

Bushwalking NSW

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BUSHWALKING NSW INC - POLICY ON NATURAL AREAS

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1. Purpose

To support the appropriate management of natural areas including the promotion and encouragement of bushwalking and related activities that are sensitive to the ecological and heritage values of natural areas.

This policy presents a position statement by Bushwalking NSW Inc which represents bushwalking clubs in NSW and the ACT. The focus is therefore on bushwalking and related outdoor activities as they are undertaken within natural areas. It is not intended as an overarching policy on the management of natural areas.

Bushwalking NSW Inc acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and acknowledges and respects their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledge their custodianship of the Country in which we engage our bushwalking and related activities.

2. Definitions

The policy principles listed below relate to all land areas represented within the subset relationship shown in Figure 1.

2.1 *Natural Area*

Any area with predominantly intact native vegetation cover and containing suitable habitat for its dependent fauna. Although natural areas are primarily located on public lands, there are significant areas in private ownership.

This policy primarily applies to publicly-owned natural areas as bushwalking and related outdoor activities primarily occur on public lands such as national parks. It is acknowledged that some activities occur on private land (such as to access an adjacent national park). In such cases this should only be undertaken with the consent of the property owner.

2.2 *Protected Area*

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines a protected area as a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values <https://www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/about>

There are many types of protected areas in Australia, including but not limited to:

- ☐ national parks, managed by the Commonwealth, states, territories and local governments
- ☐ state conservation areas
- ☐ nature reserves and regional parks
- ☐ Antarctic Specially Protected Areas
- ☐ marine parks
- ☐ World Heritage listed areas
- ☐ Ramsar sites

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- ☐ biosphere reserves
- ☐ indigenous protected areas.

This Policy focuses on protected areas within the jurisdictions of NSW and the ACT, though a small number overlap with the Commonwealth jurisdiction such as Jervis Bay. There are five broad categories of public lands which bushwalkers and other outdoor recreationists will utilise.

2.3 National Park Estate

National Park Estate means the land: (a) land declared as a wilderness area under the Wilderness Act 1987 (NSW) or the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NSW); or (b) land reserved or dedicated under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NSW). It also includes protected areas in the ACT with the main protected area being Namadgi National Park. There are also number of national parks and marine parks which are managed by Parks Australia, in partnership with traditional owners. These include Booderee National Park at Jervis Bay.

The protected area network in NSW and the ACT includes a range of habitats and ecosystems, a diversity of plant and animal species, significant geological features and landforms, as well as Aboriginal cultural heritage sites, heritage buildings and historic sites.

2.4 Wilderness Area

This is usually a large unmodified or slightly modified area, retaining its natural character and influence without permanent or significant human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural condition. It includes but is not limited to, areas identified, declared or assessed as wilderness capable under the relevant legislation in NSW or the ACT.

Wilderness is not a human exclusion zone and it requires management by responsible authorities. As will all natural areas, the "natural character" of all wilderness varies over time in response to natural and human influences. It is to varying degrees an artefact of management practices including past traditional cultural practices.

2.5 Public Reserve

A subset of Protected Area comprising land which is publicly owned. Includes Crown Reserves and land under the care and control of bodies such as local councils and trusts.

2.6 Special Water Catchment

Land within the hydrological catchment of a water storage which is zoned for protection of drinking or potable water

2.7 State Forest

Land managed by a public or corporatised forestry agency for the primary purpose of native or plantation forestry but which will also contain areas of conservation significance.

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3. Additional Definitions

Other terms used in this policy have the following meaning:

3.1 Biodiversity

The variety of life forms, the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, the genes they contain and the ecosystems they form. This is usually considered in three levels: genetic diversity; species diversity, and ecosystem diversity.

3.2 Ecological Objective

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

3.3 Long-Distance Walking Track or Route

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

3.4 Off Track Walking

Walking that follows a route which has nil or minimal signage or other evidence of a path or track and which is not shown on any formal topographic map or imagery. These may be of one day length or shorter or multi-day.

3.5 Development

Includes all works, buildings and modifications including walking tracks, buildings, roads, and any proposal that will require a lease under the relevant national parks legislation in NSW and the ACT. This includes development which is proposed and managed by the relevant natural area manager.

The policy principles listed below relate to all land areas represented within the following subsets:

4. Objectives of Policy



- Support land managers and governments to preserve native biodiversity in natural areas.
- Advocate for management of natural areas in accordance with an adopted plan of management or similar document prepared in accordance with the relevant legislation and which has afforded the opportunity for public comment during its preparation.
- Provide a range of opportunities for self-reliant recreation in natural areas.
- Encourage the public and members of our affiliated organisations to implement the Bushwalkers Code of Conduct <https://www.bushwalkingnsw.org.au/bushwalkers-code/>

5. Values

Bushwalking NSW Inc supports and encourages:

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- Protection of native biodiversity and the maintenance of ongoing ecological and geomorphological processes and systems
- Provision of opportunities for human well-being derived from:
 - experience of intact, authentic nature; and
 - remoteness, solitude and self-reliance in natural areas.
- Provision of opportunities for non-motorised, self-reliant recreation in natural areas, especially bushwalking.
- Indigenous stewardship of land and customary ownership through formal agreements with government or through past and present association with relevant lands.
- Education on biodiversity, ecological and other systems and issues.

