



Trephina Gorge Nature Park

Joint Management Plan October 2011



Trephina Gorge Nature Park Joint Management Plan

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Environment, The Arts and Sport

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This plan was prepared by Parks and Wildlife and Traditional Owners with assistance from the Central Land Council. Planning for formal joint management began with a series of meetings between Traditional Owners, Parks and Wildlife staff and Central Land Council staff in 2007. Traditional Owners and Parks have discussed how to work together and manage the Park at meetings, country visits and camps over the past three years. This Plan is the culmination of several years of hard work and negotiation by the partners to establish an effective and appropriate way to look after this picturesque country.

Executive Summary

Trephina Gorge Nature Park is located 85 kilometres east of Alice Springs and one of the most popular parks in the East MacDonnells district, attracting about 20,000 visitors each year. The Park is scenically beautiful with sheer quartzite cliffs and River Red Gum-lined water courses. It is jointly managed between Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife.

Trephina Gorge Nature Park's primary values are that it is a picturesque low-key family escape, easily accessible from Alice Springs. It is recognised as a 'quiet alternative' to the more popular West MacDonnells National Park as it provides nature based recreational experiences including sightseeing, picnicking, bush walking, camping and swimming. The Park is also part of a living cultural landscape where the ancestors of Traditional Owners still live in totemic sites across the Park. The natural values of the Park have some conservation significance; however the Park's contribution to conservation in the context of the NT Reserve system is relatively small.

The main objectives of Park management are to maintain a low-key bush setting that provides an outdoor family escape with opportunities for passive nature-based recreation; protect specific conservation values of the Park and to build effective governance which empowers Traditional Owners and successfully manages the Park.

Key issues within the Park include reviewing the standards of visitor service and functionality of the campgrounds, and wildfires encouraged by introduced grasses.

The Park will receive a moderate level of management input from park operations. There is scope for the partners to explore options to improve the campgrounds, to expand Indigenous employment associated with the district and foster collaboration with adjacent landowners, such as Loves Creek.

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Vision for the Park

“Working together as one”

Both partners will work together to manage the Park, respecting and acknowledging each others’ skills and knowledge, and communicating clearly. A strong partnership will mean:

- Country is looked after properly for current and future generations;
- Traditional Owners are actively involved through jobs, training and business opportunities; and
- Visitors gain a deeper understanding of the country and its people.

1. Introduction

Trephina Gorge Nature Park is 1,771 hectares in size set in a spectacular part of the East MacDonnell Ranges, 85 kilometres east of Alice Springs (see Map 1) and located on the eastern portion of Australia’s Red Centre National Landscape. Access is via the Ross Highway and over 20,000 visitors use the Park every year.

The Park is fundamentally important to Traditional Owners looking after their country. The Park contains significant sacred sites for Eastern Arrernte people including Alherrkentye (Trephina Gorge) and Atneperrke (John Hayes Rockhole).

In December 1870 the first Europeans visited Trephina Gorge when John Ross’ Overland Telegraph Line survey team explored the area. Tourism first began to influence the area when Ross River Homestead Tourist Park opened nearby in 1959. It is thought the Park was named after Tryphena Benstead, wife of William Benstead the first licensee of the Stuart Arms Hotel, and one of the pioneer station managers and store keepers in the area.

The Park was originally part of ‘The Garden Station’ pastoral lease. In 1965 Trephina Gorge was protected under the National Parks and Gardens Ordinance (RES 1160 22/07/1965). In 1966 it was placed under care, control and management of the NT Reserves Board. The Park was later gazetted under section 12 of the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act* (TPWC Act) on 30 June 1978 (NTGG 26A 30/06/1978).

In 2003, Trephina Gorge Nature was included in Schedule 1 of the *Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Act*, allowing the Northern Territory and Traditional Owners to enter into formal joint management of the park. In 2009, title was transferred to the Atnerrperrke Aboriginal Land Trust to be held on trust for the Traditional Owners and was leased to the Northern Territory for 99 years.

1.1 Purpose

1.1.1 Values of the Park

The key values for the Park are:

- Provides for **low-key bush tourism** - easily accessed from Alice Springs and an alternative to the more popular ‘Red Centre Way’ associated with the West MacDonnells and opportunity for ‘spirited adventures’ to get off the beaten track. Nature based recreational experiences including sightseeing, picnicking, bush walking,

camping and swimming.

- Supports a **living cultural landscape** - Trephina Gorge Nature Park is part of this extensive living cultural landscape in which knowledge is transmitted through the dreaming stories of totemic ancestors (Altyerre). Pwenye (Traditional Owners) remain connected to these ancestors who still reside in totemic sites across the Park.
- Supports **regionally significant biodiversity values** - within the internationally significant MacDonnell Bioregion. It contains some values of national conservation significance; however its contribution to conservation is relatively minor.

1.1.2 Purpose of the Park

Trephina Gorge Nature Park (see Map 2) will be managed to retain its natural character, and protect its cultural and natural resources and heritage, while at the same time providing opportunities for visitors to enjoy the landscape and wildlife. Priorities will be to:

- Protect the natural and cultural resources of the Park.
- Maintain a low-key bush setting that provides an outdoor family escape with opportunities for passive nature-based recreation.
- Meet the needs of Traditional Owners to maintain their connection to country and be involved in management and on ground operations.

1.1.3 Purpose of the Plan

This Plan gives direction to the day-to-day management of the Park. It also provides the primary source against which management performance will be measured. Management success will be defined by performance measures developed by the Partners (see Appendix 1). They are specific, measurable, achievable and repeatable and will primarily be implemented through operational strategies and annual programs and reviewed by the East MacDonnells Joint Management Committee.

