tourists as well as other Aboriginal people, scientists, photographers and film makers.

The Park offers some of the finest nature-based tourism experiences in Australia. Central to this experience is the spectacular scenery, from the red sand dunes and desert oaks to the sudden contrast between this landscape and the George Gill Range, highlighted by Kings Canyon itself. There is potential to expand the range of experiences on offer, in particular to include Indigenous culture-based experiences.

The joint management partners encourage visitors to have a safe and interactive experience at Watarrka. They would like the following key messages to be communicated to visitors:

- This is Aboriginal land. This is our home.
- You are welcome to this place - relax and enjoy this spectacular and diverse landscape.
- Respect each other and the land - we all have a responsibility to respect and look after this country.
- There’s more to this place than just the Canyon - you can learn about country and culture.
- This is a very important place for culture, country and history.
- There are plants and animals found here and nowhere else.
- Be comfortable with Aboriginal people.
- This place is jointly managed.
- Be safe – it’s your responsibility.

Principles for Managing Visitors

- National Landscape experiences should meet International visitors' expectations.
- Tourism can benefit the local community by creating demand for, and generating income from visitor services.
- Well designed facilities protect Park values and promote safe, enjoyable visitor experiences.
- Visitor safety is paramount.
- Visitors' appreciation and respect for the Park is enhanced by sharing information about the Park's unique natural and cultural values.
- Well managed commercial operations helps visitor management by providing opportunities, services and facilities that the PWS cannot provide.
- Monitoring visitor activities and satisfaction helps decision-making and can identify enterprise opportunities for Traditional Owners.

3.2.1 Recreational and Tourism Values

Background

From its quiet beginnings in the 1980s, Watarrka National Park has developed into one of Central Australia's premier parks and tourist destinations. The park contributes significantly to the Territory tourism economy. Its importance can be measured by the number and value of commercial tourism the Park supports. Approximately 215,000 people visited Watarrka National Park during 2008. Visitor numbers have been much higher than this in recent years, peaking at over 270,000 visitors in 2001.

The profile of Watarrka has been increased with its inclusion in the Red Centre National Landscape, announced by the Federal Government in December 2006. This tourism marketing initiative promotes the best of Australia's natural and cultural assets to the world. It includes the nearby World Heritage Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park and the West MacDonnell Ranges.

The Northern Territory Government is pursuing a process to inscribe the West MacDonnell National Park on the National and World Heritage Lists. Watarrka National Park is also likely to have outstanding universal values qualifying it for inscription on both lists. Listing the park represents a longer-term opportunity for the wider community that the partners should consider.

While the Red Centre Way between Alice Springs and Watarrka may not be sealed during the term of this Plan, when and if this takes place, visitor numbers will be expected to increase markedly.

The Kings Canyon experience is the major tourist draw card to the Park.



A World Class Tourist Attraction

Visitors are drawn from around the world to Watarrka by the beauty of the Canyon. The Park's unspoilt, rugged landscape contains some of the most spectacular and unusual rock formations in Central Australia. Flanking the escarpment to the south are extensive dunefields that are unfamiliar and interesting to the majority of visitors.

Located on the Red Centre Way tourist route between Alice Springs and Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park, Watarrka is an important driver of regional tourism. Its social and economic contribution to the Territory is invaluable (Tremblay and Carson 2007).

Visitors can access pre-visit information through web-based materials and publications. The majority of this information is provided by Tourism NT. It is important the public information and images of the Park are accurate, appropriate and consistent with the values and character of the Park. More specific park orientation and awareness is promoted through Park Fact Sheets published by the Parks and Wildlife Service.

The Park's popularity as a tourist destination continues to drive the regional economy. Its remoteness requires large numbers of visitors to be accommodated in the area overnight. Kings Canyon Resort, Kings Creek Station and Kings Canyon Wilderness Lodge are integral to the Park's visitor management strategy. They offer a range of facilities and services that the Park cannot provide, in doing so transferring visitor impacts which might otherwise occur on the Park.

If visitor numbers grow, these establishments will continue to expand. Additional or new accommodation options may need to be considered, either within or near the Park. Scenic helicopter tours, guided walks, coach and other tours are currently available in the area. An airstrip at Kings Creek Station has the potential to be used for commercial benefit.

A Safe and Informative Park Visit

The joint management partners have a legal and moral responsibility to provide visitors with a safe and enjoyable experience. For such a high profile Park, it is also important that infrastructure, facilities and services reflect the expectations of domestic and international visitors.

The appropriate level of access, development and activities for different areas of the Park is outlined in the Park Zoning Scheme (see **2.13**) . The partners are committed to providing accurate up-to-date information, well-designed and well-maintained facilities and a range of safe and appropriate activities for visitors to enjoy.

Access

Public roads through the Park are sealed. Occasionally access to Watarrka is compromised by significant rainfall events, resulting in localised flooding and sedimentation at the King and Kathleen Creek crossings resulting from erosion upstream in these creeks.

Walkers are encouraged to remain on marked tracks to minimise erosion and protect the natural and cultural values of the area. Overnight walkers are encouraged to register with the PWS Overnight Walker Registration Scheme.

Special access permission is required for some activities including: remote camping, functions, landing aircraft, research, volunteering and commercial activities. See **2.10** and **2.13**. Traditional Owners say “visitors can do most things, but have to go through joint management, provide adequate notice and must clean up after themselves. They have to go by ranger law, but also traditional law - cultural law. We need to know - there might be a sacred site, women’s or men’s site there.” They feel responsible for visitors to their country and want the opportunity to express this to people requesting special access when they arrive on Park.



Additional recreational opportunities are required to reduce congestion on the Rim Walk.

Park Entrances

The existing low key Park entrances often mean visitors are unaware that they have entered the Park. Park entry signage should be consistent with a high profile destination within Australia's Red Centre National Landscape. Traditional Owners would like visitors to know they are on a jointly managed, Aboriginal-owned park.

Kings Canyon Day Visitor Area

Located at the entrance to the Canyon, this area is the primary visitor hub. It is the trail head for the popular Kings Canyon Rim Walk, the Kings Creek Walk and the Giles Track. Facilities include sealed access and parking, a toilet block, drinking water and two shade shelters. A shelter informs visitors about geology, habitats, history and significance to Traditional Owners. Another shelter orientates visitors and provides maps and information relating to facilities, activities and regulations relevant to the site. Carpark congestion during peak tourist season is expected to increase with visitation and growing number of caravans and camper trailers.