6. Policy Principles that should apply to Natural Areas

- Walking tracks and routes may be established provided they are sited and constructed to minimise or avoid environmental and cultural impact and enhance visitor enjoyment.
- Roads suitable only for motor vehicles such as 4WDs and trail bikes should be restricted to the existing fire trail network. Expansion of access for motor vehicles to protected areas should be discouraged.
- Horse riding trails should be restricted to a limited number of fire trails and roads in accordance with conditions determined by the relevant authority through a plan of management.
- Mountain bike trails should be largely restricted to fire trails and management roads in accordance with conditions determined by the relevant authority through a plan of management. Subject to an environmental impact assessment process, dedicated mountain bike paths should be permitted in some protected areas such as national parks. However, they should not be allowed in high conservation areas such as wilderness and nature reserves or on dedicated walking tracks and revegetating roads/fire trails.
- Bushwalkers and other outdoor recreationist should clean all equipment before and after an activity, particularly where pest organisms such as *Phytophthora cinnamomi* are prevalent.
- Management of fire should be based on sound ecological knowledge and cultural burning knowledge from traditional owners.
- Control or eradication of introduced flora and fauna should receive a high priority by land managers and through community involvement.
- Users of natural areas should be given opportunities to learn more about the natural and cultural values of these areas through signage and information centres, as well as programs such as volunteer bush regeneration and partnerships with park management agencies, research bodies and non-government organisations.
- Existing structures such as huts should be maintained in accordance with relevant plans of management and cultural heritage guidelines.

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7. Additional Policy Principles applying to Wilderness Areas

- Self-reliant walking by limited numbers of bushwalkers including off-track walking should be supported.
- Roads including management roads should only be retained to fulfil essential purposes such as fire management.
- Walking tracks of a more formal nature should be confined to the edges or margins of identified wilderness.
- In certain circumstances, there may be scope to install structures such as remote area toilets where existing usage is resulting in unacceptable impacts.

8. Additional Policy Principle applying to Water Catchment Areas

- Self-reliant walking by limited numbers of bushwalkers including off-track walking should be supported, where this does not compromise water quality outcomes.

9. Long-Distance Walking Tracks or Routes

The establishment of major extended walking tracks or routes through natural areas (including protected areas) are subject to the following principles:

- Use of tracks or roads within protected areas for long distance walking routes should be conditional on being consistent with the area's plan of management for levels and type of use.
- Tracks should be routed to minimise the traversing of wilderness areas and avoid sensitive environmental or cultural features or critical habitat.
- The provision of private accommodation infrastructure to support such tracks or routes should be provided off-park in nearby or adjoining areas so as to protect the area's natural and cultural values and provide a benefit to surrounding communities.
- Where existing long-distance routes pass through declared wilderness, sign-posting should be kept to a minimum and users should be expected to be self-reliant in terms of navigation.

10. Development in Protected Areas

Development in protected areas should be consistent with the relevant legislation in the NSW, ACT or Commonwealth jurisdictions and with the relevant plan of management or equivalent document depending on land tenure. Amendments to plans of management to facilitate development proposals should be subject to an effective public consultation process.



All alternatives for locating a development outside a protected area must be considered before considering a development within that area.

Private infrastructure development in the National Park estate should not be permitted. This includes ancillary development such as access roads and support services such as helicopter transport.

Any development within protected areas (including public development) must:

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- seek to improve the environment and ecological values of the area where possible, or reduce the impact of existing human activities
- be low key
- be sensitive to surroundings
- promote sustainable visitation and awareness of the natural surrounds
- be located within modified natural areas
- promote sustainable and low-impact activities such as bushwalking
- consider the broader community perspective towards the proposed development
- not restrict access to bushwalkers or other low impact users of the area.

Dwellings and accommodation for private or exclusive commercial use should be sited outside the National Park estate or other public reserves and should not result in net loss or reduction in access to tracks or campsites by other bushwalkers or outdoor recreationists.

Through roads should only be provided or maintained only for protected area or fire management purposes.

More specific development considerations for development within the national park estate are given in Appendix 3.

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Appendix 1. Guide to the Application of the Policy for Recreation Management

Facilities Type	Natural Areas	Wilderness
Marked Routes	Marked routes are permissible in places where safety is an issue or where navigation is difficult (such as to locate a cliff pass). Markings such as plastic tape installed for special events e.g., long-distance runs should be removed once the event is completed. Other markers such as stone cairns or paint splashes should be progressively removed unless they are of historical or cultural significance or where they are essential for navigation and where other navigation aids such as sign posts are absent. Multiple cairns at one location or cairns at frequent intervals are not supported.	No new routes should be marked except at the boundaries of wilderness areas and existing markings should be confined to situations where safety is affected. Markings such as plastic tape installed for special events e.g., long-distance runs should be removed once the event is completed.
Walking Pads and Cut Tracks	Permissible provided they don't result in erosion. Eroded tracks should either be closed and revegetated, repaired or converted to a constructed track.	Walking pads are tolerable providing they do not cause erosion. Existing cut tracks may be retained but new cut tracks should not be permitted. Eroded tracks should be closed and revegetated.
Constructed Walking Tracks	Permissible and encouraged in popular areas outside wilderness to provide broad access while protecting against human impacts. Such tracks should not detract from cultural and natural values.	Existing constructed tracks may be retained. No new tracks should be constructed nor existing ones modified.