This joint management plan supersedes the 1994 Plan of Management. It will remain in effect until amended or replaced by a new plan. Further responsibilities regarding the joint management of the Park are set out in the Park Lease.

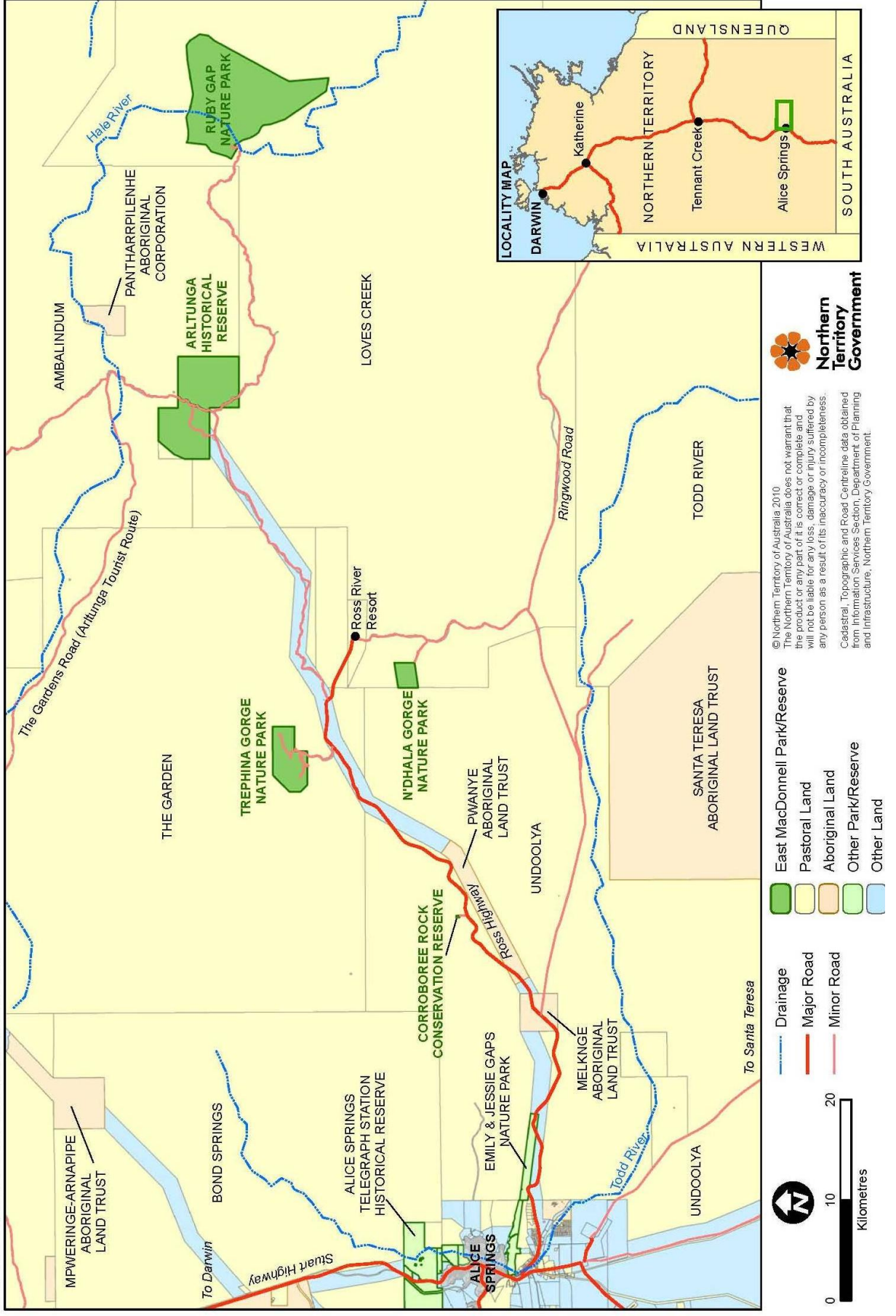
This Plan is closely linked to other joint management plans of the East MacDonnells district including N'Dhala Nature Park, Corroboree Rock Conservation Area, Ruby Gap Nature Park and Artunga Historical Reserve and should be considered with them.

Similar Joint Management Plans are concurrently being prepared for N'Dhala Gorge Nature Park and Trephina Gorge Nature Park in the East MacDonnells district. These plans have been developed separately for practical and cultural reasons, including restrictions associated with Corroboree Rock Conservation Reserve and N'Dhala Gorge Nature Park. However, the joint management plans of the district will operate under the East MacDonnell Joint Management Committee.

This joint management plan was prepared in accordance with, and complies with, the TPWC Act, the Park Lease and an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) registered with the National Native Title Tribunal pursuant to the *Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)*. The Plan has force in law under the TPWC Act.

The land subject to this Joint Management Plan includes Portion No. 00776 held by the Atnerrperrke Aboriginal Land Trust on behalf of Traditional Owners.

