



NSW NATIONAL PARKS & WILDLIFE SERVICE

Recreational activities discussion paper

**Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, Lion Island
Nature Reserve, Long Island Nature Reserve
and Spectacle Island Nature Reserve**



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David Finnegan/DPIE

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Environment, Energy and Science
Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
59 Goulburn Street, Sydney NSW 2000
PO Box A290, Sydney South NSW 1232
Phone: +61 2 9995 5000 (switchboard)
Phone: 1300 361 967 (Environment, Energy and Science enquiries)
TTY users: phone 133 677, then ask for 1300 361 967
Speak and listen users: phone 1300 555 727, then ask for 1300 361 967
Email: info@environment.nsw.gov.au
Website: www.environment.nsw.gov.au

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Introduction

The NSW *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* requires a plan of management to be prepared for each national park and nature reserve. A plan of management is a legal document that sets out how the values of the park including natural, cultural (Aboriginal and shared heritage) and recreation values will be managed in the long term.

The current Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, Lion Island Nature Reserve, Long Island Nature Reserve and Spectacle Island Nature Reserve Plan of Management has been in place since 2002. In this time, visitation to the national park has increased, new management challenges and opportunities have emerged, and community interests and expectations have changed.

In response to these emerging management challenges and opportunities and changing community interests and expectations, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is preparing a new plan of management for Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park and the island nature reserves.

Five discussion papers have been developed to inform preparation of this new plan of management and provide opportunities for comment and community feedback. The papers describe and explore key management issues focused on the following themes:

- Natural, visitor experience and shared heritage values
- Aboriginal cultural values
- Recreational activities
- Visitor destinations
- Leases, licences and consents.

Purpose of this paper

The purpose of this paper is to invite discussion about how NPWS can continue to provide high-quality recreational opportunities for visitors while protecting the natural and cultural values of Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. Preparation of a new plan of management provides an ideal opportunity to consider new ideas and develop options to meet these dual objectives.

The island nature reserves are visited by volunteers and scientists, with NPWS consent, for conservation management purposes and are not open to the public. The island nature reserves are discussed in this paper only with respect to volunteering.

Recreational activities in the park continue to change

Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park is one of the most popular national parks in New South Wales, attracting 3.32 million visits in 2016. Established in 1894, many Sydneysiders and their families have special and long memories of their visits to the park. Many of these people maintain their association with the park by continuing to visit on a regular basis.

The park's proximity to centres of continuing population growth and its relative ease of access contributes to increasing visitation to the park. The importance of the park in providing rewarding nature-based visitor experiences is set to grow with this increasing visitation offering opportunities to capture and inspire a new generation of park visitors.

National parks near large populations cater to a wide spectrum of visitor needs and aspirations for rewarding visitor experiences. In delivering the optimal suite of recreational activities and experiences in the park NPWS considers visitor preferences for the duration and frequency of activities, accessibility, infrastructure and facilities to support the activity, degree of physical challenge and naturalness of the setting.

Recreational activities in the park continue to evolve and change as new activities emerge and new locations attract visitors. In responding to these changes, park managers continually review and assess the impact of activities on park values, other visitors and public safety, and adapt management approaches.

NPWS aims to:

- Maintain harmony between visitors with different recreational needs and desires. Recreational activities competing for use of the same space require management, particularly to ensure visitor safety. An example is the shared use of management trails by walkers, mountain bike riders and horse riders.
- Manage evolving visitor expectations and interests in a way that maintains the park's natural, cultural and recreational values and supports rewarding visitor experiences. Increasing numbers of people are coming to the park seeking new places to go and new ways to experience the outdoors. Interest in these new places or activities is increasingly driven by social media, providing NPWS with opportunities to engage visitors in new ways.
- Regulate recreational activities including where they can occur to ensure protection of natural and cultural values. The park has a rugged, steep landscape and some areas within the park contain sensitive natural and cultural features that could be damaged by recreational activities.
- Manage visitor numbers to ensure that the demand for visitor facilities, such as toilets, picnic areas, carparks and walking tracks, does not detract from a positive visitor experience.
- Manage competition for space on the waterways, vessel mooring and storage facilities and boat parking effectively. The Hawkesbury River, Broken Bay and Pittwater estuary are among the busiest waterways for boating in New South Wales.
- Ensure park management is sustainable. This includes ensuring the cost of establishing recreation opportunities and the costs of ongoing maintenance of facilities and services required to support the activities are sustainable and meet identified funding priorities.