Sunset Viewing Picnic Area

This small visitor node is an excellent site to enjoy sunset views of the Range. Facilities include three shade shelters, picnic furniture, gas barbecues, flush toilets and drinking water. Increases in visitor numbers during the term of this Plan may see a need to upgrade the facility. Illegal camping is an ongoing management concern at this site.

Kathleen Springs Day Visitor Area

Located some distance from the Canyon, this low key area is a secondary visitor hub designed for tranquil picnics and nature-based activities. The Kathleen Springs Walk and the eastern end of the Giles Track are accessed from here. Facilities include sealed access and parking, a shade shelter, picnic furniture, gas barbecues, drinking water and a pit toilet. Signs at the start of the walking tracks provide maps and information relating to safety, facilities, activities and regulations relevant to the site. Developed to relieve congestion at the Kings Canyon Day Visitor Area, this site attracts few visitors. Limited promotion and parking for caravans and camper trailers could be a contributing factor.

Kings Canyon Rim Walk (6km loop, moderate 3-4 hrs)

This challenging walk around the top of the Canyon is one of Central Australia's best and is completed by over 85 percent of visitors to the Park. This walk provides many wonderful views of the dramatic cliffs and opportunities for photography and wildlife spotting amongst the sandstone domes. Signs interpret a range of habitats including waterholes, rock formations and sheltered gullies. Safety signs direct visitors to walk in a clock wise direction and to stay away from cliff edges. This walk becomes extremely crowded during peak times, particularly on the steep ascent. Swimming in the Garden of Eden waterhole has been actively discouraged for safety, cultural and environmental reasons for many years. Although a popular activity among tour groups in particular, there is a strong case to prohibit swimming at this site.

Kings Creek Walk (2 km return, easy 1hr)

This pleasant walk along the base of the Canyon provides a less strenuous and more intimate alternative for visitors wanting to see the Canyon. More than 20 percent of visitors do this walk. Recent upgrades have improved access for people with restricted mobility. The walk ends at an elevated platform that provides superb views of the sheer Canyon walls. Signs along the walk interpret natural and cultural features for visitors. Congestion occurs on the steps to the platform during peak periods.

Kathleen Springs Walk (2.5km return, easy 1 hr)

This sealed track along the base of Kathleen Gorge is suitable for visitors with limited mobility. The track ends in an elevated steel walkway at the spring-fed waters of Kathleen Springs. Signs interpret the use of the area by Aboriginal people and early Europeans. This area is prone to flooding during significant rainfall events. Only about five percent of visitors do this walk.

Giles Track (22km, moderate 1-2 days)

This is the only overnight walking track on the Park. Camping is allowed along most of its length. This marked track follows the spectacular southern rim of the George Gill Range and crosses a plateau of sandstone domes before connecting into the Rim Walk at its western end. There is scope to extend this track at each end and to develop it as the backbone of a system of extended walks. Most park visitors become aware of this walk upon their visit to the Park.

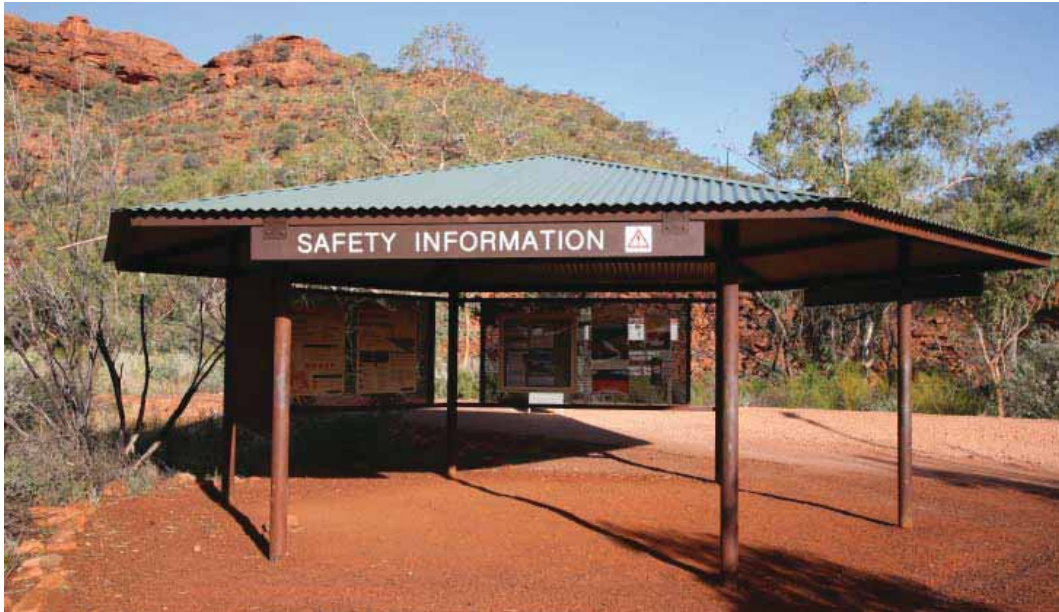
Visitor Risk Management

Risk identification and reduction is integral to safety management. The main safety concerns in the Park include: visitors becoming lost, injured or severely dehydrated whilst walking in the Park; rugged terrain and the risk of cliff related accidents; vehicle and aircraft related accidents; wildfire; dingo attack and flash flooding. Risk reduction measures include visitor education, facility maintenance and implementing management practices that remove or reduce potential harm.

Most safety incidents occur on the Kings Canyon Rim Walk or the Giles Track. The PWS internal document; Kings Canyon Rim Walk Management Plan (2003) provides specific direction regarding safety and complex management issues. Comprehensive, multilingual safety information signs and water are located at trail heads. Four UHF emergency radios are positioned along the Kings Canyon Walk. Rangers regularly patrol the Rim Walk to monitor facilities and visitor behaviour. Overnight hikers are encouraged to register with the PWS Overnight Walker Registration Scheme.

Park facilities are maintained to the highest practicable standards for visitor safety. Bridges and staircases on the Rim walk will require engineering inspections during the term of this Plan. Traditional Owners are interested in employment in the construction and maintenance of Park facilities.

Accurate and current information is critical for a safe and enjoyable experience



Rangers are trained in emergency response and advanced first aid. They respond to a range of incidents every year including search and rescue, medical evacuations and vehicle accidents. They are supported by medical staff at the Kings Canyon Resort Clinic. Search and rescue assistance is provided by Northern Territory Emergency Services (NTES) staff and helicopter pilots at the Resort and Kings Creek Station. Emergency Response Plans are reviewed annually with relevant stakeholders.