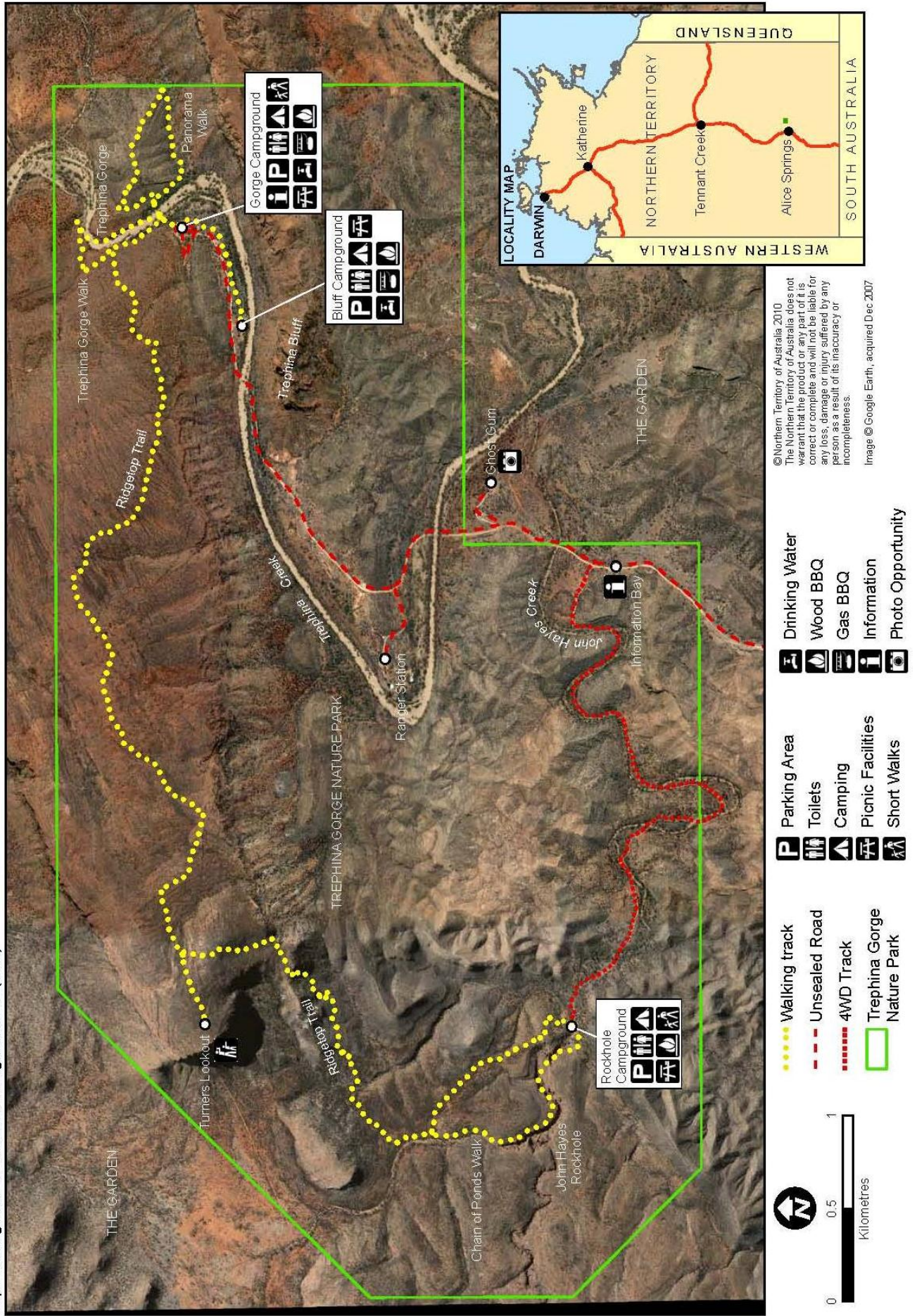
Map 1. Location Map, Parks and Reserves of the East MacDonnell Ranges
Trepthina Gorge Nature Park Joint Management Plan (Draft)



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Cadastral, Topographic and Road Centreline data obtained from Information Services Section, Department of Planning and Infrastructure, Northern Territory Government.



Map 2. Park Map
Trephina Gorge Nature Park Joint Management Plan (Draft)



1.2 Joint Management

Joint Management is about Traditional Owners and the Parks and Wildlife Service working together, exchanging their knowledge and expertise, solving problems and sharing decisions.

Trephina Gorge Nature Park is Aboriginal land under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)* (ALRA). Traditional Owners have agreed to lease the land back to the Territory for 99 years and work together to manage the Park. The terms of joint management for the Park have authority in law under the TPWC Act, the Park Lease and an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) registered under the *Native Title Act*. This Plan complies with all of these legal instruments.

Under section 25AA of the TPWC Act the joint management partners for Trephina Gorge Nature Park are the Territory and the Traditional Owners of the park. The Territory will generally carry out its joint management obligations through the Parks and Wildlife Service. For the purposes of this Joint Management Plan, references to the Parks and Wildlife Service as a Joint Management Partner should be read as including a reference to the Territory.

1.2.1 Traditional Owners

Traditionally Trephina Gorge is known as Alherrkentye, meaning Lightning Place. Pwenye is the Eastern Arrernte name for the long hill south of the Ross Highway stretching east from the Numery Road turnoff to N'Dhala Gorge; it is also the name Traditional Owners use to refer to themselves as part of their country. Neighbouring 'countries' or 'estates' are Antulye to the west, Uytetye to the south, Ulpmer to the north, Uleralkwe to the east.

Ancestral tracks and song lines traverse these estates, linking Aboriginal people in the region and sometimes, right across the country. Arrernte kin relations, known as anpernirrentye or 'skin names,' allow individuals to be placed in a social framework which guides every person's behaviour to others within that system. Anpernirrentye also incorporates a system of descent and inheritance, where children inherit a skin name in line with their father's anyenhenge (father / child skin names).