How do you think NPWS should respond to evolving recreation interests?

Recreational activities

Bushwalking

Bushwalking is one of the most popular nature-based activities in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. The park's extensive track and trail network ranges from longer bush tracks across rugged terrain for more experienced walkers to short, all-access trails for less-able walkers, people using wheelchairs and prams, and people with less time. The park currently has over 240 kilometres of walking tracks and trails. The patterns of use and condition of these tracks and trails is variable.

Proposals for new walking routes in the park have been suggested by members of the community and by tourism and recreational planners. These proposals range from short loop tracks within main visitor precincts to longer multi-day walks.

NPWS is currently assessing track and trail condition, level-of-use and safety across Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. NPWS will use this social, environmental and management sustainability assessment to prepare a strategic framework for the delivery of walking experiences in the park.

The strategic framework may propose:

- installation of raised boardwalks or other protective measures to reduce erosion
- rerouting, closure or construction of new connections or routes
- a track stewardship program to provide opportunities for volunteer groups to partner with NPWS in the care of tracks.

What new and improved bushwalking experiences, if any, would you like to see provided in the park?

Camping and accommodation

Camping in a national park is a popular visitor activity and Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park currently provides for this at two locations:

- The Basin Campground offers camping overlooking the picturesque waterways of Pittwater. Public access by foot is along a steep management trail. Most visitors access the campground by private boat, water taxi or a ferry from Palm Beach (see the [Visitor destinations](#) discussion paper).
- Bush-style camping is provided at Brooklyn Dam. This camping area caters for self-sufficient walkers hiking the Great North Walk and is designed for a single night's stay only. Usage levels are generally low but there are often groups of children camping overnight as part of organised walks, particularly during school holiday periods. Visitor facilities are not provided.

As the needs and preferences of park visitors evolve over time, the range of overnight stay opportunities in the park may need to be adjusted to include other forms of short stay visitor accommodation.

Changes to camping opportunities will focus on environmental sustainability and diversifying the camping experience and will be informed by social research and assessment of business viability. Options for existing campgrounds include:

Redesigning The Basin Campground to attract a broader range of visitors by: providing a variety of comfort levels; catering better for guided tour groups; improving overall amenity; and managing water, waste and energy more sustainably ([see the Visitor destinations discussion paper](#)).

- Managing (or improving) the camping areas at Brooklyn Dam according to an assessment of usage (including strategic assessment of the Great North Walk's camping locations) and environmental sustainability.

Adaptive re-use of heritage buildings is a common, popular and successful way to maintain heritage buildings and provide unique visitor experiences. Successful examples of heritage buildings adapted for short term accommodation include the Lightkeepers cottages at Cape Byron, Seal Rocks and Green Cape and three cottages in Royal National Park.

New overnight experiences may be introduced to the park by adapting existing buildings following environmental and heritage assessment. The [draft Barrenjoey Head Concept Plan](#) explored the adaptive re-use of the lightkeepers cottages and other buildings for short-stay accommodation. Access to these historically significant buildings is currently limited.

What forms of accommodation would you like to see provided in the park?

Do you agree with adaptive re-use of buildings for short stay accommodation?

Drones and other remotely controlled aircraft

The use of drones (unmanned aerial vehicles or remotely piloted aircraft) is becoming increasingly popular for recreation and commercial activities such as photography. Drones may also be used for research and park management purposes. Drones are classed as aircraft and are covered by civil aviation laws. NPWS does not control aircraft above parks but can regulate certain behaviour in parks.

Use of drones and other remotely controlled aircraft in the park can interfere with visitor enjoyment and privacy and impact wildlife. Drones can also dangerously interfere with park operations, such as fire management. Under the NPWS [Drones in parks policy](#), NPWS consent is required to use drones in NPWS parks. Anyone operating a drone must comply with Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) rules, which require that drones be kept 30 metres away from other people.

Opportunities for the use of recreational drones in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park is limited by the availability of open space and the large number of visitors frequently using these open areas for picnicking and relaxation. Use of recreational drones is generally not appropriate in high-use visitor precincts, because of the requirement for drones to be kept 30 metres away from other people and because drones can impact other people's enjoyment, safety and privacy.

