

PART A GENERAL PARK MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES AND DIRECTIONS

This Part presents the general principles and directions which apply to the parks and reserves² (around one hundred) managed by the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory. It focuses on:

- management of native plants, animals and the natural environment;
- management of Aboriginal interests and sites;
- management of non-Aboriginal historic sites;
- visitor management and the provision of recreational opportunities;
- park administration, stakeholder management and concessions management.

It is incorporated as a key component of all Plans of Management prepared according to the requirements of the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act* and of other Management Plans for parks not declared under that Act.

1. MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Plans of Management, incorporating this Document, are central to the Parks and Wildlife Commission's management framework, and provide the basis for measuring progress over time.

Recently, the Commission has moved to address the issue of managing for outcomes through a management regime monitored and controlled through the Project Management System. In the case of park management, this provides the basis for setting short-term objectives and pursuing these through the achievement of realistic milestones. Within each of the Parks and Wildlife Commission's nine administrative districts throughout the Northern Territory, annual project plans are developed for the following key areas:

1. native species management;
2. fire management;
3. exotic animal species management;
4. weed management;
5. visitor management;
6. cultural values management;
7. stakeholder engagement; and
8. district management.

With respect to individual parks, however, successful operation of the Project Management System requires longer-term goals and targets to be set in the Plan of Management for each park.

Additional feedback on progress from year to year is provided through the Park Audit System. For each of the eight program areas, annual park audits are to be conducted for all parks to determine if targets and desired trends are being achieved. Audits are in place for the first six program areas. Audits for the stakeholder and district management programs are yet to be developed.

² Throughout this document 'parks' will be used to refer to 'parks and reserves'.

For each park, the overall implementation of the Plan of Management will be monitored through a review conducted after five years of operation in which progress with respect to management actions and overall direction will be assessed. This assessment will also determine whether the Plan requires revision or should continue in operation for the intended ten-year period.

At the end of its ten-year life, the Plan will be further reviewed and a report prepared assessing the level of success achieved in implementation. This report will then be used to aid the preparation of a new Plan of Management.

2. MANAGEMENT OF NATIVE PLANTS, ANIMALS AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

A primary objective in the management of parks is the protection and management of native plants and animals and the natural environment. In the Northern Territory such protection is guided by the following set of general principles.

2.1 General Principles

- The native plants and animals of a park represent primary values which are dependent upon maintenance of natural habitats and ecological processes.
- The effective management of a park's natural values requires a sound knowledge base.
- Introduced plants and animals have the potential to alter a park's ecosystems to the detriment of native flora and fauna and landscape/aesthetic values.
- Fire is an inescapable process in the landscape that demands careful management to achieve conservation objectives.
- The maintenance of a park's scenic values and natural character is fundamental to the value of the park as a whole.
- Accelerated soil erosion arising from new or poorly managed processes can threaten landscapes and habitats.
- The hydrological resources of a park are a critical element of the park's ecosystems and the maintenance of their integrity is crucial.
- Effective visitor management is crucial to the protection of a park's native plants and animals and the habitats and ecological processes upon which they depend.
- Any substantial management action may benefit some species, disadvantage others, and have no effect on yet other species. Hence, in prioritising management actions, long-term implications should be taken into account as well as the satisfaction of short-term objectives.
- Management actions must give weight to long-term impacts above short-term effects.

2.2 Management Directions

Within the Northern Territory, the application of the above principles is focussed on the following four areas:

2.2.1 *Native Species Management*

Management Objective	To provide an overall framework for the protection of plants, animals and the natural environment within Territory parks, and for the management of species of flora and fauna of particular conservation interest.	
Management Directions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The protection of native plants, animals and the natural environment, including the retention of all species will be accorded the highest priority in the management of NT parks. 2. Research, monitoring and recording of natural values and ecological processes will be accorded high priority. 3. Particular attention will be directed at the management requirements and status of threatened plant and animal species. 4. Projects will be developed for the protection of all threatened species, and will take into account any relevant Species Management Programs. 5. No developments or activities will be permitted that may seriously affect natural ecological processes or the aesthetic value of a park's landscapes. 6. Soil erosion sufficiently severe to compromise other management imperatives will be controlled and efforts will be made to rehabilitate seriously affected areas. 7. Interpretation and community education programs will be used to help visitors, school children and the wider community understand and appreciate the natural values of Territory parks, and of the ways in which these are best managed; and to adopt impact-reducing behaviour. 	
Performance Measures In accordance with the Biodiversity and Species Management Audit: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Total number of known native species present 2. Distribution of species currently classified as threatened or of greater conservation concern 3. Abundance of species currently classified as threatened or of greater conservation concern 	Desired Trends To be determined for each park and included in individual plans of management	