People descended from a paternal grandfather and his brothers are referred to as apmerekke-artweye. They are the recognised holders of an estate or country with the right to make decisions affecting the use of that country; the responsibility of looking after that country; and the accountability to the land itself and the spirits of their ancestors still present in the landscape. Traditionally, failure to comply with these responsibilities could result in sickness or death, so that when a person becomes sick, it is often attributed to neglecting their country.

Apmerekke-artweye are assisted in their role as owners by their kwertengerle – people who hold a different connection to the same country, often through their mother's father or mother's brother. Kwertengerle can become the holders of knowledge with significant ritual responsibilities and are considered essential partners for discussing any issues affecting that country. Together the Apmerekke-artweye and Kwertengerle care for the land, exercising complementary roles and responsibilities. Anthropologists will often refer to this group as the estate group.

There are a number of other factors that play a significant role in assuming positions of authority or seniority within a group related to an estate, principally, residence and knowledge of country, aknganeme (conception or 'borning' place), gender and involvement in ritual activity. Personality and level of interest are also relevant factors for the exercise of authority over an estate. These factors are often played out in the secret/sacred arena of traditional ceremony. The recognition of seniority from the broader

group is important to consider in the context of joint management.

Traditional Law is transmitted through the dreaming stories of the totemic ancestors, or the Altyerre. Layers of meaning encoded into the stories and songs are gradually revealed at various stages throughout a person's life. Sacred objects, songs, designs and dramatic acts have been left behind by the spirit ancestors to transmit this knowledge. Young children are taught the 'open' or public versions of these stories, and may attend certain stages of some ceremonies. Some men will eventually become akngerrtye (senior men) - a status that is recognised by other members of the group and not one that a person can independently assume. Ceremony is traditionally the arena in which decision-making occurs. These ceremonies are usually held between October and March.

For Arrernte traditional owners, Trephina Gorge contains sacred sites and remains an important place despite the impact of colonisation. There are many sacred sites of strong cultural significance across the East MacDonnell Ranges. Some are places along an Ancestral track where a particular event happened that is commemorated in traditional songs and ceremonies; some have local dreaming stories that are not part of a travelling song-line; and some others are named places where old people camped in the early days. There are Ancestral dreaming stories that traverse the East MacDonnell Ranges. For example, Caterpillar ancestors are embodied as the East MacDonnell Ranges themselves – some of the Gaps along the Ranges being where they fought and had their heads bitten off. Another dreaming, Anthepe (Dancing Women), travels from the west along the foothills of the East MacDonnell Ranges. The white ghost gums on the side of the hills near Ross River Homestead are the embodiment of the Dancing Women themselves.

Most Traditional Owners for Trephina Gorge Nature Park live in Santa Teresa, Amoonguna and Alice Springs. The closest residential area to the Park is Williams Well Outstation, approximately 25 kilometres to the west off the Ross Highway.

1.2.2 The Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service

The Parks and Wildlife Service is dedicated to conserving the natural and cultural values of parks and reserves, while providing high-quality nature-based tourism and recreation opportunities for visitors. The Service is committed to engaging the public and working with the interests of the community. The Parks and Wildlife Service is committed to seeing that the joint management partnership grows and becomes truly equitable and that Traditional Owners benefit culturally, socially and economically from joint management.

This Plan has been developed by the joint management partners in a positive spirit. Like the Traditional Owners of the Park, the Parks and Wildlife Service is optimistic about the future.

2. Park Governance

Joint management is about Traditional Owners and the Parks and Wildlife Service working together to achieve their shared goals and aspirations, exchanging knowledge and expertise solving problems together and sharing decisions. A mutual understanding of country, Law, culture and Indigenous decision-making principles are fundamental to making good joint management decisions. For the purpose of joint management, the term governance is defined as "the way the partners organise themselves and the rules they put in place to realise their shared vision." It includes all aspects of partnership, communication, planning and decision-making.

Making sure that the joint management partners have a clear structure and process for making decisions is essential for good joint management. The partners are optimistic that this new way of learning and working together improve management equity. Both partners acknowledge that it will take time and support to build capacity and a strong working relationship.

Principles for effective governance

- Decision-making and accountability should be equally shared.
- Time spent together on country is important for developing mutual trust, respect and understanding between the partners.
- Indigenous decision-making processes must be respected.
- Management priorities will be guided by the Park's key values.
- Planning and decision-making must incorporate risk identification and minimisation.
- Engagement and employment of Traditional Owners in management operations is central to joint management success.
- Resources are limited and must be used effectively.
- Joint management has to be checked to see that it is working well. It is important to keep improving.
- Public support for joint management is very important.

2.1 Planning and decision-making

2.1.1 A partnership approach

Joint management provides exciting new opportunities to make better management decisions based on a combination of Indigenous and western approaches to land management. Successful joint management relies on meaningful engagement with Traditional Owners and will be measured against the achievement of the aims in this Plan and the satisfaction of the joint management partners.

For Traditional Owners of Trepghina Gorge Nature Park it is fundamental that appropriate senior people are involved in making decisions related to their country. Across the East MacDonnell district different groups of Traditional Owners maintain responsibility for different areas of country which includes the Park. Traditional Owners emphasise the importance of ensuring decision-making structures reflect the differing responsibility between different family groups.

It is important to acknowledge that Traditional Owners' values and perceptions in relation to looking after country do not always line up with conventional park management approaches. Their perception of joint management is strongly influenced by what they value most highly – Aboriginal law and extended family. Respecting these differences will significantly assist the partnership and provides the basis for effective joint management and governance of the Park.

Accordingly, decision-making will be structured so that the people whose country is affected are well-informed about park operations and are involved in decisions. Working in a cross-cultural environment requires mutual trust and respect as well as clear communication at all levels. A shared understanding of country, culture and indigenous decision-making principles are fundamental to making good joint management decisions.