Management of drones and other remotely controlled aircraft will be further considered in preparing the plan of management and after considering community views. It may be determined there are no locations in the park where drones are appropriate. If there is scope for drone activities, written consent from the park manager would be required and consent would only be granted after considering the location, time and likelihood of impacting other park users and the natural or cultural values of the park.

Information about the restrictions on the use of drones will be clearly communicated to park visitors by signage and park information channels.

Commercial use of drones for photography, filming or other activities requires consent (see the [Leases, licences and consents discussion paper](#)).

Do you think there are any suitable locations for recreational drones to be used in the park?

Group activities and organised events

Group recreational activities are popular in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. The size and frequency of organised large group events have grown steadily over recent years. Activities involving large numbers of participants include long-distance bushwalking, rogaining, orienteering and cycling events and organised picnics in major precincts such as Bobbin Head. Group activities may be commercial, where people pay an organiser to participate, or non-commercial, organised by private individuals, not-for-profit community groups, incorporated associations or clubs (see the [Leases, licences and consents](#) discussion paper).

Organised groups can provide opportunities for people who would otherwise not be able to experience the park. Guided group activities can promote environmental or cultural understanding and reduce environmental impacts by ensuring that activities follow guidelines for low-impact use. Guided experiences are available through the NPWS Discovery program and commercial operators.

Large-scale group activities in visitor precincts and along tracks and trails need to be managed to protect the environment and maintain the enjoyment of other park visitors. Currently, NPWS consent is required for the following non-commercial group activities:

- rock climbing and abseiling activities at Barrenjoey Head of 10 or more people
- activities of more than 20 people at West Head
- activities of more than 40 people
- sporting events
- school/ educational visits
- weddings.

All commercial recreational and guided activities require one-off consent from NPWS or a [Parks Eco Pass](#) licence, regardless of the number of participants.

The public can book The Station and The Pavilion picnic shelters at Bobbin Head and Beechwood Cottage at The Basin for group activities and organised events.

Future management of group activities will focus on recognising the opportunities these activities can provide for visitors and ensuring that environmental impacts are managed through the licensing, consent or booking process. It is proposed that NPWS will undertake a review of management of organised, non-commercial group activities, including an assessment of the group sizes that trigger consent.

It is proposed that access to particular locations in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park for large events, such as competitive sporting or fundraising events, will be appropriately managed to minimise impacts on environmental values and other visitors as these events continue to grow.

Do you think that the current limits on group sizes are appropriate?

What changes, if any, would you like to see to the management of group activities and organised events?

Horse riding

Horse riding is a popular activity particularly in the eastern section of the park near the semi-rural suburbs of Ingleside, Terrey Hills and Duffys Forest. In 2014, the existing plan of management for Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park was amended to provide for improved horse riding opportunities in the park. Since then, four existing management trails have been made accessible to horse riders. The construction of three short tracks to provide longer rides connecting the semi-rural suburbs and allowing riders to avoid busy roads continues to be investigated. Funding for construction and maintenance and cross tenure negotiations remain a major constraint to implementing these connecting tracks and horse riding trails in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park.

The horse riding tracks in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park are shared by walkers and mountain bike riders as well as park management vehicles. Shared tracks allow for a greater range of activities in high demand areas of the park, but safety issues must be addressed.

NPWS will continue to implement the horse riding opportunities detailed in the 2014 plan of management amendment.

How can NPWS improve safety on shared use trails?

Mountain biking

Berowra Valley, Lane Cove, Garigal and Ku-ring-gai Chase national parks contain around 300 kilometres of management trails that can be used for mountain biking. These trails were designed primarily for park management vehicles and do not meet the expectations of all mountain bike riders regarding trail length, terrain features, style and destination. To address the demand for improved mountain biking experiences in northern Sydney parks the Gahnia and Serrata mountain biking tracks were opened in Garigal National Park in 2015, providing 3.75 kilometres of purpose-built single-width mountain bike track. The tracks are the only legal single-width mountain bike tracks in northern Sydney's national parks.

Increasing demand for mountain biking opportunities in Sydney's north is likely to continue with projected growth in Sydney's population and the rising popularity of mountain biking. Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park's scenic and natural features, as well as its accessible metropolitan location, is very attractive to mountain bikers and NPWS continues to receive requests to provide additional and improved mountain bike experiences in the park.

