

Lhere Mparntwe Management Strategy 2019

Protecting and enjoying the
Todd and Charles rivers

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Alice Springs Town Council

Department of Infrastructure Planning and Logistics

Department of Tourism Sport and Culture

Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Services





Background

The Todd and Charles Rivers form the backbone along which the town of Alice Springs is both built and defined. The rivers are an integral part of the town's image and of how residents view their community.

The Todd River (Lhere Mparntwe) and Charles River (Anthelke Ulpeye) are sacred sites and central features in the cultural landscape of Mparntwe Aboriginal custodians, protected by the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989. Key features of these sacred sites are the majestic river red gums that mark the travels of caterpillar and other Dreaming ancestors through the town. Respecting and caring for the rivers is a central part of cultural maintenance for Mparntwe custodians, who regard these trees as their kin.

The rivers intersect the town's other key iconic natural feature, The MacDonnell Ranges, at its gateway in Ntaripe (Heavitree Gap).

The MacDonnell Ranges is a timeless and enduring geological feature, the rivers form a living ecosystem that requires care and management to sustain its ecological health and value to the town's community and visitors.

The rivers are normally dry and quiet

allowing people to use and enjoy the peaceful beauty of the fringing river gums and open river beds. Occasionally the rivers burst forth in a flow that quickly turns community attention to an excited and more active engagement.

Recreational use by local residents and visitors has expanded appreciably in recent years following installation of shared pedestrian and cycle pathways. This network continues to expand providing attractive and convenient access for recreation, exercise, and as a route for getting to and from school or work.

Majestic river red gums mark the travels of caterpillar and other Dreaming ancestors through the town

The open sandy river beds are already widely used for recreation and events such as the Henley on Todd Regatta, and the first Camel Cup.

If properly managed to mitigate the destructive fires and other degrading

environmental influences, the Todd and Charles River systems provide untapped opportunity for improving the amenity of the town, particularly in the central business district, and in promoting their place as a defining part of the town's image.

Despite the place of the rivers in the town's imagery there is a tendency for businesses to avoid engagement with or to "turn their backs" to the rivers. Similarly, and despite their widespread use, the local community often lacks respect for the health and integrity of the rivers. This is steadily changing.

In March 2018 the Minister for Environment and Natural Resources established the Lhere Mparntwe Management Working Group tasked with preparing a strategy to address management requirements. This formally established Committee comprised representation from traditional Aboriginal owners, representatives from both the Northern Territory Government and the Alice Springs Town Council, and community members of Alice Springs. Establishment of the Committee followed a summer period of major loss of large river red gums due to fire, and substantial community concern for this loss.

Aims and objectives

The Lhere Mparntwe Management Strategy 2019 (the Strategy) aims to have well managed, ecologically healthy rivers that are widely recognised as an iconic symbol of Alice Springs and which are enjoyed by locals and visitors as a natural urban space with significant Aboriginal cultural values.

To achieve this, the Strategy identifies a series of actions grouped by the following:

1. Protect and enhance the natural and cultural values of the rivers.
2. Encourage more locals and visitors to use the rivers in culturally and ecologically appropriate ways for recreation and relaxation.
3. Local and Territory governments, traditional owners, business and the community to work collaboratively to care for the rivers.



A pragmatic approach to management

There is a broad and disparate range of parties with formal and informal responsibilities and interests in the rivers. These parties include government agencies, local government, traditional Aboriginal owners, business, non-government organisations, river users and the general public. Coordination of effort among these interest groups is critical if the rivers are to be effectively and efficiently managed.

The Strategy provides a way for the activities of these interest groups to be co-ordinated to achieve the shared aim of ecologically healthy rivers.

The committee identified fire management as a key element affecting

river health and it forms a major component of the Strategy. Effective management of fuel loads will have a positive effect on the ecological health of the river, maintain its cultural value, protect the large red gums of advanced age, enhance the visual beauty of this iconic asset, improve both the amenity of the town and its value to tourism, actively demonstrate to the community that the rivers are a valuable resource, and will contribute to the management of issues of antisocial behaviour in the rivers.

The 3 management zones are proposed with recommendation for the more intensive management of fuel loads in the town area where there is highest public use.

Growth of the grassy fuel loads depends on good summer rains varying from year to year. Consequently, flexibility in the way that resources are needed and used to manage the fire risk is required.

Formal responsibility for management in the Strategy area is shared across the Parks, Wildlife and Heritage Division of the Department of Tourism, Sport and Culture, the Alice Springs Town Council and the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. The Strategy provides guidance to these authorities and includes actions that address the broader responsibility of the community of Alice Springs to respect and care for the rivers for our shared benefit.

Investment in river maintenance needs to be directed to activities that are sustainable over the long term. As there are portions of the Strategy area that have not been actively managed for fuel loads for some time, there will be a requirement for increased initial effort, with reduced resources required for maintenance of effort.

