



**NSW NATIONAL PARKS & WILDLIFE SERVICE**

# **Consultation Report**

**Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area  
Plan of Management**



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## Summary

Consultation to support the establishment of Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area commenced in 2021 after the park's establishment was announced by Matt Kean, the then Treasurer and Minister for Energy and Environment.

Consultation on the plan of management included meetings with Wiradjuri representatives, meetings with key stakeholders and public exhibition of a draft plan of management and draft Masterplan. A series of community briefings on the establishment of the reserve and planning process were provided in Lithgow.

Key stakeholders consulted included; recreational users, conservation groups, local businesses, mining companies, defence organisations, reserve neighbours, local government and relevant government agencies.

The Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area Draft Plan of Management was placed on public exhibition from 6 May to 5 July 2022. A total of 736 submissions covering a broad range of viewpoints and interests were received.

The Blue Mountains Regional Advisory Committee and National Parks and Wildlife Council provided advice to the Minister for Energy and Environment in July 2022 after considering the draft plan and submissions received during public exhibition.

The Gardens of Stone Plan of Management was adopted by the Minister for Environment and Heritage under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (NPW Act) on 07 November 2022.

This report summarises the issues, concerns and suggestions raised during the public exhibition of the draft plan of management and outlines changes made to the final plan in response to submissions, advice of the Blue Mountains Regional Advisory Committee and the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council.

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) acknowledges the community's interest in the preparation of this plan of management and would like to thank those members of the community that made a contribution.

# Themes raised during consultation

## Caring for Wiradjuri Country

The draft plan sought to describe the cultural significance of the landscape, and outline the legal and planning frameworks proposed to protect cultural sites and care for Country. The draft plan also proposed strategies to further partnerships with Wiradjuri People.

Points raised	Response and changes made to the adopted plan
Aboriginal cultural heritage is not adequately described	<p><b>Revisions have been made.</b></p> <p>To address this, the plan has been revised to better recognise that all activities in park can have implications on Aboriginal cultural heritage, and to ensure that these implications are properly considered.</p>
Plan should outline Wiradjuri aspirations for Country	<p><b>No changes made.</b></p> <p>To avoid pre-empting future discussions with Wiradjuri representatives, an outline of Wiradjuri aspirations for Country has not been described in the plan. The plan reiterates a commitment to work in partnerships with Wiradjuri People to identify and progress their aspirations for Country.</p>
Plan should make a commitment to communicate Wiradjuri perspectives to park visitors	<p><b>Revisions have been made.</b></p> <p>The plan has been revised to include actions to support cultural tourism and incorporate Wiradjuri perspectives into interpretation and signage.</p>

## Vehicle access

One of the main challenges in establishing the park is to design and implement an environmentally sustainable and functional vehicle access network. Due to the complexity of this task, the draft plan reiterated existing statewide NPWS policies for vehicle access (including four-wheel drives and motorbikes), proposed high level outcomes for the future park access network and deferred track-specific decisions to an access strategy to be developed over time.

Points raised	Response and changes made to the adopted plan
Four-wheel drive tracks should not be closed or upgraded	<p><b>Several points of clarification have been made.</b></p> <p>There is an extensive network of tracks in the park. Many of these are in poor condition, do not meet fire trail standards, are not required for public access and are causing unacceptable impacts to park values. NPWS has a responsibility under the National Parks and Wildlife Act (NPW Act) to ensure that tracks have a minimal impact on the parks values while also enabling public access and supporting management activities.</p>
Four-wheel drive tracks should be closed	<p><b>No changes made.</b></p> <p>Recreational use of four-wheel drive tracks is a popular activity in the park. The plan includes actions for the environmentally sustainable management of vehicle access. As a result, maintaining access for appropriate four-wheel driving is consistent with the objects of the NPW Act, and the management principles for a state conservation area.</p>
A track rating system to communicate driving difficulty should be implemented	<p><b>A revision have been made.</b></p> <p>An action to progress this suggestion has been incorporated.</p>
Access to four-wheel drive tracks should be managed via a permit or booking system	<p><b>No changes made.</b></p> <p>This point is consistent with the plan.</p>
Access to four-wheel drive tracks should not be managed via a permit or booking system	<p><b>No changes made.</b></p> <p>High volumes of traffic on some four-wheel drive tracks, particularly in wet weather, can cause damage to trails, including erosion and sedimentation. This can potentially compromise long-term public (and management) access and can be costly to repair. Controlled access mechanisms, such as temporary closures and trail bookings, may be necessary to manage traffic and thereby ensure environmental sustainability.</p>
Motorcycle access – Support for the continued prohibition of off-track motorcycle use (and the designation of single tracks for trail bikes)	<p><b>No changes made.</b></p> <p>This point is consistent with the plan.</p>
Motorcycle access – Objection to prohibiting motorcycle use of single track	<p><b>Revisions have been made.</b></p> <p>To ensure the protection of biodiversity, prevent erosion and minimise conflicts with other recreational activities, off-road vehicle access (including motorbike access) is not allowed in parks.</p>



## Recreation

The draft plan proposed that a range of camping experiences should be available and accessible to two-wheel drive and four-wheel drive vehicles. It proposed that vehicle-based camping be restricted to designated sites. It was proposed that non-vehicle based camping be allowed at sites more than 200 m from roads, tracks and infrastructure.