Tour operators and school groups must abide by the safety conditions specified on permits they require to operate in, or visit the Park. Tourism Central Australia and the PWS share the responsibility with tour operators to ensure these requirements are met.

Communication between Tour Operators, the Tourism Industry and the partners is important to ensure safe and enjoyable experiences for visitors. Regular meetings are held between Tourism NT, Tourism Central Australia transport sector and tour operators.

Opportunities for information exchange include:

- the Parks and Wildlife Service accredited Tour Guide Training program that will become operational during the term of this Plan and;
- Tourism NT Desert Guides information nights aimed at increasing the knowledge base of Central Australian tour guides through contact with protected area managers.

High risk activities such as rock climbing and abseiling are neither promoted nor permitted.

Appropriate Promotion and Tourism Development

The Draft Northern Territory Parks and Conservation Masterplan and the Tourism Strategic Plan 2008 to 2012 prescribe development to a high international standard as an overarching goal for the Territory's high profile parks such as Watarrka. The Masterplan says this goal will be achieved through appropriate capital development, better monitoring, high quality interpretation and opportunities for Traditional Owners to present a cultural dimension.

Visitor surveys are important for understanding visitor needs and expectations and help the planning of services and facilities. Visitors and tourism industry feedback indicate satisfaction with low impact development and ongoing improvements provided by the PWS. Visitor surveys show the majority of visitors are generally satisfied with facilities and experiences provided. They also express an interest in more contact with rangers and Aboriginal people. Traditional Owners express much interest in visitors' perceptions of the Park and satisfaction with their experience.

It will continue to be important for the joint management partners to work closely with all tourism interests in the area. It is critical the Joint Management Committee engage with the tourism industry and "sit down together and plan" to ensure Parks staff, Traditional Owners and the Tourism Industry are kept informed, contribute to problem solving and are involved in decision-making. See **2.11**. The partners' decision-making will be guided by over-arching plans and policies such as Territory parks tourism development plans and commercial development in parks policies.

Providing accurate and appropriate information to visitors is important for fostering appreciation and appropriate enjoyment of the Park. Strategies to manage increasing visitor numbers may include: working with relevant agencies to ensure the Park is promoted appropriately, providing a broader range of activities, opening new areas to disperse visitor activity, further hardening of areas, developing additional facilities or limiting the number of visitors to particular sites within the Park.

A large number of visitors to the NT are "Spirited Travellers" who seek interactive, engaging experiences with physical and psychological elements. Watarrka attracts many such visitors by offering a range of enriching experiences, based on its natural and cultural strengths.

Themes identified and promoted by the tourism industry in their Tourism Strategic Plan 2008–2012 include the outback, nature, culture and conservation. Transforming experiences centred on these themes should strengthen Watarrka's position as a leader in biodiversity conservation and contributor to the Territory economy.

Discover Australia's genuine outback

Australia's Red Centre National Landscape is marketed nationally and internationally as the "quintessential" outback experience where visitors can discover "the relationship of people with land." Red Centre Way travellers are rewarded with an inviting opportunity to discover Australia's genuine outback and its people in comfort and safety. Sealing of the tourist route, whenever this happens, will improve access to a number of key Central Australia sites, still perceived as remote.

Western
desert dunes
meet the
ancient
ranges of
Central
Australia.



Pre-visit information may be enhanced through the innovative use of communication technologies made available on-site or on-line. At Watarrka, where the dunes meet the ranges, pre-visit information will be complemented by an authentic outback bush experience that epitomises the Red Centre landscape. Visitors can be immersed in the spectacular colours of the desert ranges, waterholes and gorges whilst engaging with a unique Aboriginal desert culture with links to pastoralism and mining.

As part of the Parks and Wildlife Service interpretation program, rangers have for many years presented slideshows at Kings Creek Station and Kings Canyon Resort. Guided walks at Kathleen Springs have also interpreted the cultural heritage of the area to visitors. Interpretation signs provide information on the significance of the area to the Park's Traditional Owners, early explorers and pastoral settlers.

Opportunities to enhance this experience include:

- A Visitor Centre serving multiple purposes and interests could provide a focal point to orientate visitors to the opportunities of the Park and the region, and provide interpretation of the area's natural, cultural and historical values and the national landscape theme: "connecting with the land and culture – Aboriginal and post-settlement connections with the land." It could also provide local employment and infrastructure to support the growth of tourism in the region. To cover the range of information sought by visitors the facility could be staffed by Resort staff, Parks staff and Traditional Owners.

Traditional Owners have been asking about a visitor centre for more than twenty years, saying, " We need our culture at our own visitor centre. We want this to be a place where tourists can find out about our culture. We need that information for our young people too - something for them to look back on. We want visitors to know about our history, how our ancestors lived, contact history, shootings, plants and animals, Aboriginal names and bush tucker. We want Aboriginal names for places too so people know this place is owned by Traditional Owners. People will go home happy inside when they learn our culture."

- Historical sites and events in the Park interpreted for visitors including Traditional Owner perspectives on early European history of the area. Traditional Owners also want to tell their family histories. These themes are of interest to a large number of visitors.

- Bush camping in the southern part of the Park and/or Community Living Areas would provide opportunities for greater appreciation of the outback and undisturbed nature in uncrowded surroundings. Illegal camping on Park and Aboriginal land is a major concern for the partners. There is potential for concession-managed bush camping in the Park.

Traditional Owners reflect on a time when unregulated camping was allowed in the Park, “people used to camp here. Lots of rubbish, graffiti, rubbish under rocks, but it looks good here now.” They expect any proposed camping in the Park to be well managed.

- Four Wheel Drive/bush camping experience. The Red Centre Way Visitor Management Strategy recommends single and multi-day four wheel drive tracks are developed off the tourist route. Management tracks in the south of the Park could be considered for regulated visitor access.

Clear policy and guidelines are required for commercial development on Northern Territory Parks. Involvement of the full Traditional Owner group is required to guide the partners in considering any new development or commercial accommodation investment on Park.

***All Traditional Owners, can't just talk
to a couple of fellas, got to talk about it with everybody.
Everybody's got to be involved.***

Traditional Owner referring to commercial development proposal.

Explore captivating nature

The Park offers a range of high quality nature-based tourism experiences in an accessible desert landscape. Visitors can appreciate spectacular natural landscapes by enjoying scenic flights, picnics and walks that allow for a range of nature based activities including bird watching and photography. The “Kings Canyon Experience” is the major tourism draw card. This experience includes the Kings Canyon Rim Walk and the Kings Creek Walk. Both showcase the spectacular natural landscape and unique geology of Watarrka and provide the opportunity to spot wildlife in its natural environment.

