

## ParkCare Patch: Annual Planning Information Session: Minutes

**Date:** Friday 5 August 2022  
**Time:** 9:30am – 11:50am  
**Location:** Online via Microsoft Webinar  
**Attendees:** Please see Appendix 1

### Introduction

#### **Lauren McQueen, Volunteer Programs Manager, Volunteer and Visitor Experience**

Hi everyone, and thank you for joining us online for the first ever Annual Planning Information Session.

I would first like to begin by acknowledging that, albeit virtually, we do meet on the land of the Ngunnawal People, and we pay respects to their elders past and present. We acknowledge that our nation is home to the oldest living culture in the world, and express gratitude that the works we do, both paid and voluntary, sits alongside the continuing contribution of the Ngunnawal people, as well as other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons.

As we mentioned, this is the first time a session of this kind has been run leading into our Annual Planning meetings. We ask for your patience as we navigate the technology, and encourage your feedback after the session so we can better understand if this format is useful and how it can be best implemented in future years. We will also be going out for formalised feedback at the end of the annual planning process as a whole.

Today, we will hear from a range of Departments, and each will cover off on their relative business area, and provide context on where their work priorities lay for the coming year, and also identify how they come to these decisions. We hope that understanding this broader context of work priorities will provide useful context as you head into your individual annual planning meetings for your group.

Today, we will hear from:

- Jac Travers, the Commercial Tourism Manager within our team, who will let you know about public consultation rounds that have started this week.
- Kirsty Babington, the Senior Fire Management Officer within the Fire Management Unit. Kirsty will be speaking to the annual Bushfire Operations Plan (BOP).
- We will then hear from Harley Baker, the Invasive Weeds Officer within the Biosecurity Team. Harley will be speaking to the Weeds Operation Planning.
- Finally, we will hear from Mark Sweaney, the Manager of Invasive Animals and Overabundant Wildlife, who will be speaking to the Vertebrate Pests Management Plan.

After speakers for the VOP, WOP and VOP has presented on their relevant topic, we will open the sessions up to Questions and Answers. Please add any questions you may have to the chat box. Any questions that we cannot answer within the given time will be followed up on after the fact.

Please note that as budgets have not yet been confirmed for this financial year, we will not be able to provide this information in this session.

## **Nature-Based Commercial Tourism Framework**

### **Jacqui Travers, Commercial Tourism Manager, Volunteer and Visitor Experience**

The Nature Based Commercial Tourism Framework (NBCTF) is focused on connecting business and nature in a sustainable way. The Framework has not gone public yet, and public consultation rounds are coming up.

Please note that in the current stages of the NBCTF nothing is set in stone, and everything is up for conversation and consideration. The public consultation rounds are to get feedback on what we are thinking based on the outcomes report.

The Outcomes Report is currently in its final stages, and this is what we will be consulting on.

#### What is the Nature Based Commercial Tourism Framework (NBCTF)?

An NBCTF provides a blueprint for how nature-based tourism is regulated across the estate.

Businesses are interested in conducting business on PCS managed estate, similar to experiences that are available in other states.

This is further amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic and visitor markets seeking a range of experiences outside and in open spaces to connect with nature and embrace local culture.

The framework will enable us to support local business, ensuring appropriate governance, operator education, and development of relevant and high-quality products and services that align with current plans of management, policies and legislation. It will also help us provide some consistency across all of PCS.

Other jurisdictions have shown that a framework such as this can bring significant benefits to the environment, economy, and public wellbeing.

Having a NBCTF will enable us to support conservation efforts through education and experience, safeguard against overuse, mitigate risk and ideally create job opportunities.

#### What is the scope of the Framework?

The framework is limited to commercial tourism business that operate on PCS managed estate and charge a fee for service.

The project does not include film, photography and sound, events, not for profits (unless any of the aforementioned are requesting fee for service), hospitality/food or assets for longer term leases of more than 10 years.

The reason for this is that there is currently ACT Government processes in place for these types of activities and proposals. The NBCTF looks to fill a gap, not recreate the wheel.

#### **Feasibility Project:**

A feasibility study was conducting in 2020 during the lockdown, and engaged over 70 stakeholders, including volunteers, internal teams, industry bodies, other government departments, commercial operators, and recreational users to name a few.

Based on the feasibility study, three options were identified on the potential to move forward with an NBCTF. Of these, Option 3 was preferred by PCS management. Option 3 is known as 'Building Strategic Partnerships'. This was then put to the Minister and approved for next steps in early 2022.

### What are the next steps?

Targeted public consultation will be conducted based on the Outcomes Report.

Once feedback has been collated, there will be a reassessment of Option 3 'Building Strategic Partnerships' and it will be adapted as appropriate.

Once this has been reviewed, it will be sent back to the Minister for endorsement to action.