2.1.2 Roles and responsibilities

Clear roles and responsibilities are essential for joint management and each of the partners have responsibilities for looking after the Park in accordance with traditional Aboriginal laws and laws applicable in the Northern Territory (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

- A **Joint Management Committee** is intended to be the principal governing body for parks and reserves of the East MacDonnells district, including N'Dhala Gorge and Trephina Gorge Nature Parks. The East MacDonnells Joint Management Committee's primary functions are to provide strategic direction to Park operations, determine local policy and procedures, and review progress against management directions in this plan. The Committee will be composed of representatives nominated by the main Traditional Owner families and senior Parks and Wildlife staff. It is hoped that centralising management between all reserves of the East MacDonnells to a single Joint Management Committee will increase management efficiency and effectiveness across the district.
- **Traditional Owners** provide an essential contribution to the direction and management of the Park. Core members of family groups have responsibilities for decision-making and overseeing cultural protocols.
- Traditional Owners also have responsibilities for managing traditional knowledge and passing it on to the right people, looking after the land and its resources, maintaining sacred sites and keeping the country alive. Traditional Owners are responsible to the land, law and culture.
- The **Parks and Wildlife Service** is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Park under the direction of the Joint Management Committee. The Parks and Wildlife Service is required to finance and resource the Park's ongoing management including administrative functions, staffing, infrastructure and services in accordance with the Park Lease, Indigenous Land Use Agreement and any relevant laws. Park employees are responsible to the Minister for Parks and Wildlife and the Northern Territory Government.
- The **Central Land Council (CLC)** are responsible for representing and protecting the interests of the Traditional Owners in the Park's management under the TPWC Act. Specifically they are to represent and support Traditional Owners' interests, undertake consultations, assist with monitoring joint management processes, and help resolve differences between Traditional Owners, if needed.

All joint management decisions will be consistent with any relevant laws in force in the Northern Territory, with the Park Lease and Indigenous Land Use Agreement, and with any relevant Northern Territory Government policies or guidelines.

2.1.3 Building effective governance and continuous improvement

The partners recognise the need for training to build effective governance. Traditional Owners are willing to teach Rangers and visitors cross-cultural skills, language and Aboriginal land management techniques. Rangers are prepared to share their knowledge of planning, budgeting, organisational structures and resource management with Traditional Owners.

The partners are also committed to continuous learning and improvement. The process involves tracking progress against performance measures, evaluating results and purposely modifying management to reflect new knowledge and insights (see Appendix 1). It also involves monitoring to measure efficiencies, improved effectiveness and progress toward long-term aims.

2.1.4 Community engagement and participation

Good working relationships with landholders situated between the five parks and reserves of the East MacDonnells may increase management effectiveness across the district. Matters of mutual concern include fencing, boundary access, control of stock and feral animals, weed control, fire management and to some extent, visitor access and safety.

Working with stakeholders and neighbours for mutual benefit expands the positive influence of the Park beyond its immediate boundary. Forums such as the 'Desert Guides' network provides an example where commercial tour guides and Rangers share information and work collaboratively to best serve visitors across the district.

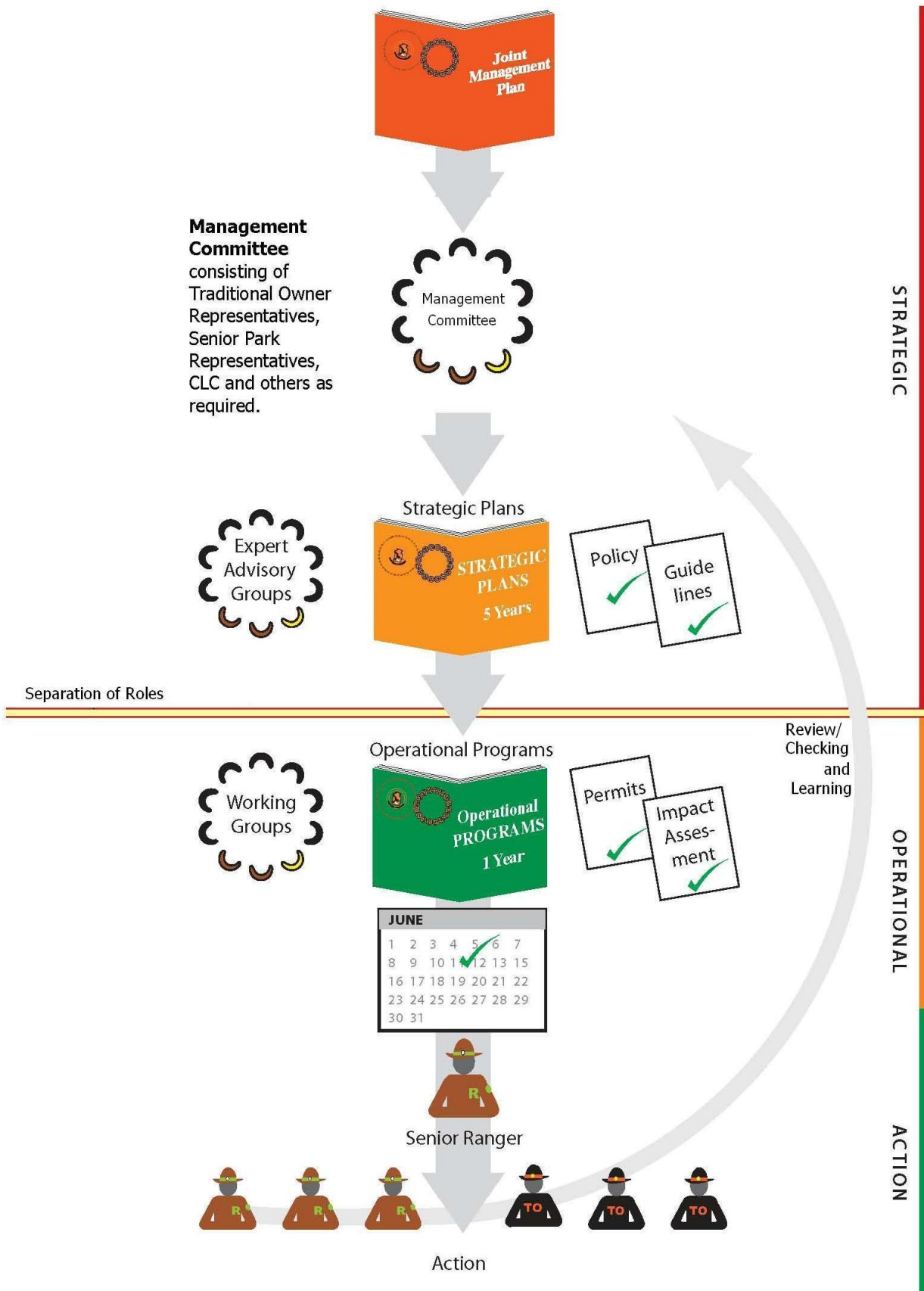
There are no immediate proposals to expand the Park. The vision of a "greater park" linking the West MacDonnell National Park, Corroboree Conservation Reserve and N'Dhala Gorge Nature Park has been investigated from time to time over the last three decades. Such a vision may become a reality in time through co-operative arrangements with neighbouring landholders such as Loves Creek, Undoolya and The Garden pastoral stations.