2.2.2 Fire Management

Management Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>To protect native plants, animals and the natural environment and minimise detrimental impacts of wildfires on the environment.</i> 2. <i>To protect people, personal property and park assets from harm due to fire.</i> 3. <i>To improve scientific understanding of the role of fire in the landscape of Territory parks and to use this knowledge for improved fire management practices.</i> 4. <i>To establish, with respect to the management of fire, a cooperative working relationship with neighbours</i>
Management Directions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The management of fire will be given high priority as a key mechanism for protecting and managing native plants, animals and the natural environment in Territory parks. 2. Fire management activities will follow sound strategic planning principles with decisions and actions based on the best information available. The general direction of the fire management program for the park will be established through the annual project review and program audit. Specific attention in planning and implementing the program will be given to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protection of native plants, animals and the natural environment; • minimising impact on the recreational and aesthetic values and ensuring the protection of people, personal property and park assets; • identification of cultural resources that may be damaged by fire and adoption of strategies to ensure their protection; • systematic monitoring with the aim of achieving better understanding of fire-habitat relationships and more informed fire management in the future; and • staff and visitor safety. 3. Efforts will be made to minimise the risk of wildfire incursions into Territory parks and will include cooperation with neighbouring landholders. 4. Restrictions on the lighting of fires may be applied in times of high to extreme fire risk or in accordance with the <i>Bushfires Act</i>. 5. Visitor access to all or part of Territory parks may be regulated or restricted in times of high to extreme fire danger.
Performance Measures In accordance with the Fire Management Audit: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extent and type of fires matched to stated operational objectives 2. Area adversely affected by wildfire 3. Impact of fire on fire sensitive sites 4. Incidence of fire in area designated as fire-free 5. Effectiveness of fire management in maintaining the extent and habitat suitability of the major vegetation types 	Desired Trends To be determined for each park and included in individual plans of management

2.2.3 Exotic Animal Species Management

Management Objective	<i>To minimise the impact of exotic animals on the native plants, animals and natural environment of NT parks.</i>	
Management Directions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Managers will seek to reduce or eliminate the impact of exotic animals on the native plants, animals and natural environment of Territory parks. 2. Exotic animal control activities will be outlined in the feral animal management project statement and will be based on a strategic approach to the control of exotic animals with attention being directed at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the ecology and behaviour of feral animals; • assessment of the impact of exotic animals, and of a range of possible mitigation measures; • staff competencies and training requirements; • the interests of stakeholders; • safety of staff and Park visitors. 3. A feral animal monitoring program will be developed for Territory parks. 4. Programs will be developed in conjunction with neighbours. 	
Performance Measures In accordance with the Exotic Animal Management Audit: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Type, extent and density of exotic animals 2. Impact of exotic animals on park values 3. No. of incursions into areas designated as exotic animal-free 	Desired Trends To be determined for each park and included in individual plans of management	

2.2.4 Weed Management

Management Objective	<i>To minimise the impact of weeds on the native plants, animals and natural environment of NT parks.</i>	
Management Directions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Managers will seek to significantly reduce the impact of weeds on the native plants, animals and natural environment of Territory parks. 2. Weed control activities will be outlined in the weed management project statement and will be based on a strategic approach that gives attention to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • criteria for assessing priority such as threat to rare or sensitive habitats, aesthetic and recreational impacts, status under legislation and probability of long-term success; • assessment of the impact of weeds, and of a range of possible mitigation measures; • monitoring and maintenance of identified priority weed-free areas; • control options best suited to different species and conditions, including burning, slashing, physical removal and chemical methods; • the ecology and life cycle of target weed species; • education and cooperation of neighbours and visitors in minimising the risk of weed spread; • minimising the risk of seed spread during and after control activities; and • staff training and safety standards. 3. A weed monitoring program that includes the collation of data, allowing for comparisons of data across the years will be established for Territory parks. 	
Performance Measures In accordance with the Weed Management Audit: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Extent and severity of weeds 2. Assessment of weed species highly likely to cause severe impacts if left untreated 3. % of park area essentially weed-free 4. % of park area subject to dense infestation 	Desired Trends To be determined for each park and included in individual plans of management	

3. MANAGEMENT FOR ABORIGINAL INTERESTS INCLUDING PROTECTION OF SITES

The Parks and Wildlife Commission aims to protect the Aboriginal interests and sites of significance which occur in nearly all Northern Territory parks. Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory are important stakeholders with respect to all activities of the Parks and Wildlife Commission. A number of factors contribute towards making the relationship between the Commission and Aboriginal communities sufficiently special to be treated separately from other stakeholders. These include:

- ***The Social Characteristics of the Northern Territory:*** Aboriginal people make up over 25% of the population.
- ***Aboriginal ownership and interest in Territory lands:*** Through Land Claims, approximately 44% of Northern Territory lands are under Aboriginal ownership, including several high profile national parks. Underpinning this formal recognition of ownership, there is also the deep and abiding spiritual connection of people to many other lands, including most NT parks.
- ***Coincidence of Operations and Interests:*** The Parks and Wildlife Commission tends to operate in the rural/remote areas of the Territory where the majority of Aboriginal people live. There is also a shared interest in conservation with Aboriginal people displaying a major concern with “caring for their country”.
- ***Common Interest in Parks:*** The involvement of Aboriginal people in the Territory's parks brings considerable benefits to the park system, adding an important cultural dimension to areas which contribute significantly to the conservation of the Northern Territory's native plants, animals and natural environment, and to visitor interest.

Management will be in accordance with the following general principles.

3.1 General Principles

- The significance of Territory park areas to Aboriginal custodians is an important value in its own right.
- Involvement of Aboriginal communities enriches park management and is important to ensure consideration of Aboriginal perspectives.
- The development of economic opportunities, including provision of employment, contract services and concessionary enterprises for local Aboriginal people, is an obligation accepted formally under some joint management arrangements, and it is desirable that it be extended more widely.
- It is desirable that park visitors gain respect for and understanding of traditional culture and history associated with Territory parks, as well as any association between Aboriginal communities and the parks.

3.2 Management Directions

Management Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>To recognise and protect values, areas, sites and artefacts of significance to Aboriginal people.</i> 2. <i>To manage park values relating to Aboriginal culture in accordance with the wishes of those with traditional affiliations to the area.</i> 3. <i>To encourage visitor understanding and appreciation of the cultural values attached to Territory parks.</i> 	
Management Directions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aboriginal interest's, values and concerns will be taken into account in the management of Territory parks. Ongoing, effective consultation in relation to all aspects of management of Territory parks will be pursued. 2. Insofar as traditional activities do not significantly conflict with conservation values and visitor safety and enjoyment, those activities will be accommodated in Territory parks. 3. Further documentation and research into places and objects of cultural significance, knowledge and history will be encouraged and facilitated. 4. Aboriginal sites of significance will be protected according to the wishes of the traditional custodians. 5. All Aboriginal archaeological sites and objects are automatically protected under the Heritage Conservation Act. 6. Proposed developments in Territory parks will require site investigation and clearance from the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority. 7. The Commission will establish formal mechanisms to ensure that the Aboriginal custodians are consulted with respect to the management of Territory parks. 8. Support will be given to Aboriginal organisations or individuals wishing to run appropriate interpretive and educational programs within Territory parks or to be involved in park management. In addition, relevant Aboriginal organisations will be encouraged to apply for contracts for park operations such as track maintenance, campground and picnic area cleaning, and cultural site management. 9. Consultation with Aboriginal custodians will be undertaken to ensure that appropriate interpretative messages relating to Aboriginal culture and values are communicated to park visitors. 10. Any developments in Territory parks or any other "act" for the purposes of the Native Title Act ("NTA"), done in the parks, will comply with the requirements of the NTA." 	
Performance Measures Extent of degradation of Aboriginal areas and sites as determined by the Cultural Management Audit.	Desired Trends To be determined for each park and included in individual plans of management	

4. MANAGEMENT OF HISTORIC SITES

For many Australians the historic sites which occur in Territory parks are highly valued. The Parks and Wildlife Commission aims to protect these sites in accordance with the following general principles.

4.1 General Principles

- Historical features and the history of Territory parks are important values that provide insight into the past, and should be identified and protected wherever possible.
- Management of historic sites and artefacts should follow recognised practices and procedures.
- It is desirable that park visitors should appreciate the historical significance of Territory parks and of the sites within them.