### Option 3: Building Strategic Partnerships

Based off the feedback in the feasibility project, 21 opportunities for improvement were identified, which we then categorised into 9 components to make up the NBCTF.

What we are offering is essentially a permit system with relationship management, education and support.

21 opportunities for improvement were identified, and broken down into 9 components.

- Value Proposition – what it is that we offer
- Channels – having a single point of entry for permit applications and central point of contact
- People & Organisation – a structure of how it will operate, include expansion of the Commercial Tourism stream and extra responsibilities associated to those staff, including permit applications and compliance
- Process - how it will operate, and exception processes (for example, Indigenous approvals)
- Governance – including compliance modelling, education support and management and continuous improvement
- Culture – change management processes and communications
- Technology / Data Analytics & Insights – customer relationship management system, automation where appropriate, feedback loops, etc.
- Partners – working with them to promote and maintain the framework, such as VisitCanberra, National Capital Attractions Association, local community and recreational user groups etc

### Consultation:

The outcomes report will be coming out shortly, and will be used for consultation, and will go into finer detail of the components and how this framework is proposed to work.

We will notify when the consultation goes live.

There will be a link for feedback, so please only provide your feedback to this link to ensure that it is captured in the process. We encourage you to be completely honest, this is a key opportunity to provide feedback into the final approach to the NBCTF.

### Contact details for the Commercial Tourism Stream:

Email: [parks.tourism@act.gov.au](mailto:parks.tourism@act.gov.au)

Phone: 0403 930 969

### **Questions**

What sort of businesses have made the approaches?

Due to commercial in confidence, we cannot identify all or which businesses, but if there are any proposals being considered currently, they are going through robust assessments, and key persons are involved in this process, including Rangers.

But what types of business are they?

There are a range, from glamping to coffee carts to a range of different things.

Can the funds raised go back to the Parks?

Strongly recommend being forthright in your suggestions like this in the feedback you provide, please.

What is happening about the commercial use of the Centennial Trail around the ACT?

I am unsure of this, it is the first I have heard about it.

Thank you for this presentation: Several questions: more job opportunities - does that include more rangers?

The Framework is currently only in consultation phase, so details such as these ones have not been finalised.

As the NBCTF is about supporting businesses to connect with nature and culture sustainably, the intention behind "more job opportunities" is more aimed at locals in those businesses as an economic driver. Such as more job opportunities for Ngunnawal people.

Governance - enforcement not mentioned this is critical. How is that included? What are the criteria that businesses need to meet?

Agree that this is critical and more information about this is included in the outcomes report, such as the model we intend to utilise.

Because we are only in the consultation phase, we have not completely defined what the criteria will be (beyond Plans of management, policies, and legislative requirements) and development on this will continue after this round of consultation. If there are specifics you would like to see in this please add as part of your feedback. We want to know what is important to you so this framework can be beneficial for all.

Have we been included in the consultation for the criteria for the businesses?

We encourage you to include feedback/suggestions of this during the public consultation. As mentioned, nothing is set in stone, and everything is up for consideration. The criteria that will be used in the NBCTF are not defined yet, as this will take place in the development stage which is before implementation. Neither of which are to occur until after we have Minister endorsement for action.

## Fire in the Landscape / Bushfire Operations Plan (BOP)

### Kirsty Babington, Senior Fire Management Officer, Fire Management Unit (PCS)

My name is Kirsty Babington, and I am the Senior Fire Management Officer with the Fire Management Unit, so I manage the Prescribed Burning Program (which includes ecological burns) for PCS.

Fire is integral to land management in the ACT and Australia, and there are three different ways:

1. Hazard Reduction
2. Ecological
3. Cultural Burning

I'll first show you a key website where a large amount of information can be found. (Website: Bushfire Management in the ACT)

[https://www.environment.act.gov.au/ACT-parks-conservation/bushfire\\_management](https://www.environment.act.gov.au/ACT-parks-conservation/bushfire_management)