Information on the Park’s geology, flora and fauna is provided in pre-visit information and on interpretive signs. Visitors are encouraged to explore the diverse desert ecology on a range of walking tracks as well as enjoyable, interactive ranger experiences during the peak season.

The importance of gorges to the biodiversity of Central Australia has been explained to visitors in ranger guided walks along Kings Creek for many years. The full range of habitats and their associated flora and fauna have also been interpreted to visitors in slideshows delivered by rangers at Kings Creek Station and Kings Canyon Resort. Rangers have also delivered Junior Ranger Programs to nearby schools and communities throughout the school year.

To enhance this experience and protect the values of the Park, the partners ask visitors not to swim or wash in the waterholes, feed or chase wildlife, drive off-road, collect firewood or take dogs or other animals into the Park.

Mala enclosure tours could be developed to raise awareness of endangered species conservation.



Most Park visitors do the Rim Walk and leave without developing a full appreciation of the Park. The partners want to encourage visitors to stay longer by promoting other walks and developing extra experiences.

***In the future, we may open up new areas.
We need to talk about it first.***

Traditional Owner.

Traditional Owners share concerns with rangers about safety and congestion on the Rim Walk during peak periods. Ways to relieve Rim Walk issues and enhance the overall experience of the Park include:

- Development of spur tracks off the Rim Walk and Giles Track.
- Wider promotion of the Giles Track and Kathleen Springs.
- Enabling visitors to see Mala and learn about the science of rare species conservation.
- Increase the number of guided walks by commercial interests.
- Introduce night time activities such as camp fire talks, star gazing and Mala enclosure tours.
- Cycling tracks.

Traditional Owners have said they would like any new walking track to provide a cultural aspect.



Cultural experiences are highly sought by visitors to Watarrka.

Engage with authentic Indigenous culture

Traditional Owners of Watarrka maintain strong connections to country through language, culture, stories and ecological knowledge. They live on or in close proximity to the Park, providing viable opportunities for visitor contact.

A large number of visitors seek authentic, interactive experiences with local Aboriginal people. They want to learn about their lives, history and heritage and observe indigenous art. Conversational exchanges can foster appreciation of the living cultural landscape of Watarrka and encourage visitors to enjoy the Park with greater respect. Joint management may improve visitor access according to Traditional Owners who say “visitors can go to some special places with a Traditional Owner.”

The success of regional tourism has inspired some Traditional Owners to capitalise on the new opportunities provided by joint management. They want to share their stories with visitors through “good cultural information on signs, bush tucker tours by local people and cultural activities such as spear throwing, fire and boomerang making.” They have the opportunity now to develop their own tour operations.

A strategic, regional approach is required to assist Traditional Owners develop tourism products. Traditional Owners wanting to develop tourism businesses and concessionary operations may require assistance of other Northern Territory government agencies (DEET and DBERD), Central Land Council and the Tourism industry. Joint ventures with existing tour companies may be a sound way to obtain experience in the early stages. Some tour operators have expressed interest in a closer working relationship with indigenous communities.

Contribute to responsible tourism

The Park caters for a small number of volunteers to assist in conservation and land management programs. An increasing number of visitors travel to satisfy particular environmental or social interests; they have a particular purpose in mind such as community development or habitat conservation. They seek inspiring, transformative experiences through active involvement. An opportunity exists to extend the existing Park volunteer program into a niche market for paying holiday-makers, focussed on cross-cultural conservation projects with opportunities to reconnect with nature and learn about its meaning to Aboriginal people. Such a program could foster tremendous support and influence for joint management. Such “Engagement for Action” or “voluntourism” activities could include flora and fauna survey of the Park, monitoring and control of weeds, management of the captive Mala population and seed collection for native plant propagation.

Aims

- Provision of premium visitor experiences for spirited travellers; safe, informative and memorable, centred on the Park’s natural and cultural highlights including Aboriginal culture and Traditional Owners connection to country.
- Visitor facilities and services befitting a Park of international significance.

Management Directions

3.17 Zoning – Visitor access, activities and facilities will be managed and developed according to the zoning scheme in this Plan. See **2.12**. (High)

3.18 World Heritage Listing – The partners will consider the benefits of the Park being inscribed on the National and World Heritage Lists.

3.19 Access

- The partners will engage as necessary with the relevant roads management and soil conservation advisory branches within the Northern Territory Government to reduce erosion and sedimentation at major creeks to minimise the impact of flooding on visitor access. (High)
- Walkers wanting to camp overnight in remote areas of the Park require a permit. See **2.12**. (High)
- Pets – Entry of pets will be consistent with existing Parks and Wildlife Service policy. See **3.12**. (High)
- Closures – The Park or areas within it may be temporarily closed to the public for fire, flood, feral animal culls and important Aboriginal ceremonies. See **3.2**. As much notice as possible will be given to avoid inconvenience to the public. Areas may be closed for erosion control and/or rehabilitation works. (Medium)

3.20 Activities

- Camping will continue to be allowed on the Giles Track. (High)
- Firewood collection is not permitted in the Park. Visitors are encouraged to use gas BBQs provided or fuel stoves. See 3.9. (High)
- To protect its natural and cultural values and for the safety of visitors, swimming will be prohibited in the Garden of Eden waterhole. See 3.13. (High)
- Cycling opportunities in the park will be considered by the partners. (Low)
- New four wheel drive opportunities in the Park may be considered by the partners as part of a bush camping concession, subject to appropriate clearances including expert soil conservation advice. (Low)
- If public interest warrants it, rock climbing and abseiling guidelines will be developed by the joint management partners. (Low)

3.21 Existing facilities – Park infrastructure will be maintained and subject to resources will be upgraded to a standard befitting a Park of international standing. Visitor surveys will continue to inform visitor management strategies and development planning. See 2.10.

- Park entrances will be redeveloped with appropriate high profile signage and orientation information to reflect a jointly managed, iconic park within Australia's Red Centre National Landscape. (High)
- Bridges and staircases on the Kings Canyon Rim Walk will be subject to engineering inspections and replaced or upgraded as appropriate. Works will minimise interruption to public access. (Medium)
- Highly visited areas and sections of existing walking tracks will be hardened for improved amenity and to minimise erosion. (High)
- Energy efficient technology, such as hybrid toilet systems will be used where possible. (Medium)

3.22 Future developments – The Joint Management Committee will endorse five-year forward works plans and site development plans in collaboration with stakeholders, guided by Territory-wide parks tourism development plans. Decisions will be made in accordance with structures and processes outlined in section 2 and PWS commercial development policy. The protection of scenic, natural, cultural, historical values and the character of the Park will underpin any future development. Development is subject to available resources. See 3.8 and 3.14.