The Strategy is a first and overarching step towards effective management of the rivers. The next steps will be for stakeholder development of specific plans designed to address each key management requirement.

Management zones

The Strategy area has been split into 3 zones, with a scaled approach to management.

Zone 1 – Town area

The zone receives the highest level of public use and thus the highest level of human impact, including the incidence of destructive fire.

It is the most visible portion of the river, both for residents and tourists, and includes the ‘entrance’ to Alice Springs (for rail, road and air visitors) at Ntharipe (Heavitree Gap).

Protection of large river red gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) in this zone is of critical importance and management must focus on reduction of fuel loads across this entire zone. Together with planting operations, fuel management, over time, will lead to a resurgence of attractive native vegetation along the river banks and on the many river islands.

Zone 2 – Rural area

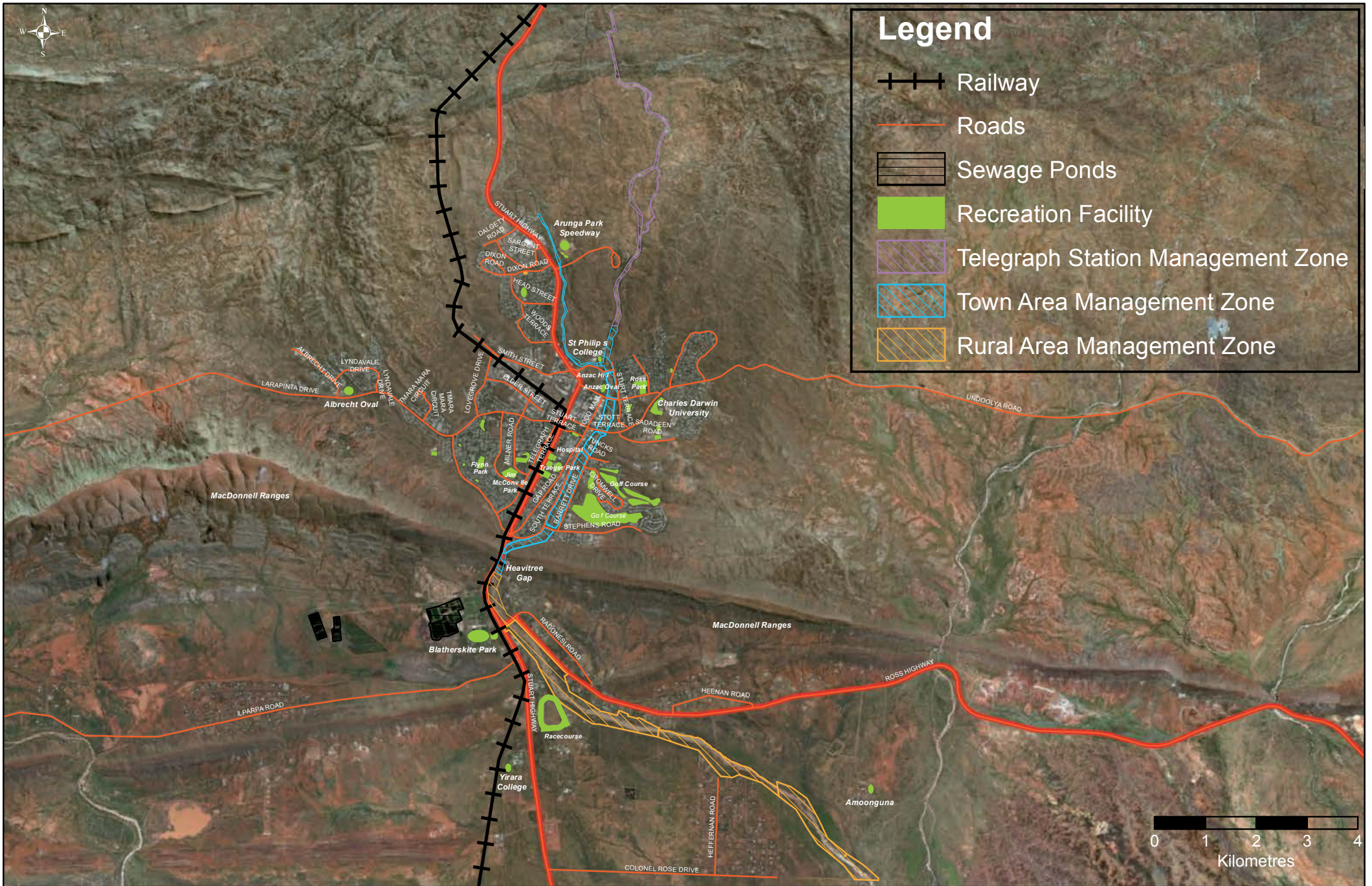
The Rural Area south of Heavitree Gap has a low intensity of use but has high visibility from the Stuart Highway that has a high level of public use.

