

From: Diane Luhrs
Sent: Friday, 6 October 2017
To: 'jaala.pulford@parliament.vic.gov.au' <jaala.pulford@parliament.vic.gov.au>

Fulham Streamside Reserve - disturbing damage by campers

Dear Jaala,

I am forwarding an email to you that I sent to Parks Vic earlier this week to plead for support to retain the conservation and recreation status of one of Victoria's remaining excellent grassy woodland streamside reserves that is Fulham Streamside Reserve.

Our club members of the Hamilton Field Naturalists Club have been conducting flora and fauna surveys in this reserve from 2005 onwards and have been conducting an environmental weed eradication program that spans several weeks in spring each year to ensure that the native flora is not overrun by environmental weeds. During that time we have noticed the damage caused by unsupervised humans – campers and day visitors alike – who do not adhere to the advice posted about keeping to the tracks, road closures and the ban on wood removal from the reserve. We also notice the clearing of standing trees by campers to enlarge the areas they wish to camp on and the mess they leave (toilet and other items).

Our Club has written of these issues to Parks Vic each year as we complete an annual report on the works we have done. We also have made recommendations for the installation of a long drop toilet near the main camping area and increased supervision and better management of the human traffic to this reserve, particularly in the western section where we work to retain the remnant flora intact.

In sending this email to you, I am hoping that a stronger voice can be made to direct funding and increased supervision to the area in Western Victoria. I do understand that the Parks ranger in charge of the area has an impossibly large area to supervise and suggest that the Government needs to allocate more funding to this region so that the smaller but also significant reserves are not lost while the focus is on the development of the Peaks Trail in the Grampians.

As volunteers, we are only too aware that unless assistance comes from the government through provision of official environmentally-trained personnel who have a working knowledge of the local ecology as well as skills in people management that the task of environmental management will not be done well. The result will be another significant native vegetation reserve downgraded through adverse-to-environment activities. I hope that you can help further this cause.

Kind regards

Diane Luhrs

President
Hamilton Field Naturalists Club

From: Diane Luhrs
Sent: Thursday, 5 October 2017
To: 'info@parks.vic.gov.au' <info@parks.vic.gov.au>

Subject: **Fulham Streamside Reserve - disturbing damage by campers**

Dear Parks Victoria

The Fulham Streamside Reserve is suffering from unsupervised/unregulated visitor impacts that endanger the flora, fauna, amenity and conservation value of this reserve.

A recent visit (Sept Oct 2017) by members of our Hamilton Field Naturalists Club to conduct our annual removal of environmental weeds (Cape Tulip, gladiolus, Sparaxis, bridal creeper and African weed orchid) brought the following disturbing observations:

1. Campers felling standing and living trees to cut up for firewood and to remove the wood from the park. Chainsaws over the grand final weekend were in constant use across the western section of this reserve.
2. Toilet waste visible behind large trees with toilet paper loose on the ground.
3. Rubbish left in large bags – also placed behind large trees.
4. Many fires/fire places, that after the campers left, showed large areas of denuded ground where previously native vegetation (shrubs/trees and grasses) once grew.
5. Previous timbered areas cleared by campers to enable them to park in groups both beside the river and on places on the south side of the roads (in areas where orchids and other remnant native plants once were present) – many of these areas are now covered by capeweed instead of native plant species. The area west of the locked gate is increasingly denuded of standing trees.
6. People driving off the tracks across remnant native heath land (and getting bogged and rutting the ground) – further damaging places of native vegetation.
7. People driving around the locked gate and continuing on the track that the sign clearly states is closed for winter until the end of October.

Each year our members work long and hard to preserve the rich biodiversity of this park – and yet visitors and campers and the lack of supervision and enforced regulation of even current regulations is contributing to the reduction in the long-term conservation value of this reserve.

We hope that some further assistance is forthcoming to ensure that visitors and campers actually behave responsibly in this reserve. Assistance such as:

- Better signage at the entrance to the reserve of what behaviour is allowed, not allowed;
- A long-drop Park's style toilet system near the camping area in the western section; AND
- Regular weekend supervision visits by Parks personnel to check visitor/camper compliance.

Kind regards

Diane Luhrs

President
Hamilton Field Naturalists Club

From: Romy Moclair
Date: 27/10/2017
To: Diane Luhrs

Subject: **Fulham Steamside Reserve**

Dear Diane,

Further to your recent telephone conversation with Tim Miller from this office, I have received a response to the email you sent to Jaala Pulford.

In relation to campers and ranger patrols in the area, the Ngootyoong Gunditj Ngootyoong Mara South West Management Plan 2015 determines the zoning, use and intended visitor experience for the Glenelg River Fulham Streamside Reserve.

The zoning for the reserve is Conservation and Recreation and also has Visitor Experience Area overlay that identifies the goal and strategies for visitor use.

The visitor experience goal for this reserve is to maintain a range of areas for remote and self-reliant camping experiences with a lower level of service. The campers experienced by the field naturalists on this weekend were obviously looking for a remote experience but also undertaking activities that were in conflict with the conservation objectives of the reserve. Ranger patrols have occurred in this reserve previously but it hard to determine when campers will be at the reserve as no booking is required. Previous patrols have focussed on firewood collection.

Funding for ranger patrols is coordinated at a regional level and in the West region of Parks Victoria there is approximately \$450-500k allocated per year for the weekend ranger patrols across the whole region. For the geographic area that this reserve falls into the local ranger has been allocated 20 weekend days for 2017-18 – this is an increase from the 10 weekend days for 2016-17.

Visitor facilities will be kept to a lower level of service as per the management plan goals and strategies. In terms of signage many of the signs that have been installed have been removed or vandalised and the replacement is done as budgets allow in any given year. Temporary signage, combined with increased patrols will be used to change the behaviour documented in the recent correspondence.

There will be further discussions between the Hamilton Field Naturalists Club and Parks Victoria to manage the impacts of campers on the reserve for greater management of the area.

Kind regards,

Romy Moclair

Office of Jaala Pulford MP
Member of the Legislative Council for the Western Victorian Region

From: Diane Luhrs

Date: 27/10/2017

To: Romy Moclair, Office of Jaala Pulford MP,
Member of the Legislative Council for the Western Victorian Region

Subject: **Fulham Steamside Reserve**

Dear Romy,

I appreciate this communication, both as a response to my initial communication and for the details regarding the status of Fulham Streamside Reserve.

I am pleased to see that there will be increased surveillance of the reserve in 2017/2018 but am also concerned that the status as a remote camping experience will contribute to further decline in sustainable conservation and therefore reduced visitor amenity for responsible bush campers.

I look forward to continuing communication with your office and the Minister and with working together to maintain the significance of this reserve.

Kind regards

Dr Diane Luhrs,

President,
Hamilton Field Naturalists Club