4.2 Management Directions

Management Objective	<i>To recognise the historical values of Territory parks and to ensure the appropriate protection of sites and objects of historical interest.</i>	
Management Directions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Documentation of the history, historic sites and artefacts in Territory parks will be encouraged to increase understanding of the values and provide information that will facilitate management. 2. All conservation work and management of historic sites and artefacts in a park will follow ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites) principles and recommended procedures outlined in the Burra Charter. 3. Where there are significant historical values in Territory parks, work will be in accordance with a Conservation Plan prepared by suitably qualified experts. 	
Performance Measures Extent of degradation of historic sites as determined by the Cultural Management Audit.	Desired Trends To be determined for each park and included in individual plans of management	

5. VISITOR MANAGEMENT AND THE PROVISION OF RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The majority of Northern Territory Parks make some provision for visitors. Recreation is an important component in all parks other than in a small number of parks that are primarily concerned with conservation of particular species or other aspect of the natural environment. The Parks and Wildlife Commission aims to manage visitors and recreation according to the following general principles:

5.1 General Principles

- Parks provide opportunities for visitors to enjoy and appreciate the values for which they have been set aside. Recreation is an important element in the use, appreciation and enjoyment of parks by visitors.
- Poorly designed recreational facilities or infrastructure can diminish park values as well as visitor experiences.
- Well designed interpretation and education programs can increase visitor knowledge and understanding of park values and their management leading to enhanced visitor experiences and compliance with management provisions.
- The safety of park visitors is of paramount importance in the development and management of parks.
- Issues related to equity of use including gender and physical impairment are primary considerations in the provision of visitor access and development of park visitor facilities.
- Effective liaison with the tourism industry can help to improve the delivery of park recreational opportunities and the provision of visitor services.
- An understanding of visitor use and expectations can help to improve park recreational opportunities and the provision of visitor services.
- Appropriate commercial operations can be a very important tool for managing visitors and better utilizing staff resources. Well-managed operations can make parks more enjoyable to a greater number of people and contribute to the value of the tourism industry. In addition, appropriate and well-managed commercial operations may enhance visitor opportunities and enjoyment, contribute significantly to local economies, and reduce the resource requirements of park management.

5.2 Management Directions

Management Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>To provide safe and high quality visitor experiences.</i> 2. <i>To minimise the impact of visitors on park values.</i> 3. <i>To offer recreational opportunities consistent with maintaining park values.</i> 4. <i>To provide appropriate visitor facilities and opportunities to understand and appreciate park values.</i> 	
Management Directions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Visitor Monitoring Strategy will be developed for each park to monitor visitor numbers, activities, preferences and satisfaction levels to assist park management and planning. The Strategy will contain the following elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • counting of park visits and regular maintenance and calibration of counting devices, • effective management of data from counters, surveys, commercial operations and ranger observations, • a program of quantitative and qualitative assessment of visitor satisfaction. 2. Visitor access, the provision of visitor facilities and the development of recreational opportunities will be in accordance with the zoning scheme. 3. Safety standards and procedures will be followed in all aspects of park management. Visitor safety will be promoted through information management including the use of signs, publications and park interpretation programs. 4. An interpretation program will be developed for Territory parks. The program will seek to provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appropriate orientation to park visitors; • relevant safety information and also advise visitors of hazards or potential dangers that they could encounter during their visit; • information about the recreational opportunities available to visitors during their visit; and • messages and information for visitors about park values. 5. Visitor facilities will be designed and sited to minimise adverse impacts on park values. 6. All facilities will be designed and constructed to minimise the risk of injury to visitors. 7. The impacts of recreational use on Territory parks will be monitored. Activities that are identified as having adverse impacts on park values will be controlled. 8. All park developments will be carried out with a minimum of interference to park values and in accordance with relevant Territory legislation including the <i>Environmental Assessment Act</i>, <i>Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act</i> and the <i>Heritage Conservation Act</i>, as well as the Commonwealth's <i>Native Title Act</i>. 9. Visitor services, access and facilities will be provided on an equitable basis wherever practicable in relation to all park developments. Facilities provided for disabled access will be designed in accordance with Australian Standards. 	
Performance Measures In accordance with the Visitor Monitoring System. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visitor satisfaction 2. No. of visitor safety incidents 3. Site impact of visitors 	Desired Trends To be determined for each park and included in individual plans of management	

6. PARK ADMINISTRATION, STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND CONCESSIONS MANAGEMENT

The Parks and Wildlife Commission is committed to the effective management of its Parks, including appropriate concessions where these are shown to enhance the visitor experience and supplement scarce park management resources. The Commission's administration will be guided by the following set of general principles:

6.1 General Principles

- Park management should be conducted within a framework of effective and efficient use of resources, and should be outcome oriented.
- Effective park management is dependent upon the selection of competent staff and their continued professional development and training.
- Park management benefits substantially from the involvement of stakeholders and the general public.
- Volunteers can make a major contribution to park management and assist in making scarce resources go further.
- The safety of visitors is of paramount importance in the management of the Territory's parks.