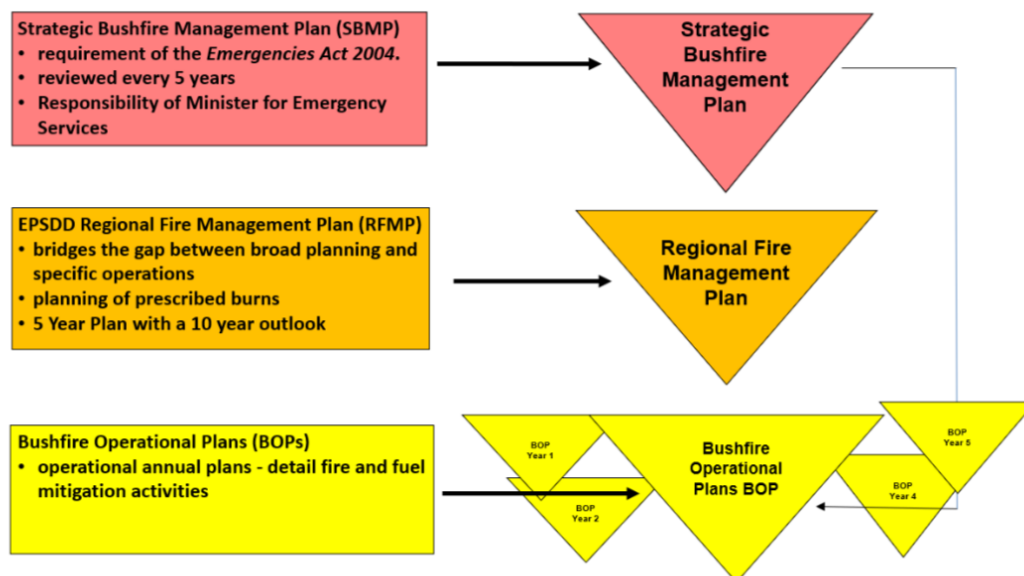
The site is a good spot to get information, including on upcoming prescribed burns. It shows the last date it's been updated, and you can use the map to look at areas of interest to you. The map hasn't yet been updated for the coming financial year but should be up in the coming week or so.

On the map you can select a burn you may be interested in, and it will provide further information. You can also always reach out to the FMU team with any questions.

Upcoming Prescribed Burns Interactive Map: [https://www.environment.act.gov.au/ACT-parks-conservation/bushfire\\_management/prescribed-burns](https://www.environment.act.gov.au/ACT-parks-conservation/bushfire_management/prescribed-burns)

### Bushfire Operations Plan (BOP)

## ACT Bushfire Management Planning Framework



We are governed by the Emergencies Act 2004, and a requirement of that is to have a Strategic Bushfire Management Plan (SBMP). The SBMP has a huge wealth of information and is the overarching document which strategically drives bushfire management. This document is the responsibility of the ESA.

Strategic Bushfire Management Plan: <https://esa.act.gov.au/about-esa/publications/strategic-bushfire-management-plan>

PCS Policies and Plans: [https://www.environment.act.gov.au/ACT-parks-conservation/bushfire\\_management/fire-management-policies-and-plans](https://www.environment.act.gov.au/ACT-parks-conservation/bushfire_management/fire-management-policies-and-plans))

From the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan, stems the Regional Fire Management Plan (RFMP)

The RFMP is a 10 year plan, reviewed on a 5 year cycle

Regional Fire Management Plan 2019-2028:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/550220a9bd8343de8ba15d56fadb526>

And then under the Regional Fire Management Plan is the Bushfire Operations Plan (BOP)

The three means we have, is removal of fuels, conversion to less flammable fuel type, and reduction of fuels, including through slashing, grazing, physical/mechanical, chemical treatment and fire in the landscape.

The BOP is developed with input from all of PCS.

Marty noted that there has been opportunity for volunteers to comment on these strategic documents over the years, and this has been made available to all registered ParkCare volunteers (as notifications were sent via the Hub)

The RFMP underwent public consultation before it was finalised.

Babs: Went through strict public consultation and has now been well finalised.

#### BOP Process

The BOP is developed with input from all of PCS, including each of the districts, Conservation Research etc. All of PCS can look and have input. Once everyone has had input, a draft is built and goes out to comment/approval. It then goes to the Director General for approval, and then the Conservator endorses it.

The BOP is well looked at, at all levels and is scrupulous, so isn't much opportunity to do things that haven't been approved from all environmental or other angles. Once that's approved, there is a list of burns and we can start the planning process.

As mentioned there are three types of burns.

Ecological burns are set by the Area Ranger, if they are out and about and think it might need a burn, they draw it up and send it through to go into the planning process. May be done for removal of exotic weeds, promote seed bank, there are a variety of reasons; it all depends where the burn is, what time of year and the objectives set by the ranger.

Cultural burns will not be talked to in this session as I am not an expert nor an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.

Prescribed burns focus on reducing overall fuel hazards, to meet requirements of the RFMP and corresponding fuel management standards (see link below). Once I get the list of burns, I go into the field and do fuel hazard assessments using the FHA standards book (national and ACT) to assess the hazard.

Fuel Hazard Assessment Guide:

[https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/21110/Report-82-overall-fuel-assessment-guide-4th-ed.pdf](https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/21110/Report-82-overall-fuel-assessment-guide-4th-ed.pdf)

ACT Bushfire Management Standards: <https://esa.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-06/Fire-Management-Standards-ACT-SBMPv31.pdf>

For example, Aranda and Black Mountain have high levels of stringy bark – depending on the zoning, the fire hazard often exceeds what it should be. So it's a balancing act - we can't leave them for too long, as soon as they tip the scale, we have an obligation and requirement to reduce. There may be options to burn individual trees, but this is quite resource intensive.

