

HAMILTON FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB



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To:

31 October 2013

Manager
Park Management and Procedures
Environment & Heritage Division
Parks Victoria
Level 10, 535 Bourke St, Melbourne Vic 3000

Submission to Draft Ngootyoong Gunditj, Ngootyoong Mara SW Management Plan

Name changes – we support the change from Mt Eccles to **Budj Bim National Park**. If a name change is made then it should also be made for Mt Napier State Park which has a well-documented history (along with the adjacent 3,000 ha Buckley Swamp, created by the eruption at Mt Napier that blocked Harmans Valley) of Aboriginal settlement. **Tappoc** (or another spelling variant) is the Aboriginal name for the scoria cone and was a significant feature in their lives.

Visitor experience areas (p.53)

1. p.60 – heading ‘Byaduk Caves’ should read ‘Byaduk Caves in the Mt Napier State Park’. The first sentence is incorrect since it implies that the Byaduk Caves are the highest point! The sentence should state that Mt Napier is the highest volcanic point in the Western District plains.
2. Why is there not a site specified at Mt Napier (the old Menzels Pit) where visitors currently park to start the ascent of Mt Napier? This site needs to have a pit toilet and information shelter provided. This is a very popular walking place for visitors who climb the mount and there are also other interesting sites nearby.
3. The Fulham Streamside Reserve (860 ha) should have a pit toilet and information shelter provided. This popular area has a large usage by fishermen, 4-wheel drivers (regrettably often off-track), campers and others looking at the wildflowers and birds. Your draft makes no mention of its significance for native flora and wildlife. The area is becoming degraded because it lacks adequate facilities, signage and supervision to control off-road driving and removal of firewood. We have worked for 8 years to try and control environmental weeds (Cape Tulip, Sparaxis, African Weed Orchid, Wild Gladioli, Bridal Creeper and Phalaris) on the magnificent western woodland-heath area that is home to 320 native flora species. That effort is constantly being undone by off-road activities and the tracks that people want to drive on in winter but then drive off-road around the sticky parts. The result is a churning up of the flora and incursion of Cape Tulip, Sparaxis and Wild Gladioli.

Fire

We understand the need for prescribed burning and the Aboriginal patterns of burning to create their safe places and hunting areas. However, parts of the Stones were never deliberately burned, as evidenced by the stone walls that were constructed through the forest areas. After settlement, graziers burned the forests frequently and inevitably converted the open forest to a mess of Bracken Fern, so dense now in places that no grass can grow. The fires have removed much of the Blackwood. However, there are a few places where no fire has been for 40 years – one such area is the NE part of Mt Napier. That shows clearly that the absence of fire does result in less Bracken Fern, whereas so-called ‘environmental burning’ in such a forest kills the Blackwood and many Manna Gum, opening up the canopy and stimulating Bracken growth to the point where the fire hazard is just as bad 6 months later. The present fire management is not helpful.

No evidence has been produced that any species in the Stones area requires fire on a regular basis to perpetuate itself (contrary to the implication in the draft) – the flora is relatively simple with, at Mt Napier SP, only about 180 native species and dominated by Manna Gum and Bracken. The Stones vegetation is one type that needs to be protected from fire.

We agree with Bill Gammie that Aboriginal burning was systematic, carefully planned and carried out in most parts of the country. It was not indiscriminate but targeted specific small areas for particular purposes. It would be most unwise to give an impression in this draft that Aborigines would have practiced *ad hoc* large-scale burning of the Stones area on a regular basis.

Management of Feral Animals at Mt Napier

We have tried for 20 years to get PV to take some determined action on feral goats in the Mt Napier SP. The goats have played havoc on the cave flora and high points in the park such as Elmore's Cone 1 km west from Mt Napier and the summit of Mt Napier (where our group revegetated the area from 1985-91). We note that there is now an intention to tackle the problem and we are prepared to offer what assistance we can when work is carried out. What we do not want to see is a regime that just 'farms' the goats, as so often happens.

It is possible that the Spot-tailed Quoll may still occur at Mt Napier. The Brush-tailed Phascogale, *Rattus fuscipes*, *Antechinus swainsonii*, *A. agilis* and possibly Potoroo (once known to occur in the southern area) has been recorded. Consequently, care should be taken with any poisoning program for foxes and rabbits.

The Devils Hole at Mt Napier

We have tried for some 20 years to have this crater fenced into the park. The surveyed boundary crosses its centre and the crater has been fenced out of the park. This crater is found 400 m north along the boundary fence from Menzels Pit. It is a most interesting geological feature and should be available for visitors to see. Please, can this be put back into the Park? Why is it not possible for PV to initiate some action? We do not see it as our job to approach DEPI again over this matter, yet that is what was suggested to us recently by Peter Livitsanis (13 Sep 2013) in a response to our letter of 15 August 2013.

Weeds

The only hope to control damaging environmental weeds is to act in the early stages. Where they are on roadsides their spread into conservation reserves must be stopped. At present we have Gazania marching along the roads in NW and central Victoria (there is one active spot on the Henty Highway in Cavendish). Watsonia, Sparaxis, Oxalis purpurea, Cape Tulip, Wild Gladioli and others are likewise on the run.

DEPI concentration on weeds affecting agriculture is another problem. Indiscriminate spraying was used to control Cape Tulip at Fulham SR and along the Glenelg River. In 2005 we were horrified to see that contractors had, for several years, applied broad-scale spraying to Cape Tulip in the heathland areas of the reserve. The result was huge areas denuded of native vegetation – the affected areas were thought by some observers to be due to salinity. The spray seldom killed all (or indeed many) Cape Tulip plants and merely provided an ideal seeding place for this weed and *Sparaxis bulbifera*, with no competition. We persuaded PV to let us try and salvage this remarkable flora area (see the article in the publications section of hamilton-field-naturalist-club-victoria.org.au) and we have spent several days each spring doing so over the past 8 years. However, PV has no funds to conduct proper weed control programs and seemingly no effort has been made to change that situation. We see this as a major deficiency in the draft plan. Now we have African Weed Orchard (*Disea bracteata*) sweeping the State. If nothing is done to stem this tide of weeds then all of reserves will become degraded. How is it that PV seems so oblivious to the problem?

PV needs to train their weed control workers in ways to reduce collateral damage to native vegetation – and to insist that broad-scale spraying NOT be used. Where weed plants (such as Wild Gladioli & Sparaxis) are in very dense numbers we use spot-spraying to eliminate them, keeping the area treated to a minimum. Our preferred approach is to wipe individual plants with herbicide, thus greatly reducing the off-target damage. It is the best way to treat every plant successfully. We have observed that contractors miss (or do not kill) at least 50% of the Cape Tulip plants (the plant is difficult to wet and often to see) and their efforts result in an incremental destruction of the native vegetation each year without eliminating the weed.

Lake Linlithgow and adjacent wetlands – why are these important reserves not included (yet Bryans Swamp is included)? These are very important wetlands for waterbirds (see the HFNC website for details) and they should receive the same attention as others named.

Dogs on Beaches – we are not happy to see unleashed dogs on any beach. That practice seems to encourage dog owners to run them on beaches that are clearly signposted to require all dogs to be on a leash.

Consultation – there does not appear to be any plans for community input into management of reserves (e.g. involving community volunteer groups to work in reserves to control weeds or conduct surveys). Since PV staffing is unlikely to be increased, having the wider community involved has an obvious benefit.

Yours sincerely

Dr Rod Bird

Secretary, Hamilton Field Naturalist Club