The Park is enjoyed by a wide variety of user groups and is an important part of the local community. Many special interest groups enjoy the Park including bushwalking and running clubs, choirs, field naturalists, and school and religious groups. It is important that these groups are given opportunities to voice their interests and provide feedback about the Park.

Table 1. Decision-making Framework.

East MacDonnells Joint Management Committee Representatives from Traditional Owners and Senior Parks and Wildlife Staff	Park Operations Parks Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise executive authority and be accountable for the management of the Park. • Set strategic direction and park-specific policy and procedure for management programs and staff to implement. • Approve work programs and internal annual budgets. • Establish development directions and criteria to evaluate proposals. • Consult with senior men responsible for the sacred site. • Communicate with, and provide feedback from, the groups that members represent. • Provide a link with the key stakeholders and wider community for the East MacDonnell district. • Monitor and review management performance. • Consider other proposals not specified in this plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for day-to-day management of the Park. • Implement operational programs, policy and procedure as approved by the management committee. • Maximise on-ground participation of Traditional Owners in management of the Park. • Report progress to the management committee. • Liaise with stakeholders and neighbours. • Issue permits, contracts and licenses according to policy and procedures. • Monitor management effectiveness and adjust management according to new information, improved procedures, new technology and new threats or issues.

Figure 1 Park Management and Operations – Roles and Responsibilities



Aim

- Equitable management partnership with effective governance that makes well-informed decisions.
- A park managed for the wider public interest with strong community support.

Management Directions

2.1 Joint Management Committee – A single Joint Management Committee will oversee operational management of parks and reserves in the East MacDonnell district, including N'Dhala Gorge and Trepina Nature Parks.

- **Role** - The role of the East MacDonnells Management Committee is to provide direction and policy. The Committee will not have a direct role in day-to-day operations. The Committee will represent the interests of Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife. As an initial priority, the partners will formally define and document all aspects of their roles, as well as the rules and processes to effectively govern the Park.
- **Meetings** - The East MacDonnells Management Committee will meet at least once a year.
- **Membership** – The Committee will consist of at least three Traditional Owners representing estate groups associated with nominated parks and reserves of the East MacDonnell district, including:
 - at least two Senior Government Officers,
 - at least one Land Council Officer, and
 - other persons invited by the partners to provide advice on particular issues or to represent community interests (for example the tourism industry).

2.2 Making decisions – Decisions will be made by consensus. The roles and decision-making responsibilities of the Committee are summarised in Table 2.

2.3 Expert advisory groups and working groups – Working groups of Traditional Owners, Parks and Wildlife staff, CLC officers and specialists may be formed to support the Committee or address specific tasks, such as for fire management or tourism advice.

2.4 Supporting and building effective governance - The partners and CLC recognise that joint management will be a process of continuous learning and improvement. In the future, other governance arrangements may be refined to increase effectiveness.

- **Representation** - The CLC will represent and support Traditional Owners' interests and facilitate consultations when required.
- **Governance training** – Governance training will be provided to the joint management partners to give them the tools and skills to work effectively in the partnership, with attention given to needs identified by the participatory monitoring and evaluation program.
- **Professional development** – Professional standards and staff competencies will be supported by ongoing training in all aspects of park management with special emphasis on cross-cultural training involving Traditional Owners.
- **Information exchange** – A key role of committee members will be to bring to the Committee the collective expertise, interests and concerns of their group. Committee members will be responsible for passing on information to the wider Traditional Owner group, local community and key stakeholders. The CLC will provide support if required.

Park operations will be responsible for effectively communicating information about Park management programs to the East MacDonnells Joint Management Committee.