Grassland – different again, but dependent on type of year – we've had two wet years with high coverage in height, but we haven't reached a curing level where we have been pushed to implement burns.

There are a lot of things that go into it, it's incredibly complex. There are a lot of requirements that we have to meet and it's hard to do so. In saying that, with the zoning, if you want to look at it, ACTMAPI is your friend.

ACTMAPI Bushfire Map: <https://app2.actmapi.act.gov.au/actmapi/index.html?viewer=bushfire>

When on the Bushfire Map on ACTMAPI – Go to your layers, zoom into your interested area, select the SBMP Zones, and you can see exactly how the areas are zoned. The closer you get to houses, the more strict the regulations are – so generally there are more frequent burns to keep fuel hazards at a lower level.

### Burn Plan Process

One of the first things we do is communicate with stakeholders and districts – who will be notified and we do a field trip with the relevant stakeholders – look at assets, containment, protected plants, access, egress, etc.

Once that information is collected, the person responsible will write a burn plan.

If ecological, the area ranger will write up the burn plan as they are across the area. All assets/constraints go into this plan. Hazards scores, weather prescriptions etc.

Once received, we go through the burn plan and make sure everything is accurate/correct, and then it goes out for comment/review. As part of comment/review it goes to districts, Conservation Research, the Aboriginal fire management officer, values officer, ParkCare, etc to comment. This is collated and added to the burn plan – and then it is considered complete and can be implemented.

Other factors include smoke, assets, environmental risks (including sensitive plants or waterways).

When the burns have ecological value, the values officer will be present on the burn.

The role of the values officer at the burn – 1. Close ties with divisional commander who is overseeing the burn and review process of ecological objectives - are we meeting them, does an area need

more. 2. Lighting crew – informs them on where to be mindful of 3. Div Comm, help to implement best practice to protect best values. This has been more seriously implemented in the last two years, as there are many more considerations than there has previously been.

## Questions

Thanks - useful. How much of your planned burns have you been able to complete over the last few years?

It's been tough – with curing being really low (didn't even reach 60-70% which is incredibly low – we didn't have a single day of stand up this year. I've been here for 6 years and that has never happened in that time). It's been tough, taking opportunities as they come. The good thing about winter and when we have a drier winter, is it's a good time to implement grass burns.

Marty: Weather Prescription is one reason why I notify ParkCare Volunteers with short notice of when a burn will go ahead

Max we will know is four days out, whether or not we will be certain that a burn will happen – but really until 24 hours out, we are only 80% confident it can happen.

It will always be short notice.

I don't think we have ever had a prescribed burn on Tuggeranong Hill (I might be wrong) - why would that be?

We had one planned two years ago, but when we went and looked at fuels, there wasn't enough. Still period of drought when burn was proposed and it was too heavily dry and grazed, so would not have been able to carry a fire, and the fuel met the requirements in the zoning. If it has enough fuel/curing there will certainly be a burn there, but all dependent on meeting the fuel requirement of the bushfire management standards.

Research has established that there should be intervals of 10 years between burns of each mosaic. Could you feed this into the pattern of plans for burns of mosaics in nature reserves, please?

Mainly up to Conservation Research (CR) to inform us with the intervals between – also depends on vegetation type – CR is across this, and if we want to burn something sooner to meet a standard, they sometimes encourage to wait another year and sometimes we can do this or do some other form of removal such as physical rather than burns.

If we can't burn and too close in that interval there are other things we will do to reduce.

So it sounds like the Values Officer has a key role in the decision to burn or not - what criteria do they use to make an assessment? Is that something that is an available document?

It's not a key role in decision to burn or not- they provide advice and protect values, but it all comes down to the zoning and level requirements we have to meet. As soon as we are not meeting that fuel hazard standard, we are not doing our jobs

Marty: The values officer is another set of eyes for the person in charge of the burn on that particular day (DivComm), they don't make the final decision, just another set of eyes.

Still new, working on more solid documents outlining the process/what steps they need to follow to make a good assessment. Being developed on a national scale also, but still quite a new thing.



What is the process for assessing the need for ecological burns on land managed by TCCS or other land managers?

Sometimes TCCS come to FMU – and do the same process of everyone else. Lawson Grasslands was a TCCS land burn and we implemented it on their behalf. Couple more on the cards as well, and we get Aboriginal staff involved in that too.

What assessment is done about weed invasion following burns?

We have a post burn assessment that we do – there is also a post eco burn planning tool that we use, so will be monitored by Rangers or other key person in the district. If any big incursions are noticed, it will be put up in BOP for follow up chemical treatment.

What is the Fire Units view on reintroducing indigenous cool burns across more of the ACT?

Yes, it is absolutely supported, just a matter of getting resources and getting the plans done – it still needs to follow the normal processes.

Values officers are so important. We do recce of the area, note the areas that need to be protected or treated in particular areas, and provides advice to the fire people This has helped to prevent 'mistakes', and to protect fire sensitive plants (e.g. orchids) which the fire people may not know as fully.