6.2 Management Directions

Within the Northern Territory, the application of the above principles is focussed on the following three areas:

6.2.1 General Administration

Management Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>To provide responsible management and appropriate and efficient administration of Territory parks.</i> 2. <i>To ensure that park staff are highly professional, fully trained and enjoy safe and healthy work practices and working environments.</i> 3. <i>To maximise the safety of visitors and staff.</i>
Management Directions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Park management will be guided by a project management and audit system which provides the basis for measuring outcomes and gauging progress in the achievement of management objectives. 2. The selection of suitable staff and their professional development will be accorded high priority. 3. Suitable training for staff will be provided in the skills necessary to perform required duties. 4. Wherever possible contract services will be used for general visitor facility maintenance and visitor services. 5. Management programs suitable for volunteers will continue to be identified. The Commission will actively encourage the community to become involved in programs within Territory parks including education, interpretation, monitoring and park maintenance tasks. 6. All major facility developments for both visitors and park administration will be subject to environmental assessment to ensure appropriate siting and to minimise damage to the natural and cultural resources of the park. 7. Emergency Response Procedures will be carried out in accordance with the Commission's Emergency Response Standard Operating Procedures. 8. Visitor information, including signs and interpretation material will inform visitors of potential safety hazards and appropriate precautions. 9. Operations for the exploration and recovery of minerals on parks may be permitted in accordance with the <i>Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act</i> and <i>Mining Act</i>, and current administrative arrangements between the Parks and Wildlife Commission, Lands, Planning and Environment (now both part of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment) and Mines and Energy (now part of the Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development). These arrangements will be monitored to ensure that they provide for protection of key park values.
Performance Measures <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Project milestones met 2. Staff competency levels 3. No. of volunteers hours 4. No. of safety incidents 	Desired Trends To be determined for each park and included in individual plans of management

6.2.2 Stakeholder Engagement

<p>Management Objectives</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>To ensure adequate and appropriate consultation and representation of stakeholders interests in the management of Territory parks.</i> 2. <i>To foster the involvement of stakeholders in relevant areas of park management.</i> 3. <i>To establish effective mechanisms for consultation with the key stakeholders.</i> 4. <i>To actively encourage and involve stakeholders and other agencies and organisations in the conservation of biodiversity in the districts surrounding Territory parks.</i> 5. <i>To engender a positive community attitude to Territory parks.</i>
<p>Management Directions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Parks and Wildlife Commission will be mindful of the need to keep the community and park stakeholders involved and informed with regard to all issues and proposed developments of mutual interest. Any community involvement initiatives that will assist achievement of the park's management objectives will be supported. 2. Park staff will regularly liaise with its neighbours in relation to cooperative management in the use and control of fire, control of stock and feral animals, weed control, soil conservation, fences, aspects of Aboriginal interest, visitor access and tourism development. 3. Annual assessment of stakeholder liaison will be undertaken for Territory parks as part of the Stakeholder Management Audit component (once developed) of the Park Program Audits. 4. The Commission will continue to encourage resident Aboriginal people and others with traditional affiliations with Territory parks to accept invitations to be involved in management advisory activities and will strive for a consultative process that is ongoing, open, accountable and accessible to the parties involved. Effective consultation and involvement will also be facilitated with ongoing education of park staff of the need to consult.
<p>Performance Measure In accordance with Stakeholder Management Audit:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No. of complaints from stakeholders 2. No. of engagements with stakeholders 3. Satisfaction of stakeholders with the Commission 	<p>Desired Trend To be determined for each park and included in individual plans of management</p>

6.2.3 Concessions Management

Management Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>To make provision for appropriate commercial activities which enhance the visitor experience in NT parks and reserves and/or supplement management resources.</i> 2. <i>To ensure that any commercial activities undertaken in Territory parks are of a high standard and compatible with each park's character and values.</i> 	
Management Directions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Commission may issue permits, leases and licences for concessions operations where these enhance the visitor experience. Such operations will be required to operate under the Commission's Concessionary Operations Policy. 2. Permits, licences, leases will provide details on the manner in which the operation may be carried out, including any restrictions on activities. In the development of conditions, consideration will be given to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • environmental impact; • impacts on park visitors; • codes of conduct; • visitor safety; • visitor information standards; • Aboriginal training and employment opportunities, where applicable; • carrying capacities or limits on the level of activity that can be undertaken; • penalties in the event of failure to comply with conditions, • operational term and review period. 	
Performance measures <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Level of satisfaction of visitors with commercial services as determined by surveys conducted as part of the visitor monitoring program for the park 2. Contribution of commercial services to park management 	Desired trends To be determined for each park and included in individual plans of management	