- **Continuous learning and improvement** – A monitoring and evaluation program will be developed and will help develop effective governance. Performance will be measured annually using indicators (see Appendix 1) relating to:
 - The satisfaction of the partners;
 - The effectiveness of the partnership (including decision-making processes, participation and communication); and
 - The implementation of this Plan.
- **Dispute resolution** – The partners will aim to resolve disputes through open discussion and communication, involving the CLC as required or requested by the Traditional Owners. However, should a dispute arise between the partners that cannot be resolved, the parties will follow the dispute resolution processes set out in the Park Lease.

2.5 Community engagement and participation – The partners will build partnerships and linkages with neighbouring landholders, non-Government organisations and the local community to improve conservation and nature-based visitor experiences both on- and off-park.

- **Neighbours** - The partners will work with neighbours and local community groups to address mutual interests. Such groups will be invited to work strategically with the partners on conservation and tourism planning, to resolve common issues and develop opportunities, including those that are linked to the Park but lie outside the boundary.
- **Informed Community** - The partners will keep the community and stakeholders informed about significant issues and proposed developments.
- **Aboriginal Employment** - The partners will be proactive in developing local solutions for Aboriginal employment. Aboriginal employment will remain a standing item at Committee meetings.
- **Tourism Industry** - The partners will be proactive in working with the tourism industry through established forums and organisations such as Tourism Central Australia and Tourism NT and development will remain a standing item at Committee meetings.
- **Volunteers** - Volunteers will be encouraged on the basis that it will not compromise or compete with Traditional Owners' aspirations or opportunities.

2.2 Business Operations

2.2.1 Effective operations

Park operations are currently carried out by Park Rangers based at Trephina Gorge Nature Park with regular patrols to the Park. It is hoped that day-to-day management will be carried out by both Rangers and Traditional Owners in the future. At present almost all funding to manage the Park is provided by the Northern Territory Government from funding appropriated to manage the Northern Territory's Parks estate. Major works and ongoing programs are subject to Territory-wide government priorities.

On-ground work in parks and reserves across the East MacDonnells is directed by a hierarchy of strategies and operational programs that are developed to achieve the long-term aims included in this and related Plans. The East MacDonnells Joint Management Committee will be responsible for endorsing long-term strategies and overseeing operational programs implemented by Rangers, Traditional Owners, contractors and

volunteers. The Committee's role will be to match priorities and new information with available staff and budgets to best achieve the Park's long-term aims and vision.

2.2.2 Indigenous training, employment and enterprise development

Joint management will promote opportunities for employment and business for Traditional Owners across the East MacDonnell district. Traditional Owners emphasise how important training and employment is for their families and acknowledge their responsibility to support young people. They look forward to new opportunities in working on country and applying their skills, knowledge and expertise to better look after the Park.

Since the establishment of new joint management arrangements in the East MacDonnells, Traditional Owners have participated in paid park management programs on a flexible basis. Such flexible, project-based employment provides many benefits including work experience, skills exchange and accredited training, and helps build positive working relationships between Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife staff. Where necessary, it helps Traditional Owners become work-ready and local Aboriginal organisations, including community ranger groups, contract-ready.

Traditional Owners also identified a range of employment opportunities during planning meetings including park and community rangers, tour guides and family tourism businesses. It is important to acknowledge that the broader employment aspirations of Traditional Owners and their families cannot be met by joint management alone. Opportunities will be further limited if efforts are limited to the Park in isolation. Consequently, employment and training initiatives developed by the partners will need to be developed within a local and district context and involve other groups and organisations.

While most maintenance on the Park is carried out by Rangers, contractors are increasingly used to carry out on-ground work. Contract work on the Park includes cleaning campgrounds, sign and facility repairs and maintenance, walking track construction and maintenance, and fencing. Traditional Owners are keen to be involved in contract work. Preference will be given to Traditional Owners of the park to participate in any commercial activities approved under the lease, subject to any law in force in the Northern Territory. Where capacity is lacking, the partners will work with local Aboriginal people to build confidence, provide exposure, knowledge and opportunities to gain experience.

Parks in the East MacDonnell Ranges provide an excellent opportunity for Traditional Owners to present their living culture from a personal perspective, to visitors from all over Australia and the world. Joint management and liaison with the tourism industry can help develop cultural tourism.

Access by Aboriginal Rangers, contractors and trainees to sacred sites should be carefully managed under the direction of senior traditional owners.

2.2.3 Research, survey and monitoring

Effective management is very much about review and continuous improvement (see Appendix 1). Internal research, survey and monitoring programs associated with the Park should have clear objectives and be integrated with operational programs.

Research is strongly encouraged where it will benefit the Park or the wider region. Research or surveys undertaken by external organisations may require permits issued under the TPWC By-laws. Park-based guidelines for permits will be negotiated by the partners.

Traditional Owners have knowledge of the Park that may contribute to research

outcomes. It is important that they are consulted and invited to participate in research, survey and monitoring projects and, where possible, employed in this work. It is important that the outcomes of research projects are communicated to the partners and for the intellectual property rights of Traditional Owners to be protected.

2.2.4 Regulated activities

Permits – All commercial operations, tours, commercial film and photography, public events, public gatherings, interfere with or take wildlife, special access and aircraft activities are regulated within the Park and require a permit under the TPWC By-laws. Permits holders must abide by the conditions on each permit so that their activities do not negatively affect the values of the Park.