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Roads	Kept to a minimum and based on the need for reasonable public access and park management. Surplus fire trails should be closed and revegetated. Access roads should be suitable for ordinary vehicles to provide access for all.	Roads such as fire trails should be retained for essential management purposes. Close and revegetate all other roads.
Activity or Recreation Type		
Bushwalking	Bushwalking is generally permissible if minimum impact practices are employed. In certain localities bushwalking access may be limited or controlled to meet conservation objectives.	Minimum impact, self-reliant bushwalking permitted and subject to party size limits. In some places, access may be prohibited or restricted for conservation purposes or the protection of cultural values.
Canoeing and Rafting	As for bushwalking	As for bushwalking
Mountain biking	Permitted on maintained roads only including fire trails or on dedicated trails, subject to an environmental impact assessment process.	Not supported
Rock-climbing, abseiling and canyoning	Permissible if there is no environmental damage. New permanent anchorages should be permissible only by those authorised to install them.	Permissible if there is no environmental damage. New anchorages should be permissible only by those authorised to install them.
Horse riding	Permitted on maintained roads or fire trails in limited areas of national parks.	Not supported

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Motor vehicle recreation including 4WDs and trail bikes	Permitted on public roads only. Vehicle travelling speeds and noise generation should be tempered as much as possible in natural areas.	Not supported
Miscellaneous		
Signposting	Signs should be erected only on routes which are popular with a wide range of people. Other markers such as stone cairns or paint splashes should be progressively removed unless they are of historical or cultural significance or where they are essential for navigation. Multiple cairns at one location or cairns at frequent intervals are not supported.	Signs should not be erected except on the periphery at access points or where there is an ongoing safety issue. Other markers such as stone cairns or paint splashes should be progressively removed unless they are of historical or cultural significance or where they are essential for navigation. Multiple cairns at one location or cairns at frequent intervals are not supported.
Printed guides	Detailed route guides should give due regard to protection and conservation as well as providing navigational information.	Where a well-established route passes through wilderness, supportive material should contain sufficient detail to guide the walker through. Otherwise limited to general description of the terrain, etc. with only broad suggestions concerning route possibilities.
Communication	Emergency devices such as PLBs or satellite phones should be carried, particularly where the user expects mobile phone coverage to be non-existent or limited.	Emergency devices such as PLBs or satellite phones should be carried, particularly where the user expects mobile phone coverage to be non-existent or limited.

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Appendix 2. Huts

The retention and maintenance of huts is supported where this is consistent with relevant plans of management and cultural heritage guidelines.

All huts in National Parks except for huts essential to the work of NPWS should be available to any bushwalker, cross-country skier or other outdoor recreationist including as emergency refuges during inclement weather.

Huts of historic or cultural value are distinguished from camping shelters which are constructed by public authorities to support the users of long-distance walking tracks and trails. The construction of camping shelters is generally supported, subject to an environmental impact assessment process.

Values

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

Policy

The conflict between the above values and policy on built accommodation in natural areas and structures of any sort in wilderness can be resolved when it is recognised that in the longer-term huts are not permanent structures. Eventual collapse from general decay or destruction by events such as fires is an outcome which maintenance will mitigate but not prevent. Therefore, all huts have a finite life which, with care, will be measured in decades rather than years. On this basis the following policy statements can be made:

- Removal of existing huts should be carried out if consistent with the relevant plan of management and cultural heritage guidelines.

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- Existing huts may be rebuilt after destruction or severe damage subject to plans of management, cultural heritage guidelines and consultation with bodies such as the Kosciuszko Huts Association.
- New huts should be discouraged.
- Maintenance of huts should not venture beyond general upkeep of the basic structure. There should be no upgrades of shelter from basic to more elaborate accommodation.

Appendix 3. Development Considerations for Development within Protected Areas

When considering consistency with the objectives of the relevant legislation, specific consideration for any development in a protected area should be given to:

- Conditions of development should make provision for the rehabilitation of the site area once the purpose of the development is completed. For example, the removal of a shelter or temporary worksite and the rehabilitation of the site should be a mandatory consent condition. The cost of rehabilitation should be borne by the proponent.
- Runoff, erosion and pollution (sediment / chemical use).
- Control of weeds, invasive species and diseases (including dieback).
- Restriction of lighting (artificial lighting is not appropriate outside of key visitor nodes in National Parks estate).
- Adaptive re-use of pre-existing structures and developments.
- Ensuring non-native animals and domestic pets are not brought into the National Park estate.
- Reducing sound pollution.
- Impacts to bushwalking and other low-impact activities.
- Encouraging all visitors to appreciate their location in the National Park estate and promote low impact recreation.
- Impact of roads, access, parking, and any other ancillary development.