- Visitor Centre.
 - An interpretation shelter will serve initially as a focal point for cultural information and activities on the Park. (High)

- A Visitor Centre will be pursued by the partners in collaboration with the tourism industry and key stakeholders. Partnerships with private industry in provision of infrastructure and visitor services will be encouraged and considered by the partners. Links will be made with the Australia's Red Centre National Landscapes initiative. See **2.7**. (High)
- Bush Camping Facilities. Alternative camping facilities may be considered within the Park subject to protection of natural and cultural values and provided they complement existing local services. Such would represent an enterprise opportunity for local Anangu. (Low)
- Walking Tracks. The partners will work with the tourism industry to consider options to reduce overcrowding on the Rim Walk. Opportunities for new walks may be considered. Options include new spur tracks off the Rim Walk and the Giles Track. Kathleen Springs and the Giles Track will be actively promoted to visitors. (Medium)
- Cultural Tours. The partners will collaborate with the tourism industry, CLC and local operators to foster Aboriginal employment in tourism and assist development of local Indigenous tourism enterprise. (Medium)
- Cross-cultural voluntourism opportunities will be developed and promoted. See **2.11**.(Low)

3.23 Community education and interpretative program – The partners will develop an Interpretation Plan for the Park. Both partners will be involved in planning, prioritising and delivering interpretation, information, community education and Junior Ranger programs where possible.

- Visitor information will be reviewed for accuracy and appropriateness. Aboriginal people, place names and language will be represented. Information will include new uses of communication technologies where possible and appropriate. (High)
- The joint management partners will work with Tourism NT, Tourism Central Australia and other relevant agencies to ensure the Park is marketed and promoted accurately and appropriately, consistent with the values and character of the Park. See **2.11**. (Medium)
- The partners will contribute materials to the Parks and Wildlife Tour Guide Training and Tourism NT Desert Guides Programs. Traditional Owners will ensure that all Aboriginal cultural information shared with visitors is accurate and appropriate. (Medium)
- Night time activities such as mala enclosure tours, star gazing and campfire talks will be considered by the partners. Tour operators will also be encouraged to develop night time activities. (Low)
- Traditional Owners will deliver an Introduction to Aboriginal Culture training for rangers and resort staff. See **2.8**. (High)

3.24 Visitor safety – The Park’s facilities and visitor management practices will be subject to ongoing monitoring, maintenance and risk assessment.

- Tour operators will be encouraged to report incidents and safety issues (physical and behavioural) to Park management. (High)
- Identified risks will be rectified on a priority basis. (High)
- The Emergency Response Plan will be annually reviewed and rangers will receive appropriate training. (High)
- An emergency radio may be installed at Kathleen Springs. Mobile telephone coverage and high speed internet facilities will be pursued. (Low)
- Fire prevention and safety messages will be communicated to visitors. See **3.10**. (High)

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5. Appendices

Appendix 1 Extracts from the Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act

part iii – joint management of certain parks and reserves

Division 3 – Joint management partners, objective and principles

25AA. Joint management partners

(1) The joint management partners for a park or reserve are –

- (a) the Territory or a body nominated by the Territory as the representative of the Territory; and
- (b) the traditional Aboriginal owners of the park or reserve.

(2) The joint management partners are together responsible for the management of the park or reserve.

(3) The joint management partners must perform their functions under this Part in respect of a park or reserve in a manner that –

- (a) is consistent with any lease referred to in section 8(c) or 10(1)(f) of the *Framework Act* entered into in respect of the park or reserve;
- (b) is consistent with the joint management agreement referred to in section 8(d) of the *Framework Act* entered into in respect of the park or reserve;
- (c) is consistent with any indigenous land use agreement referred to in section 8(e) of the *Framework Act* entered into in respect of the park or reserve;
- (d) achieves the objective stated in section 25AB;
- (e) is in accordance with the principles stated in section 25AC; and
- (f) is in accordance with the joint management plan for the park or reserve.

25AB. Objective of joint management

The objective of joint management of a park or reserve is to jointly establish an equitable partnership to manage and maintain the park or reserve as part of a comprehensive and representative system of parks and reserves in the Territory and for the following purposes:

- (a) benefiting both the traditional Aboriginal owners of the park or reserve and the wider community;
- (b) protecting biological diversity;
- (c) serving visitor and community needs for education and enjoyment.

25AC. Principles of joint management

The objective is to be achieved by managing the park or reserve in accordance with the following principles:

- (a) recognising, valuing and incorporating Aboriginal culture, knowledge and decision-making processes;
- (b) utilising the combined land management skills and expertise of both joint management partners;
- (c) recognising and addressing the need for institutional support and capacity building of the joint management partners;
- (d) recognising that community living areas in or in close proximity to parks and reserves are an integral part of the natural and cultural resource management of parks and reserves;
- (e) involving continuing statutory responsibilities and functions of the Minister with respect to parks and reserves;
- (f) managing parks and reserves may include cooperative management agreements for areas of land outside parks and reserves;
- (g) establishing a process for the consideration of applications for mining an petroleum

Division 6 – Role of Land Councils

25AN. Application of Division

This Division applies in relation to the parks and reserves specified in Schedules 2 and 3 to the Framework Act.

25AO. Functions of Land Councils in relation to parks and reserves

- (1) Pursuant to section 23(2) of ALRA, the following functions are conferred on a Land Council:
- (a) to ascertain and express the wishes and the opinion of Aboriginals living in its area as to the management of the parks and reserves in that area and as to appropriate legislation concerning those parks and reserves;
 - (b) to protect the interests of the traditional Aboriginal owners of, and other Aboriginals interested in, those parks and reserves;
 - (c) to consult with the traditional Aboriginal owners of, and other Aboriginals interested in, those parks and reserves about the use of those parks and reserves;
 - (d) to negotiate with persons desiring to obtain an estate or interest (including a licence) in any of those parks or reserves on behalf of the traditional Aboriginal owners of that park or reserve and any other Aboriginals interested in that park or reserve;

(e) to supervise, and provide administrative and other assistance to, the Park Land Trusts holding, or established to hold, park freehold title in parks and reserves in its area.