Absolutely.

Marty: That was perfectly instigated back in 19-20 fire season, on last burn done on Black Mountain.

Does the ACTmapi show history of fire burns of mosaics too?

Good question, not sure but it would be interesting to see the layers of previous burns on PC and be able to inspect many years (5) later. I will find out.

I've had a quick look and can't see a history layer. We have one in our own mapping database but it's not public. I'll check with a colleague. Update: we do not publish the fire history layer publicly.

## Weed Operations Planning

### Harley Baker, Invasive Weeds Officer, Biosecurity (PCS)

Standing in for Steve Taylor who is away at the moment.

The Environment Website is a really helpful page. Steve has spent a lot of time uploading dashboards from previous years, as early as 2014/2015.

Environment Website (Invasive Plants): <https://www.environment.act.gov.au/parks-conservation/plants-and-animals/biosecurity/invasive-plants>

#### Invasive Plants Implementation Plan 2020-2025

Link:

<https://actgov.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=cd59d70662c94c75a0492635f7925384#>

This is a constantly updated document that basically gives an overview of the control plan through to 2025. It has a lot of info in there, recommend going through it.

Today we are looking at the work of Dr Paul Downey – this includes the Weed Risk Assessment, which can be found by selecting the item on the menu of links when you first open to Invasive Plants Implementation Plan.

When you get to this page there is a series of links to useful documents. There will eventually be three reports here, however one is yet to be published.

1. Advisory List of Naturalised Plants in the ACT

Link: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1uBNiQCtly2APabsa7bP1o8v2-DJmrVix/edit#gid=753253221>

This excel table provides an advisory list of naturalised plants in the ACT. There are about 700 plants on it, and it is what PCS and TCCS use.

The data has been gathered through plant census, other research, and is a fairly comprehensive list. Any plant you can think of will be on this list, some new incursion plants will be on the alert list of alien plants.

The excel sheet gives range of info – but the most important guide we use is the Priority Rating – and this is how we set our priorities when planning weed management tasks.

If you know what plants are in your reserve, you can use this excel as your starting point – it is the starting point for employees in making informed decisions on how to approach weed management, as we utilised a triaging system, selecting the highest priority weeds first. In this document, you can identify whether a particular weed species is considered a high priority and it will help Park carers understand how Rangers may be prioritising control of certain species over others in a particular reserve.

2. Alert list of alien species plants for the ACT

Link:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1TguOBvABFE7LnSs2M\\_zXDnGgYYwXPzCJ/edit#gid=199822994](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1TguOBvABFE7LnSs2M_zXDnGgYYwXPzCJ/edit#gid=199822994)

While this document does not utilise a priority rating system due to more data being needed, it will show which plants are most likely to be appearing in the ACT in the near future. On this list, you will find a range of species; some may be new to the country, some are new to the ACT. Ultimately, this is a list of species we are on alert for. Some have been found and treated already, and some are in close proximity to the ACT. These are ones we would act on very quickly following the invasion curve graph in the Invasive Plants Control Plan.

### 3. Naturalised Native Plants

The third report which we are working on is a list of naturalised native plants (outside their endemic area), that have up until now been fairly overlooked as 'native so okay'. An example is Park Carers from Black Mountain seeing more Crimson Passionflower – a native species that may have invasive potential outside its own range. This new report should pick up on information like that.

If you're interested on a plant and potential impact for your reserve, you can use this to find out more.

There are some species that are data deficient, meaning we don't have enough data to be confident on their impacts, invasive-ability, etc. You may notice these in each of the documents

#### ARCGis

So we have the reports that identify species and their level of risk. The next thing we need to understand is where in each reserve we prioritise control work.

We have a new online dashboard, called the Biodiversity Triage Dashboard or ARCGIS.

How to get there?

Go into Invasive Plants Group, and scroll (view all content), go to Apps on the left, and click on Dashboards – you can see the 2022-2023 Biodiversity Triage Dashboard.

This is a living document that is constantly updated, all data that PCS staff, volunteers, anyone using fieldmaps, log will show up in this.

You can also turn on layers from previous years (see the stacked discs icon).

Main point of this one, you can see the areas of diversity. You can see where the highest density of native grasses/plants are occurring. This is used to prioritise work (Conservation Research developed it this year) which is essentially following the Bradley Principle, or, the bush regeneration principle; that is selecting highest value areas first, securing them and then working out from there.

Looking on the amount of weeds in your reserve or on the map, it can sometimes look overwhelming, especially given the growth over the past year or two. But using this dashboard, you can see where the best areas in your reserve are, and plan control work in those.

Top left box you can scroll across to show different plant species - you can then select individual species to identify only those on the mapping if you need.