Suitable locations for sustainable track construction within the park are constrained by environmental factors including steep terrain, location of Sydney sandstone-based soils (which have a high potential for erosion), location and exposure of Aboriginal rock engravings and vegetation of high conservation significance. Currently, the network of tracks and trails available for mountain bikers in the park are shared with walkers, horse riders and trail runners.

Upgrading or constructing sustainable mountain biking facilities that address environmental constraints is expensive and needs to be balanced against other conservation and park management priorities. Improvements to mountain biking opportunities would need to be

progressively staged according to available resources and in consideration of other management priorities.

NPWS is currently conducting a spatial assessment of mountain biking in northern Sydney's national parks. This assessment will consider environmental impacts and sustainability, protection of native plants, animals and heritage and the provision of relevant, safe, enjoyable and appropriate experiences for park visitors. The assessment will also consider how to link with mountain bike opportunities on surrounding lands. The results of this assessment will inform development of a long-term, strategic approach to mountain biking in northern Sydney's national parks, including Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park.

How can NPWS improve the mountain bike experience in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park?

Road cycling

With its close proximity to Sydney's suburbs, scenic environment, challenging hill climbs, connection to other routes and relatively low traffic volumes, Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park is a popular place for road cycling. Most roads used by cyclists are managed by NSW Roads and Maritime Services (RMS). RMS manages Bobbin Head Road and Ku-ring-gai Chase Road in the western section of the park and McCarrs Creek Road, Liberator General San Martin Drive, West Head Road and Cottage Point Road in the eastern section. Many cyclists using these roads also use the park's visitor facilities and services.

The number of cyclists using roads through the park appears to be increasing. Park surveys show that the number of road cyclists is much higher across a weekend than during the working week. This includes those participating in bike club events and independent cyclists.

Roads through the park host annual road cycling events, such as the Bobbin Head Classic bike tour and Tour de PIF. The frequency and number of participants of organised cycling events in the park have increased. These events occur mostly on RMS managed roads and are approved by RMS. During race events vehicle traffic is managed to maintain safe gaps between cyclist and motorists. Some motorists have complained about lengthy waiting times.

Roads within the park are isolated, narrow, winding and tree-lined. Some sections of the roads also have rock walls and steep drop-offs at the road edges. Native animals regularly crossroads. These road conditions significantly contribute to the risk of cycling accidents. Poor or dangerous motor vehicle driving behaviour and risky cycling behaviours have been observed further contributing to the risk of accidents. The movement of pedestrians at visitor precincts where parking is located near busy roads or where visitors need to cross roads creates an additional risk of accidents.

Accidents and near misses of varying degrees of severity have been observed, including single bike accidents and near misses and accidents between bikes, cars and bikes, bikes and pedestrians and bikes and native animals. NPWS does not always receive official reports about these incidences and near misses.

Information relating to road cycling trends, incidents and safety matters is mostly anecdotal. More robust information and data is required to support decision-making to improve road cycling conditions and safety. It is proposed to conduct a formal risk assessment and audit of road safety and traffic management issues across Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park in conjunction with the RMS. The risk assessment would provide options to address road and traffic management issues, which may include: physical road and access improvements (e.g.

traffic calming devices, line-marking); traffic speed limit adjustments; advisory signage; demand-shifting measures to reduce temporal and spatial conflict; event management improvements; and enhanced community education.

Do you think there should be any limits on the number or size of road cycling events?

Do you have any ideas on how to make road cycling in the park more enjoyable and safer?

Rock climbing and abseiling

Rock climbing and abseiling are inherently risky activities and as such require consent from the park manager under the National Parks and Wildlife Regulation 2009. Conditional consent for these activities may also be provided in the plan of management.

These activities have the potential to damage fragile rock features such as caves and outcrops and any associated Aboriginal cultural heritage. To ensure protection of the park's sandstone landscape and other sensitive natural and cultural features, rock climbing and abseiling are currently only permitted at Barrenjoey Head under the following conditions:

- participants minimise environmental impacts to the cliffs and surrounding vegetation
- prior approval has been given by the Regional Manager for groups of 10 or more, or for commercial rock climbing and abseiling activities
- the safety of participants continues to be the responsibility of participants and their companions
- no new or replacement bolts are established without written approval from the Regional Manager (approval will be on the basis that NPWS accepts no responsibility for the safety of the bolt).