(2) In carrying out its functions under subsection (1) in relation to a park or reserve in its area, a Land Council must have regard to the interests of, and must consult with, the traditional Aboriginal owners of the park or reserve and any other Aboriginals interested in the park or reserve and, in particular, must not take any action (including, but not limited to, the giving or withholding of consent in any matter in connection with the park freehold title held by a Park Land Trust) unless the Land Council is satisfied that –

(a) the traditional Aboriginal owners of the park or reserve understand the nature and purpose of the proposed action and, as a group, consent to it; and

(b) any Aboriginal community or group that may be affected by the proposed action has been consulted and has had adequate opportunity to express its view to the Land Council.

(3) In this section –

“area”, in relation to a Land Council, has the same meaning as in ALRA;

“park freehold title” has the same meaning as in the Framework Act;

“Park Land Trust” has the same meaning as in the Framework Act.

Appendix 2 Indigenous Land Use Agreement

NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA

Watarrka

Framework for the Future Indigenous Land Use Agreement

IN ACCORDANCE WITH SUBDIVISION C OF DIVISION 3 OF PART 2 OF THE *NATIVE TITLE ACT*, FOR THE PURPOSE OF DEALING WITH THE GRANT OF PARKS FREEHOLD TITLE, FUTURE DEVELOPMENT, COMPENSATION AND OTHER RELATED MATTERS IN RESPECT OF A PARK IDENTIFIED IN SCHEDULE 2 OF THE *PARKS AND RESERVES (FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE) ACT*

THIS AGREEMENT is made the *10th* day of *March* 200*4*⁵

BETWEEN:

the **NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA** care of the Department of the Chief Minister, 4th Floor, N T House, 22 Mitchell Street, Darwin NT 0800 ("the Territory")

AND:

the **CENTRAL LAND COUNCIL**, a body corporate established pursuant to section 21 of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Commonwealth) of 33 Stuart Highway, Alice Springs 0870 Northern Territory ("the Land Council").

RECITALS

- A. Following the decision of the High Court in *Ward*, the Territory and the Northern and Central Land Councils entered into negotiations concerning the future title and management of a number of Parks and Reserves in the Northern Territory. The Territory and the Land Councils considered that a negotiated outcome was preferred so as to avoid expensive and drawn-out litigation that would occur over many years.
- B. Following those negotiations, the Territory enacted the *Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Act* ("the Act"). The Act provides that, inter alia, the Chief Minister is authorised to grant park freehold title over the Parks and Reserves specified in Schedule 2 of the Act.
- C. Section 10 of the Act provides that the Chief Minister is only authorised to grant park freehold title over the Parks and Reserves specified in Schedule 2 if, inter alia, one or more Indigenous Land Use Agreements or other legally enforceable agreements have been executed dealing with compensation for the effect of the declaration or purported declaration and use of those parks and reserves on native title rights and interests, and facilitating future development in those Parks and Reserves.
- D. The area of land described in the Schedule ("the Park") is one of the Parks specified in Schedule 2 of the Act. The purpose of this agreement is to satisfy the condition set out in section 10(1)(b) of the Act, and to otherwise deal with native title issues in respect of the grant of park freehold title over the Park,

the lease of the Park to the Territory, execution of the Joint Management Deed and actions taken in accordance with the Plan of Management for the Park.

- E. The parties have agreed to enter into this agreement to confirm that the provisions of the Act applicable to the Park have been complied with.

NOW THIS AGREEMENT WITNESSES as follows:

1. Interpretation

- 1.1 In this agreement, including the Recitals, unless the context otherwise requires:

"approved determination of native title" has the same meaning as it has in the *Native Title Act*;

"future act" has the same meaning as it has in the *Native Title Act*, and "future acts" has a corresponding meaning;

"Joint Management Agreement" has the same meaning as in the Act;

"Joint Management Partners" has the same meaning as in the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*;

"Joint Management Plan" means the Plan of Management for the Park agreed by the Joint Management Parties and created in accordance with the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*;

"*Native Title Act*" means the *Native Title Act 1993* (Commonwealth);

"Native Title Regulations" means the Native Title "Indigenous Land Use Agreements" Regulation 1999;

"park freehold title" has the same meaning as in the Act;

"Joint Management Plan" means the Plan of Management for the Park agreed by the Joint Management Parties and created in accordance with the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*;

"Register" means the Register of Indigenous Land Use Agreements established pursuant to Part 8A of the *Native Title Act*;

"Registrar" means the Native Title Registrar under the *Native Title Act*;

"the Act" means the *Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Act*;

"the Park" means the area of land described in Item 2 of the Schedule;

- 1.2 In this agreement, unless the contrary intention appears:

- (a) "person" includes a firm, body corporate, statutory corporation, an unincorporated association or an authority and a reference to gender includes each other gender;

- (b) the singular includes the plural and visa versa;
- (c) a reference to a person includes a reference to the person's executors, administrators, successors, substitutes (including but not limited to persons taking by novation) and assigns;
- (d) an agreement, representation or warranty on the part of or in favour of two or more persons binds or is for the benefit of them jointly and severally; and
- (e) a reference to anything is a reference to the whole or any part of it and reference to a group of persons is a reference to any one or more of them.

2. **Conditions Precedent**

This agreement shall have no force or effect and shall not be binding on any party unless and until the Chief Minister has indicated that she is satisfied that the conditions set out in section 10 of the Act have been satisfied.

3. **Consent, Compensation and Use of Park**

3.1 The parties consent to:

- (a) the granting of Park freehold title in accordance with the Act over the Park;
- (b) the grant of a lease over the Park to the Territory for the purposes of a Park and in the form at Annexure 'A';
- (c) any action taken in accordance with, or permitted by, the lease referred to in sub-paragraph (b) above, the Joint Management Agreement or the Joint Management Plan (including, without limitation, the grant of sub-leases for commercial purposes and the construction, operation and maintenance of improvements in the Park),

whether or not they are future acts.

3.2 The parties acknowledge and agree that Subdivision P of Division 3 of Part 2 of the *Native Title Act* does not and is not intended to apply to the actions specified in clause 3.1.

3.3 The parties agree that the non-extinguishment principle set out in section 238 of the *Native Title Act* applies to and in relation to all of the actions set out in clause 3.1.