Harley showed example of North Mitchell Grasslands – shows high/very high density and mod/high – green and orange areas. Showed Serrated Tussock and that it is encroaching on these areas - showing it has high invasive-ability in these areas – so would be prioritised.

Then showed same area but instead looked at Scotch Thistle – only showing in red areas (low priority) – so while it looks bad, it's not a conservation issue – and often a problem of disturbed areas. Eyesore – but not an issue. It shows how serrated tussock is a more important focus than many of the broad leaf weeds that might look much worse.

## Questions

Marty - ref my recent query about using Field maps. Would be great to have the capacity to map revegetation as well as locations of patches of native forbs/plants (not just protected plants) and overlay with Weed and maybe Burn maps.

We have the Dr Paul Downey risk assessment excel, but not another layer in ARCGIS.

There is an option in ARCGIS to feed maps/layers – we are not sure we can add this to the public layers – but something we can have a chat about and potentially create permissions for map creations.

What about Tidbinbilla?

Not yet- like Namadgi, there is a huge area to cover. So far we have used initiative funding to help gather data, but currently only covering CNP reserves.

If we have the ecological data/assessment for a TCCS block could we have it mapped?

Would need to check into this one.

Can vollies bring up the biodiversity triage layer on field maps in the field?

This layer can only be viewed on a web browser (ARCGIS), not in the field maps app.

How do we know what areas are being targeted for treatment by contractors?

That is available through the dashboard.

So on the dashboard – zoom to your reserve – There are tabs down the bottom, and there is one called 'Controller' – so you can see the work that volunteers have done, what PCS staff, and what contractors. And you can select on the area and it will identify what species has been targeted.

My question is about what is planned, not what has been done?

The planning part would be the 'not treated' layers. In terms of longer term planning, the not treated is the best way to see where things have been mapped that we would like to control that we haven't gotten to yet.

Please could we make sure the link to that mapping is in the minutes?

<https://www.arcgis.com/index.html>

What is the best way for these datasets to be added for TCCS areas? Is this something that needs to be from TCCS staff or is there a role for volunteers?

As far as I understand it – all the data has come from EPSDD from Conservation Research, no one in TCCS as there are no ecologists in their space. So we would need to go to Conservation Research – they may have the data in the works.

## **Vertebrate Pest Management**

### **Mark Sweaney, Manager of Invasive Animals and Overabundant Wildlife**

Our team oversees the conservation culls and other invertebrate pests. My normal position is Northside Area Manager, but I have been in this role since start of the year, and will be until June next Year. Richard Barnsley is also a part of my team.

Don't have everything online like Weeds Team.

Soon the team will meet with all the depots to come up with a plan for the year. Hoping to move it to every three years rather than individual years. This will mostly focus on rabbit control which is a key issue in some areas.

In planning we go and sit down with the depots to develop control plans across the estate. A lot of this work is now aerial for larger areas (pigs, deer, etc in places like Namadgi and River Corridors). And then rabbit control will be planned for each area - the bio control for rabbits are becoming less effective (myxomatosis is considered inhumane, not used anymore but still out in the environment. Calicivirus has been released in 2015/2017 which had relatively good impact on local population and effectiveness is declining. Wet weather has now also been providing plenty of food. Ainslie, Majura, Red Hill, Jerra Wetlands are above threshold of what they consider acceptable, so need long term plans to treat these sites.

All depots do quarterly pest spotlighting, mostly focusing on rabbits. This is a reliable and easy method used to monitor population levels and helps identify the abundance. If there is, we need to apply methods. We currently mostly control with fumigation, a more straight-forward and less resource intensive method.

If above threshold, we need to use more techniques (including poison and baiting), and these involve more approvals to get through. So far there has been big successes in thermal shooting in CSIRO, Black Mountain areas. Another technique which may be introduced in tricky reserves that are smaller and have a lot of constraints on methods which can be used.

Question: What's the position on using Pindone in CNP reserves now?

Pindone and 1080 are still used. 1080 has a lot more restrictions which mostly excludes all Canberra Nature Park (CNP). Pindone saw some secondary poisoning, so we worked with Conservation Research to identify how and when to use it. When using it, we must use cages to protect other wildlife, and collect carcasses as early as possible the next day – and check every single day to mitigate impact on other species.

Question: Can you explain the thermal camera control. Is it just used for mapping and monitoring?

Not confirmed yet, as we still need to brief minister. Thermal cameras use heat rather than light, so can be used in pitch black, and allows us to more easily shoot with air rifles (contractors used around ANU/CSIRO that are more difficult). Rabbits have a high metabolism, they have to feed regularly so can't stay underground all night.

Question: How do we know when rabbit shooting is being done on black mountain? Have seen notices on Mt Ainslie, but not seen so far on Black Mountain?

We haven't developed the control plans with each depot, this is happening in the coming weeks. The areas that will be treated will only be where the threshold is well above what it should be, and cannot be controlled using ongoing fumigation methods.