The plan proposed the development of tracks for walkers and cyclists. The plan proposed to allow for rock climbing but prohibit the installation or maintenance of protection points. Table 1 of the plan outlined proposals for how recreational activities would be authorised and the restrictions that would apply.

Points raised	Response and changes made to the adopted plan
Bush camping – Request that non-vehicle based campers be allowed to light fires outside of designated fire sites	<b>Revisions have been made.</b> The plan has been adjusted to enable fires to be lit outside of constructed fireplaces at locations greater than 200 m from tracks, trails and other park infrastructure to support bush camping.
Vehicle based camping – Vehicle based camping should not be restricted to designated camp sites	<b>No changes made.</b> Restriction of camping to designated campsites is required to provide a quality visitor experience and manage the impacts of camping on park values.
Cycling – A network of cycling tracks should be developed	<b>No changes made.</b> This point is consistent with the draft plan.
Cycling – A cycling track network should not be developed	<b>No changes made.</b> Provisions of an appropriately designed and constructed cycling track network will provide opportunities for visitor use and enjoyment of the park, consistent with the objects of the NPW Act and the management principles for a state conservation area.
Horse riding – A network of horse riding tracks should be provided	<b>No changes made.</b> The plan provides for the establishment and designation of horse riding tracks.
Horse riding Off-track horse riding should be allowed.	<b>No changes made.</b> To ensure the protection of biodiversity, prevent erosion and minimise weed spread, off-track horse riding is not allowed in the park.
Slacklining and high lining This activity should be allowed and managed in a similar way to activities such as rock climbing	<b>No changes made.</b> A consent process is necessary to ensure that risks are managed, the activity occurs in appropriate locations and does not impact on the park values.

## Commercial tourism development

The plan proposed that the Lost City Adventure Activity Precinct and accommodation for a multi-day walk would be developed and operated by the private sector. The plan also highlighted that authorised mining activities would continue.

Points raised	Response and changes made to the adopted plan
Adventure activity precinct should not be developed	<p><b>No changes made.</b></p> <p>The development of this precinct, and its operation by the private sector are consistent with the objectives of the NPW Act and the management principles for a state conservation area. Any potential impacts will be considered and addressed as a part of environmental and cultural assessments.</p>
Adventure activity precinct should be located outside the park	<p><b>No changes made.</b></p> <p>The topography of the Lost City makes this area within the park an ideal location for this precinct. The establishment of a high-profile attraction within the park will help to raise awareness of the park and its special values, and thereby help to build community support for the park's conservation.</p>
Hard-roofed accommodation should not be developed on the multi-day walk	<p><b>No changes made.</b></p> <p>The development of appropriate accommodation, and its operation by the private sector is consistent with the objectives of the Act and the management principles for a state conservation area.</p> <p>The establishment of the walk and supporting accommodation will help to raise awareness of the park and its special values, and thereby help to build community support for the park's conservation. Any potential impacts will be considered and addressed as a part of environmental and cultural assessments.</p>
Multi-day walk campsites Request that the basic, NPWS-operated campsites be available for independent walkers	<p><b>No changes made.</b></p> <p>This point is consistent with the draft plan, which allows for the development of campsites to support independent users of the multi-day walk. The plan does not identify these campsites for commercial operation.</p>



## Plan format and content

The draft plan sought to set key objectives for the park, provide high level strategic directions for management and describe the highest priority strategies and actions. It did not seek to provide a comprehensive list of all management responses at an operational level. Rather, it explained that detailed planning for the delivery of fire management, conservation, park access development, visitor facilities construction and other programs would be undertaken after adoption of the plan of management.

Points raised	Response and changes made to the adopted plan
The plan does not adequately outline the values of the park	<p><b>No changes made.</b></p> <p>The plan describes the park’s key values and explains the high level strategies for their protection and conservation. A comprehensive description of the park’s values is not required.</p>
The scheme of operations does not meet the requirements of the NPW Act or provide adequate information about implementation of the plan	<p><b>Revisions have been made.</b></p> <p>A scheme of operations has incorporated into the final plan to explain how key short to medium term actions will be implemented.</p>
Decisions about tracks, trails, authorised recreational activities and visitor facility development should be integrated into the plan before its adoption	<p><b>Revision have been made.</b></p> <p>The NPW Act requires that a plan of management is prepared as soon as practicable after the creation of a new park. A plan of management for the park is also required to guide a multitude of management actions that are needed to establish the park.</p> <p>This landscape was not previously managed as a conservation reserve. Changes to fire management, conservation, park access development, visitor facilities construction and other park programs management are expected to be quite significant and will require further stakeholder input and detailed planning. Therefore, it has been necessary to defer this detailed level of planning until after the plan’s adoption.</p> <p>Changes were made to the plan to explain the rationale for this approach and to outline the opportunities for involvement in the development of these detailed plans.</p>