Volunteering

Volunteering programs and activities build connections between NPWS, communities and individuals and contribute significantly to the ongoing management of the national park and island nature reserves.

Volunteers participate in a range of activities in the park and nature reserves. These activities include providing guided tours, operating visitor centres, meeting and greeting visitors on site, maintaining and championing heritage sites and a range of bush regeneration and environmental management activities. Several organised volunteer groups run these services including Chase Alive Discovery program (managed in partnership with NPWS), West Head awareness team, Pittwater bush regeneration and Floating Landcare.

Volunteer bushfire brigades participate in fire management activities and the Marine Rescue NSW based at Cottage Point provide rescue, boating safety and education services.

Opportunities exist to expand volunteer provided services to include campground host services and track and trail maintenance. Horse riding, walking, and mountain bike groups have expressed interest in contributing to the maintenance of tracks and trails.

Volunteering as part of a tourism experience is increasingly popular in Australia. It is proposed that NPWS will identify opportunities for this type of experience within the park and island nature reserves. Opportunities for corporate volunteering will continue to be provided.

What types of volunteering opportunities would you like to see in the park?

Water-based activities

The waterways in and around Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park provide major recreation opportunities. Boating, sailing, fishing, swimming and kayaking are the most popular water-based activities in the park.

Sailing and motorised boating, including the use of personalised watercraft, are very popular in the park's waterways. Public boat ramps are located at Apple Tree Bay and Akuna Bay in the park. Public pontoons for short stops are located at Bobbin Head and The Basin. The marinas at Bobbin Head and Akuna Bay provide storage, mooring and boat servicing facilities for motorboats, yachts and other watercraft. These marinas also offer small boats for hire on a casual basis. The public wharves and boat ramps on local government-managed land also provide access to the park.

The waterways in and around the park can become congested especially near popular boating and sailing destinations. Some users of Cowan Creek and its tributaries have suggested that some larger vessels are generating excessive wash, creating a hazard for those in smaller vessels. Navigation, maritime safety and regulation of watercraft is the responsibility of RMS. NPWS works closely with RMS in managing sailing and boating activities that may impact park values.

Public swing moorings for boats are located among the more sheltered parts of Cowan Creek and its tributaries. Private swing moorings are also located within the park. The majority of private moorings are located at Apple Tree Bay and Cottage Point and are managed under a licensing system. A number of private jetties have been licensed by NPWS at Cottage Point.

The park's waterways are popular for recreational fishing from boats and from foreshore locations such as Bobbin Head, Apple Tree Bay and Illawong Point. The management of fisheries is the responsibility of the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) – Fisheries. NPWS works closely with DPI Fisheries to manage recreational fishing in the park.

The popularity of kayaking and use of paddle craft has increased in recent years. A separate ramp for hand-launching these vessels away from motorised watercraft is located at Bobbin Head.

Swimming is enjoyed at The Basin and at other small beaches on the Lambert Peninsula. The swimming enclosure at The Basin is dredged from time to time to remove the build-up of sand. Wading and swimming in the park's freshwater creeks is becoming more popular. Increased recreational use of freshwater creeks may lead to damage from vegetation trampling and water pollution from sunscreen as well as visitor injuries (e.g. slipping on wet rocks).

The Leases, licences and consents discussion paper considers management of private moorings and marinas within the park.

Would you like to see changes to the management of water-based activities in the park?

What do you think?

Your thoughts, ideas and comments on this discussion paper are now invited and can be provided using an [online comment form](#), by emailing ku-ring-gai.plan@environment.nsw.gov.au or by writing to Manager, Planning Evaluation and Assessment, PO Box 95, Parramatta NSW 2124.

The questions scattered throughout this paper are only intended to guide your thoughts. You may choose to comment on other aspects of the management of recreational activities. All input will inform the preparation of a new plan of management for Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, Lion Island Nature Reserve, Long Island Nature Reserve and Spectacle Island Nature Reserve.

There will be another opportunity to have your say when the draft plan is completed and put on public exhibition. If you would like to be notified when the draft plan is available, please [register your details](#).