Question: Are you still using rabbit control contractors? And how much does that impact on your capacity to control rabbits?

In the past there hasn't been a lot of contractor availability in the ACT. We have used Chris Robinsons a lot, and he sold his business and retired. At the same time, EPSDD put on the rapid response biosecurity team, so we didn't have a gap in rabbit control; they picked up the contractor hole. Good news is, someone has bought Chris Robinsons equipment, is using Chris as a consultant and is a local person who has been involved in pest management for some time. So, with them and biosecurity team, they have been able to keep the work going and will have a new contractor.

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This year, there were too many sites that were beyond threshold for us to treat, so we have to prioritise which sites. Places like Ainslie and Majura, we've attempted to treat some areas and move to another, but this hasn't really worked. Need to treat it all at once.

Places like Mt Pleasant, that are connected to large rabbit populations outside the reserve also prove challenging and we are coming up with some solutions.

We work with districts and reserve managers to identify treatment – but it will stretch resources this year with continued rain.

Marty: The other day I heard on the radio, talking about the populations that would be managed by NCA and in that interview with scientist, they were saying (potentially misguided), that it was our responsibility to manage these rabbits. Kings Ave Bridge, Commonwealth Park etc, are infested. It's always been clear that custodian is responsible for control.

Mark Sweaney: NCA and TCCS don't have a budget for it, so we do work with them in prioritising what they can do. Overall, we still talk to them about impacts. In terms of rabbit control that is available we do put that all towards conservation areas. If TCCS have a heritage sight that has been impacted, we will use fencing rather than an ongoing control method, as we don't have resources to control those difficult areas that are highly urbanised. At the moment there is no solution, the ideal is a new bio control - it's the most effective methods

Tenzin: Density of rabbit to density of predator – foxes?

Sweaney: It's safe to assume the reason rabbits can build up is because fox predation is not as effective, it would be hard for them to get into those areas and hunt effectively. To my knowledge, there is no actual studies in CNP of the impact.

It's what happened when we fenced Mulligans – rabbit numbers built up more than other places on the reserve – less predation.

Question: Can we see the data on rabbit density for our reserve? Is there anything we can do to assist with rabbit control?

There is a dashboard (ARCGIS Rabbit Spotlight Dashboard)

This shows where population is considered too high, OK or low and you can look at previous years data. They have committed to making it publicly available this year – and will get it to ParkCare first.

In the past, ParkCare groups have been essential in mapping large rabbit populations – using collector, manual GPS.

Once met with depots and come up with a plan, then will become something that ParkCare can get involved in.

Walking around mapping is a great help, and something ParkCare has contributed too and has fed into rabbit control.

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Problem sites: will continue ongoing control across CNP, and sites where problems have been identified. We have committed to navigating Percival, Red Hill, Mt Pleasant, and are hoping to do big program on Ainslie/Majura this year.

Is the shooting done in day time or night time? We go out Frogwatching at night.

Would you arrange through the system to ensure that PCS and ParkCare groups are told, and let us know if there will be shooting on Black Mountain.

Unsure with shooting programs for ANU/CSIRO as we do not manage these - but they don't have to close the area like PCS does.

Marty: we as an agency try to inform ParkCare with as much info as we possibly can, but we are unable to talk for other agencies. We do what we can do to keep communication open.

We haven't shot rabbits in CNP yet. This is used in CSIRO/ANU which is private land. We are proposing to use it in small areas- if we did it, we would put up signs, close the reserve etc. It would be notified and we would need to restrict access; and we would certainly notify ParkCare Groups.

To do any work with firearms, we would need to get several layers of approvals including Ministerial approval. In the same way the Kangaroo Management Program is approached.

The Thermal shooting would be considered as we are not winning the 'battle'. If there is good food security it makes poisoning more difficult. Rabbit breeding season is coming up, that means every 4 weeks up to 8 per litter, and then they breed at 120 days old. The bio controls aren't working. Even if we implement really good programs, it's hard - most of the methods that we use work well in a blank paddock, but we've got wildlife and other considerations. In some sites we need to check burrows really carefully to ensure there isn't other wildlife in there, so we need another method.

Really hoping to get the dashboard up, the next step then would make it available for people to map burrows and activity.

Marty: that would be great, as in the past we can't necessarily understand effort/output of volunteers.

Sweeney: No doubt that ParkCare mapping has contributed to lower rabbit numbers across CNP. Mapping done by ParkCare is given to the contractor, and these gas tablets are placed in the hole and covered up. If we hadn't done this, rabbit populations would be completely out of control – with huge thanks to ParkCare. Keep doing it, and we're getting you a better system.

In terms of other pests, we've done fairly well. This year seen a big increase in pig numbers in river corridor and Namadgi. That's coincided with us doing aerial shooting with thermal technologies.



There was one done in Namadgi/Lower Cotter/Murrumbidgee/Googong/Molonglo – in May, across this time about 500 animals removed.