3.4 The Land Council and the Native Title Parties agree that, while park freehold title is in existence in respect of the Park, they will not make or

pursue any application for native title determination in respect of the Park or any part of the Park except for the purposes only of:

- (a) addressing an application for the creation of a right to mine as defined in the *Native Title Act* (and then only to the extent of the proposed grant);
- (b) responding to a notice of proposed compulsory acquisition (and then only to the extent of the proposed acquisition);
- (c) responding to a non-claimant application as defined in the *Native Title Act*
- (d) the setting up or operations of a registered native title body corporate following an approved determination of native title; or
- (e) an application under section 13 of the *Native Title Act* to vary an approved determination of native title.

3.5 The parties agree that in the event that any compensation is payable, pursuant to the *Native Title Act* or otherwise, in respect of the effect on native title rights and interests:

- (a) of any grant or action the subject of the consent given in clause 3.1 above; or
- (b) by virtue of any action taken by the Territory or the Commonwealth in respect of the declaration or purported declaration and use or purported use of the Park as a Park declared under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*, or any earlier Act or Ordinance of the Territory or the Commonwealth, prior to the date of the grant referred to in clause 3.1 above,

then the quantum of such compensation is limited to a total of One Dollar (\$1.00).

4. Warranties

4.1 The Land Council warrants to the Territory that:

- (a) as required by subsection 203BH(2) of the *Native Title Act*, it has, before becoming a party to this agreement, as far as practicable, and having regard to the matters proposed to be covered by this agreement, consulted with and had regard to the interests of persons who hold or who may hold native title in the Park; and
- (b) as required by subsection 203BE(5) and 203BH(2) of the *Native Title Act*, it is of the opinion that:

4

- (i) all reasonable efforts have been made to ensure that all persons who hold or may hold native title in the Park have been identified; and
- (ii) all of the persons so identified have authorised the making of this agreement.

5. Registration

- 5.1 The parties agree that the Land Council shall apply to the Registrar for this agreement to be registered on the Register.
- 5.2 The parties agree that they shall in all respects cooperate with the Registrar and do all things necessary or convenient in order to satisfy the Registrar, upon the application for registration being made, that this agreement should be registered.
- 5.3 For the purposes of subsection 24CG(1) of the *Native Title Act*, and paragraph 7(2)(b) of the Native Title Regulations, this agreement constitutes a statement by each party to the agreement that the party agrees to the application for registration being made.

6. Other

The Native Title Parties appoint the Land Council to execute a Joint Management Agreement in respect of the Park, and any amendments to the Joint Management Agreement.

7. Miscellaneous

7.1 Severability


If a court determines that a word, phrase, sentence, paragraph or provision in this agreement is unenforceable, illegal or void then it shall be severed and the other provisions of this arrangement shall remain operative.

7.2 Counterparts

This Agreement may be signed in any number of counterparts and all such counterparts when taken together shall constitute one instrument.

EXECUTED by the parties as an Agreement.

SIGNED by the HON CLARE MAJELLA)
MARTIN MLA, CHIEF MINISTER)
for and on behalf of the NORTHERN)
TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA)



.....
Witness *Travis Dowling*

IN WITNESS whereof the COMMON)
SEAL of the CENTRAL LAND)
COUNCIL was hereunto affixed in the)
presence of:)



William BROWN.....
Chairman

.....
Ron Hagan
Richard Minor

SCHEDULE

The Park

WATARRKA NATIONAL PARK AND LEASEBACK AREA

All that parcel of land near Temple Downs in the Northern Territory of Australia containing an area of 105600 hectares more or less being the whole of Northern Territory Portion 2214 more particularly delineated on Survey Plan CP4527 lodged with the Surveyor General, Darwin.

Appendix 3 Botanical Species of Conservation Significance (Duguid et al, 2008).

Endangered in the Northern Territory

Baumea arthropophylla

Vulnerable in the Northern Territory

Santalum acuminatum

Rare at the national level

Austrostipa aquarii

Macrozamia macdonnellii

Eragrostis subtilis

Melaleuca faucicola

Austrostipa centralis

Sedopsis filsonii

Euphorbia sarcostemmoides

Hydrocotyle sp. Watarrka (A.C.Beauglehole 20471)

Amperea spicata

Hakea grammatophylla

Rare at the Northern Territory level

Poranthera leiosperma

Goodenia havilandii

Calandrinia pleiopedala

Goodenia occidentalis

Bulbostylis pyriformis

Grevillea pterosperma

Menkea sphaerocarpa

Abutilon lepidum

Mirbelia ramulosa

Eragrostis sterilis

Gunniopsis septifraga

Chthonocephalus pseudevax

Persicaria decipiens

Histiopteris incisa

Corynotheca licrota

Lachnagrostis filiformis

Poranthera triandra

Einadia nutans subsp. *nutans*

Sclerolaena parallelicuspis

Doodia caudata

Senecio lanibracteus

Dodonaea microzyga var. *microzyga*

Stenanthemum petraeum

Juncus continuus

Acacia grasbyi

Cuphonotus andraeanus

Swainsona colutooides

Juncus kraussii subsp. *australiensis*

Ophioglossum lusitanicum

Glischrocaryon aureum var. *angustifolium*

Eleocharis pusilla

Xanthorrhoea thornstonii

Goodenia glandulosa

Poorly known (data deficient) at the national level

Acacia aneura var. *Bloods Range* (D.E.Albrecht 10087)

Sida sp. *Petermann Ranges* (B.G.Thomson 2340)

Comesperma viscidulum

Logania centralis

Poorly known (data deficient) at the Northern Territory level

<i>Cullen discolor</i>	<i>Sida</i> sp. Watarrka (D.E.Albrecht 8672)
<i>Leiocarpa tomentosa</i>	<i>Austrostipa trichophylla</i>
<i>Enneapogon intermedius</i>	<i>Senna artemisioides</i> subsp. Kuyunba (B.Pitts 113)
<i>Heliotropium inexplicitum</i>	<i>Maireana sedifolia</i>
<i>Eragrostis lanicaulis</i>	<i>Amyema miraculosa</i> subsp. <i>boormanii</i>
<i>Isolepis australiensis</i>	<i>Arabidella trisecta</i>
<i>Amaranthus</i> sp. Alice Springs (D.E.Albrecht 8892)	<i>Polystichum proliferum</i>
<i>Triglochin</i> sp. Newhaven (P.K.Latz 16797)	<i>Phyllanthus lacunellus</i>
<i>Swainsona purpurea</i>	<i>Oxalis radicata</i>
<i>Sonchus hydrophilus</i>	