This area generated significant public feedback in response to the major loss of large river red gums from fire during the summer of 2017-18.

Management focus for this zone is on minimising further loss of trees by reducing fuel loads in their near vicinity. Extended grassy areas with few trees are of lower priority and as a first step, should have fire risk mitigation through the use of fire breaks.

Zone 3 – Telegraph station

The Telegraph station zone receives high public use and receives fire management by the Parks and Wildlife operations based at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station. It is important to ensure that the management of fire in this reserve is integrated with management of the river in the 2 zones to the south.











...paths enable people to safely experience its beauty





Objective 1

Protect and enhance the natural and cultural values of the rivers.

Issue	Action	Lead Responsibility	Timeframe
Uncontrolled fires destroy mature red gums that are a visual signature of the town and support a multitude of native plant and animal species and have significant cultural values.	Prepare Vegetation and Fire Management Plans for each management zone, to be reviewed annually by the proposed advisory committee	ASTC/DENR/DIPL/DTSC/NTFRS	6 months
Reducing fuel loads will lessen the frequency and destructive impact of fires and will reduce call-outs on fire agencies to extinguish wild fires.	Document appropriate techniques and procedures for managing fuel loads.	DENR/NTFRS	3 months
Quick response to fires can be hampered by confusion about what actions are permitted around sacred sites.	Document standard procedures and protocols for relevant authorities in meeting requirements of the Sacred Sites Act 1989.	AAPA/NTFRS/DENR	3 months
Fires in the river are not always reported quickly to Northern Territory Fire Rescue Service for response.	Provide guidelines and encouragement for community members to report the occurrence of uncontrolled fire	AAPA/NTFRS/DENR	3 months
Introduced buffel and couch grasses have invaded and dominate large sections of the river banks to the almost complete exclusion of native understory species.	Prioritise buffel and couch grass hazard reduction for fire management into areas important for tree protection and re-emergence of native species.	ASTC/DIPL/DTSC	Ongoing
These grasses accumulate much larger fuel loads than native species causing more intensive and more frequent fires and substantially greater ecological damage. Management of both grasses is critical to minimising loss of river red gums and encouraging return of native species.	Develop a Fire and Vegetation Management Plan for targeted sub-zones on the basis of biological and cultural values as well as expected intensity and type of use.	ASTC/DIPL/DTSC/ community	Subsequent to Vegetation and Fire Management plans
	Landcare to work with partners to restore identified target sections of the Todd River.	Landcare/ASTC/DIPL	Ongoing
	Expand support the existing efforts undertaken by Alice Springs Landcare between Gosse Street and Stott Terrace on the eastern bank and by the Olive Pink Botanic Garden between Stott Terrace and Tuncks Road.	All	Ongoing

Issue	Action	Lead Responsibility	Timeframe
Woody weeds (White Cedar, Albizia, etc.) have invaded the town's large open stormwater drains and have potential to impede water flow. Discharging into the rivers these drains are already a source for downstream weed infestation.	<p>Include weed management in the Vegetation and Fire Management Plan for the town area.</p> <p>Work with responsible authorities and interested parties in removal and monitoring of weeds of concern in the storm water drains and in the management area.</p>	DIPL/ASTC/DTSC/DENR	6 months
Mexican poppy is a Class B and Class C prickly weed that affects amenity of the river. The weed is being managed by Landcare groups and is still sparse in the areas of high public use north of Heavitree Gap. It is important to exclude this invasive species to maintain public amenity in this part of the river through town.	<p>Work with responsible authorities and interested parties in removal and monitoring of Mexican poppy in the areas of the river upstream from John Blakeman Bridge and the town drains.</p> <p>Ensure litter crews able to identify and treat infestations.</p>	DIPL/ASTC/DENR	Ongoing
The periodically high water table and salinity levels in the Town Basin aquifer have impacted the ecological health of the rivers. This risk is being mitigated by managed extraction for irrigation of parks, reserves, and other areas to encourage recharge by better quality waters.	Ensure the next review of the Alice Springs Water Allocation Plan includes an assessment of how well the existing controls on extraction from the Town Basin are affecting water table height, tree health and salinity levels.	DENR	18 months

Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA)

Alice Springs Town Council (ASTC)

Central Land Council (CLC)

Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)

Department of Infrastructure Planning and Logistics (DIPL)

Department of Tourism Sport and Culture (DTSC)

Alice Springs and Olive Pink Landcare (Landcare)

Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service (NTFRS)

Northern Territory Police, Fire & Emergency Services (PFES)

Objective 2

Encourage more locals and visitors to use the rivers in culturally and ecologically sensitive ways for recreation and relaxation.