Feral deer are increasing across South East Australia, and definitely the ACT Deer are relatively recent – particularly along Googong and Murrumbidgee. The deer population can build up, more slowly than pigs and rabbits, but they do well in these environments. Annual aerial control program has been important in managing these species. We want to keep Namadgi free from impacts as much as possible. Currently fairly free from deer, that's not the same for a lot of the rest of the Alps at the moment. A lot of VIC and even NSW now have fairly high deer or horse numbers – and they are building in adjacent areas. We are fortunate in the ACT that we probably have the next three years funded, and a good program and good contractors to keep it free from these impacts.

Tenzin: Is there any natural predator playing a role in controlling this? Any info about density population of predators in respective areas?

Sweaney: No study from Namadgi, but other research shows dingoes do prey on pigs and deer. However there is too much 'food' for the dingoes to effectively control. Particularly as dingoes are controlled across a lot of areas now. We have dingo conservation areas in NSW and ACT, but they eat them where dingoes occur -but- so say in Namadgi, there's definitely a healthy dingo population. There are dingo control areas in Namadgi, which is part of ongoing wild dog agreements that incorporate parts of NSW, and parts of Namadgi, but parts of Namadgi that are core conservation area, that there are large dingo populations. They are the same areas where we are also seeing a large build up.

Question: Feral cats?

Feral Cats are an ongoing issue across Australia really. Big impact but we don't have a good control method. At this stage we would only control if posed a key problem – e.g. predator proof sanctuary. We don't try to control them at the moment, we don't have any methods to do it. There are always cat control trials happening across Australia and we keep an eye on technology.

Question: Do we have any information on the level of cat infestation in the ACT?

Cats occur across whole of ACT. Another interesting thing, we just finished a paper about the Molongo Team, who did some camera monitoring work in the block behind Stromlo Forest Park and towards the river away from Denman Prospect. And they found some Common Dunnarts (not common anymore) and Antechinus – used to occur across CNP, and last series of trapping efforts seemed to show they were gone from Black Mountain/Mt Ainslie. Recorded these and cat/fox densities. So there's something allowing them to stay in those blocks, maybe connectivity or food. Molongo and Fire Team working together on this one.

Marty - CSIRO are currently conducting a new program, looking at genetics, so breeding more males. Trial program. Instead of biological control (Carp Herpes), changing the DNA to physically breed more male cats.

## **Wrap Up**

Thank you everyone for attending today. As mentioned, we appreciate your feedback on how useful you found this session, and we will be distributing the minutes as soon as possible.

This year, the Annual Planning Meetings for your individual groups are being coordinated by the Rangers. Many groups do have their meetings now booked in, and for those who do not yet, you should expect to hear relatively soon.

These sessions will follow the same approach as they have in previous years, and we look forward to seeing what priorities come out of it for 2022-2023.

Thank you again for attending today – we're excited for what we can achieve together over the coming year.

## Appendix 1: Attendees

### Presenters

Lauren McQueen	Volunteer Programs Manager
Martin Bajt	ParkCare Ranger (North)
Tenzin Phuntsho	ParkCare Ranger (South)
Jacqui Travers	Commercial Tourism Manager
Kirsty Babington	Senior Fire Management Officer
Harley Baker	Invasive Weeds Officer
Mark Sweaney	Invasive Animals and Overabundant Wildlife Manager

### Attendees

Paul Sheils	Cooleman Ridge ParkCare
Wendy Rainbird	Farrer Ridge ParkCare
Cathy	F/o Black Mountain and F/o Jerra Wetlands
Sheridan Maher	Friends of Aranda Bushland
Linda Beveridge	Friends of Black Mountain
Margy Burn	Friends of Mount Majura
Sarah Hnatiuk	Friends of Mount Painter
Julia Raine	Friends of Mulligans Flat/Friends of Gossan Hill
John Brannan	Friends of The Pinnacle
Fiona Spier	Friends of Tidbinbilla/Catchment Groups
Cath Blunt	Friends of Tuggeranong Hill
Jean Hammond	Kosciusko Huts Association
Elyssa Castles	Molonglo Conservation Group
Annette Martin	Mount Ainslie Weeders
Ren Webb	Senior Ranger
Alex James	Ranger
Kelzang Tshering	Ranger
Ross	Red Hill Regenerators
Sue Ross	Red Hill Regenerators
Glenn	Urambi Hills ParkCare Group

## Appendix 2: Agenda

Time	Who
09:30-09:45	ParkCare (Lauren McQueen)
09:45-10:00	Commercial Tourism Update (Jac Travers)
10:00-10:30	Fire in the Landscape (Kirsty Babington)
10:30-11:00	Invasive Plants (Harley Baker)
11:00-11:30	Vertebrate Pest Management (Mark Sweaney)
11:30-11:45	ParkCare (Lauren McQueen)