Significant in Southern Region of Northern Territory

<i>Lindsaea ensifolia</i> subsp. <i>ensifolia</i> (rare, disjunct)	<i>Imperata cylindrica</i> (apparently rare, disjunct)
<i>Psilotum nudum</i> (rare, disjunct)	<i>Ottelia ovalifolia</i> subsp. <i>ovalifolia</i> (disjunct)
<i>Phragmites australis</i> (disjunct)	<i>Pteris tremula</i> (disjunct)
<i>Fimbristylis sieberiana</i> (disjunct)	<i>Schoenus falcatus</i> (apparently rare, disjunct)
<i>Cyclosorus interruptus</i> (rare, disjunct)	<i>Adiantum hispidulum</i> var. <i>hispidulum</i> (disjunct)

Significant in MAC or GSD bioregions

<i>Alectryon oleifolius</i> subsp. <i>oleifolius</i> (disjunct, western range limit)	<i>Cheilanthes brownii</i> GSD (apparently rare, disjunct), MAC (disjunct)
<i>Polycarpha involucreta</i> GSD (disjunct), MAC (disjunct, southern range limit)	<i>Eriocaulon cinereum</i> s.lat. MAC (apparently rare, disjunct)
<i>Harnieria kempeana</i> subsp. <i>kempeana</i> MAC (northern, western, eastern range limits)	<i>Goodenia larapinta</i> GSD (western, southern limits)
<i>Cyperus castaneus</i> MAC (rare)	<i>Cassytha capillaris</i> MAC (rare)
<i>Vallisneria annua</i> MAC (apparently rare, disjunct)	<i>Eremophila ovata</i> MAC (northern, southern, eastern, western range limits)
<i>Eragrostis pergracilis</i> MAC (rare)	<i>Boerhavia paludosa</i> MAC (apparently rare, disjunct)
<i>Swainsona villosa</i> MAC (rare)	

Endemic to Watarrka /George Gill Range

Amperea spicata

Hydrocotyle sp. Watarrka (A.C.Beauglehole 20471)

Endemic to MacDonnell Ranges Bioregion (or nearly so)

<i>Austrostipa aquarii</i>	nearly/effectively endemic to MAC bioregion
<i>Austrostipa centralis</i>	endemic to MAC bioregion, with the Watarrka population apparently disjunct from rest of bioregion
<i>Eremophila ovata</i>	endemic to C.Aus, nearly/effectively endemic to MAC bioregion
<i>Hakea grammatophylla</i>	nearly endemic to MAC bioregion, one outlying population
<i>Macrozamia macdonnellii</i>	nearly/effectively endemic to MAC bioregion but moderately widespread and abundant
<i>Melaleuca faucicola</i>	nearly endemic to MAC bioregion, one outlying population
<i>Senna artemisioides</i> subsp. <i>Kuyunba</i> (B.Pitts 113)	possibly endemic to MAC bioregion/C.Aus

Endemic to C.Aus

Goodenia larapinta

Harnieria kempeana subsp. *kempeana*

Ozothamnus kempei predominantly in MAC bioregion with various outliers

Sedopsis filsonii predominantly in MAC bioregion with two outlying populations

Eragrostis subtilis in MAC bioregion only known from Watarrka

Disjunct/Relict Species - Strongly Dependent on Groundwater

<i>Adiantum hispidulum</i> var. <i>hispidulum</i>	relictual/disjunct fern- only at a few shaded springs in C.Aus
<i>Cyclosorus interruptus</i>	relictual/disjunct fern- only known in southern NT from springs at Watarrka & one West Macs spring
<i>Doodia caudata</i>	relictual/disjunct fern- in C.Aus only at some shaded springs in MAC bioregion
<i>Fimbristylis sieberiana</i>	relictual/disjunct sedge- only at springs in C.Aus
<i>Histiopteris incisa</i>	relictual/disjunct fern- in C.Aus only at some shaded springs in MAC bioregion
<i>Imperata cylindrica</i>	relictual/disjunct grass - only at a few springs in C.Aus
<i>Juncus continuus</i>	relictual/disjunct rush- predominantly at springs and permanent/semi-permanent waterholes
<i>Juncus kraussii</i> subsp. <i>australiensis</i>	relictual/disjunct rush- in C.Aus only at some springs in MAC bioregion
<i>Lindsaea ensifolia</i> subsp. <i>ensifolia</i>	relictual/disjunct fern- only at a few shaded springs/ seepages in C.Aus
<i>Persicaria decipiens</i>	relictual/disjunct aquatic plant - only known in C.Aus from a single spring at Watarrka
<i>Phragmites australis</i>	relictual/disjunct aquatic plant - restricted to waterholes and springs in MAC bioregion
<i>Psilotum nudum</i>	relictual/disjunct fern- only at a few shaded springs/ seepages in C.Aus
<i>Pteris tremula</i>	relictual/disjunct fern - only at a few shaded springs/ seepages in C.Aus
<i>Schoenus falcatus</i>	relictual/disjunct sedge- only at a few springs in C.Aus

Other Disjunct/Relict Species

<i>Maireana sedifolia</i>	relictual/disjunct - only known in C.Aus from Watarrka
<i>Ottelia ovalifolia</i> subsp. <i>ovalifolia</i>	relictual/disjunct aquatic plant- most records in C.Aus from Watarrka

Other Disjunct Species

<i>Acacia aneura</i> var. Bloods Range (D.E.Albrecht 10087)	Watarrka population the only one in MAC bioregion
<i>Acacia grasbyi</i>	in MAC bioregion only known from Watarrka
<i>Baumea arthropylla</i>	only known in NT from Watarrka
<i>Eleocharis pusilla</i>	only one record in C.Aus; possibly not extant
<i>Euphorbia sarcostemmoides</i>	disjunct - in NT only known from MAC bioregion
<i>Lachnagrostis filiformis</i>	MAC bioregion population disjunct
<i>Mirbelia ramulosa</i>	mostly C.Aus records from Watarrka
<i>Poranthera triandra</i>	in MAC bioregion only known from Watarrka; 3 of the 5 C.Aus records from Watarrka
<i>Swainsona colutoides</i>	disjunct - only known in C.Aus from MAC bioregion (Watarrka and Finke Gorge areas)
<i>Vallisneria annua</i>	aquatic plant, only at Watarrka in southern C.Aus

Other distributions of interest

<i>Acacia aneura</i> var. Bloods Range (D.E.Albrecht 10087)	Watarrka population the only one in MAC bioregion
<i>Acacia rhodophloia</i>	Watarrka population the only one in MAC bioregion (identify requires confirmation – similar to <i>A. grasbyi</i>)