Issue	Action	Lead Responsibility	Timeframe
Some residents and visitors avoid walking in the rivers due to concerns about rubbish and safety.	Ongoing proactive management of rubbish within the river and along the banks.	ASTC/DIPL	Ongoing
Redundant infrastructure within the river is an eyesore and gives the impression the rivers are not valued.	Identify the location of redundant or discarded infrastructure and plan for its removal.	DIPL/ASTC	1 year
While the rivers are used for recreation, relaxation, camping and community events such as the Henley on Todd, the river beds are generally ignored. Little information is accessible for locals and visitors to gain an understanding of the importance of the rivers.	Develop a series of communication products to assist the community to understand and celebrate the cultural and ecological values of the rivers, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improved interpretative facilities along the rivers • education materials for use in schools (including redevelopment of the Nature's Boarding House and Birds of the Todd checklist posters) • materials that improve understanding of the connections between stormwater drains and the rivers behaviour • promotion of nature based activities in the rivers • develop Community Recreation Zones • contribute to the discussion on the impact of camping in the rivers. 	Advisory group with assistance from DENR/DIPL/DTSC/ASTC	Develop a communications plan to include a series of communication products within 1 year
Commercial developments along the rivers mostly face away as if to avoid an interface with this outstanding natural feature.	Encourage and advocate to businesses located along the river, schools and interested organisations to become involved in care of the river corridor.	All	As part of communications plan

Issue	Action	Lead Responsibility	Timeframe
<p>There has been considerable development of public amenity along the river corridor in recent years including well-used bicycle and pedestrian paths. Potential remains to further enhance the rivers for public use.</p>	<p>Careful placement of street furniture lighting and landscaping features combined with selected replanting of targeted areas to improve visitor experiences, increase safety and would encourage locals to value the rivers Leichhardt Terrace and area adjacent to Olive Pink Botanical Gardens should be prioritised.</p>	<p>DIPL/ASTC</p>	<p>Dependant on review below, then ongoing</p>
	<p>Review previous proposals and past public consultations to identify priority projects for additional infrastructure along the rivers.</p>	<p>DENR/DIPL/ASTC</p>	<p>1 year</p>
<p>Vehicle movements in and along the river banks are largely unrestrained creating an ugly network of wheel tracks. These destroy remnant native vegetation, spread weeds and have potential to channel water and erode the banks, especially after prolonged dry periods.</p>	<p>Based on an assessment of current erosion risks, formalise and stabilise pedestrian and vehicle access tracks to mitigate erosion, including through the installation of barriers where required.</p>	<p>ASTC/DIPL/DENR/PFES/DTSC/AAPA</p>	
	<p>Work towards the exclusion of unnecessary vehicle traffic.</p>	<p>ASTC/DIPL</p>	<p>Over 5 years</p>
	<p>Develop a prioritised erosion repair program.</p>	<p>DTSC/ASTC/DIPL</p>	<p>Over 5 years</p>



Objective 3

Governments, business and the community to work collaboratively to care for the rivers.

Issue	Action	Lead Responsibility	Timeframe
<p>Over recent decades the level of effort put into caring for the rivers has fluctuated, and focus on the rivers' management has ebbed and flowed based on the efforts of individuals and/or availability of outside funding programs.</p> <p>Consistent effort and strategic oversight is required to ensure that management is sustainable.</p>	<p>Establish and resource an ongoing advisory group to monitor the Strategy implementation and to focus public and government attention on the rivers.</p>	<p>Supported by DENR</p>	<p>4 Months</p>
	<p>Encourage and facilitate commitment by individuals, schools and community groups in managing fuel loads in small sections of the rivers.</p> <p>Encourage recurrent funding from all levels of government and philanthropists to promote maintenance and eventual expansion of the management area.</p>	<p>Advisory group</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
	<p>Encourage and support the development of an Mparntwe Ranger Group in conjunction with relevant organisations in accordance with the aspirations of Mparntwe sacred site custodians.</p>	<p>Advisory group/CLC/AAPA/DIPL/DTSC/ASTC</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
	<p>Based on the results of a flood mitigation geomorphologic study of the Todd River, a flood mitigation plan is currently being prepared by Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. It is important for coordination to occur between the flood mitigation plan and the Lhere Mparntwe Strategy.</p>	<p>Ensure that the advisory group is consulted regarding management of sedimentation for flood mitigation purposes (including maintenance targets) to ensure that effects on erosion and vegetation control considered.</p>	<p>DIPL</p>
<p>Key management activities should be monitored to determine the level of achievement and whether modifications are indicated.</p>	<p>Establish a monitoring program for assessing progress and achievement in the implementation of the Strategy.</p>	<p>Advisory group/community with support of DENR</p>	<p>1 year</p>