Permit approval – An effective permit processing system is needed to assess permit applications submitted to Parks and Wildlife. The East MacDonnells Joint Management Committee will establish local policy and guidelines for park operations to issue permits, subject to the provisions of the TPWC Act and TPWC By-laws. The partners will need to have regard to timeliness of processing, the interests of Traditional Owners, the community, industry stakeholders and existing Parks and Wildlife policy. Such guidelines should also explicitly state when a proposed activity will, and will not, require consultation with Traditional Owners. The rights, obligations and conditions of permit holders are usually specified in the permit and will be consistent with conditions determined by the partners. Some permits may require paid supervision by Traditional Owners or Parks and Wildlife staff. The CLC will consult with Traditional Owners on permit applications that request any access or activity that would not normally be allowed to visitors until any necessary agreed guidelines and procedures are developed.

Tour operator permits – Tour companies visiting any Northern Territory park or reserve require a permit issued under the TPWC By-laws. Most tour operator permits are addressed through the Tour Operator Permit System. If special provisions are needed a separate permit is required, with the operators rights, obligations and conditions usually detailed in the permit. Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife want information presented by tour operators to be accurate and appropriate, particularly for cultural information.

Concerts, public events and performances - Occasionally the Park provides a venue for public events and performances which have included choirs, orchestras, school groups and weddings. Larger events have led to significant traffic congestion along the main road, day-use areas and campgrounds. Events have been known to attract over 100 vehicles.

Park promotion, commercial film and photography - Media coverage and other forms of promotion can help build public support for the Park with flow-on benefits to the partners and the Territory. Accurate promotion and marketing of the Park gives visitors appropriate expectations and influences visitor satisfaction. Practical guidelines are needed to ensure that commercial film and photography can happen without compromising park values.

Research – External research is encouraged especially where the resulting knowledge will improve management of the Park and the Territory's park estate. Research proposals should be developed in conjunction with Parks and Wildlife staff and Traditional Owners and be consistent with Park policies and guidelines including ICIP (see section 5.1.3). Also wildlife research requires a permit to interfere with, take or keep wildlife.

Development proposals - All development proposals need to be reviewed against guidelines and conditions prepared by the partners. Where development proposals, leases or activities may cause environmental, heritage or cultural impacts, the proponent will be required to demonstrate that the proposal complies with all relevant legislation.

The proposal will also require the informed consent of Traditional Owners.

Advice needs to be sought from NT Departments responsible for environment, heritage, natural resource management, and the CLC. If deemed appropriate, the proponent may be required to thoroughly assess the risks to determine whether a development or activity is likely to significantly affect sacred sites, threatened species, ecological communities, natural resources or the long-term interests of the community.

The types of developments that may occur include:

- re-designing and upgrading existing facilities;
- new fences and improved vehicle access;
- commercial camping and exclusive use sites; and
- new walking tracks, bike paths or other visitor infrastructure.

Benefit sharing agreements - With the consideration of the Committee and consent of all affected Traditional Owners, the Park Lease and this Plan allow the partners to enter into benefit-sharing arrangements with commercial partners.

Licence or sub-lease – In certain circumstances, including where a secure form of land tenure is needed, a licence or sub-lease may be entered into. Any licence or sublease entered into by the Northern Territory in respect of the Park must be consistent with the terms of the Park Lease and must have the prior written consent of the Atnerrperrke Aboriginal Land Trust on behalf of the Traditional Owners.

Protecting sacred sites – Protection for places of cultural significance to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory is afforded under overlapping legislation. The *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)* gives legal recognition to areas which that Act terms 'sacred sites', defined as: "a site that is sacred to Aboriginals or is otherwise of significance according to Aboriginal tradition, and includes any land that, under a law of the Northern Territory, is declared to be sacred to Aboriginals or of significance according to Aboriginal tradition". The *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act* (NTASSA) also provides protection for sites that fall within the scope of the ALRA definition of sacred site. Both the ALRA and NTASSA make it an offence to enter or remain on land that is a sacred site. It is also an offence under the NTASSA to carry out work on, use or desecrate a sacred site. Further, the NTASSA provides protection for sacred sites by requiring a person who proposes to use or conduct work on land to apply for an Authority Certificate. An Authority Certificate will only be issued if the use of or work on the land can proceed without there being a substantive risk of damage to or interference with a sacred site on or in the vicinity of the land or if an agreement is reached between the applicant and the custodians of the sacred site. Subject to the terms of the NTASSA, this protection enables custodians of the sacred site to say who can enter the site and what can happen in or on the site.

Successful joint management will assist to ensure the Park is protected in accordance with the wishes of the traditional owners. Pursuant to the ALRA, the Central Land Council has a specific function to assist Aboriginals in the taking of measures likely to assist in the protection of sacred sites within the Park.

Protecting heritage sites - The *Heritage Conservation Act* provides protection for two categories of places and objects. Firstly, it provides for the protection of prescribed archaeological places and objects,' which include, among other things; places containing rock paintings or carvings, prehistoric or proto-historic occupation places; places containing human remains or burial artefacts; art sites, cultural objects and wood carvings. Under the *Heritage Conservation Act* consent of the Minister is required before work is carried out on or in relation to an archaeological place or object. Further, the *Heritage Conservation Act* also provides for the protection and conservation of declared

heritage places and objects.

Under the *Heritage Conservation Regulations* a person who discovers an archaeological place or object must report the discovery and its location to the Director as soon as practicable after discovering it. In addition to this obligation, the Traditional Owners request that if any artefacts are uncovered they are not disturbed and are immediately reported to the senior men through the Central Land Council.

Proposals for expansion of the Park – There are no immediate proposals to expand the Park. The vision of a “greater park” linking the West MacDonnell National Park and parks and reserves of the East MacDonnell ranges has been investigated from time to time over several decades. There are opportunities to build links between protected areas of the East MacDonnells through cooperative arrangements with nearby landholders.

Community living areas in the district are an integral part of both the continuation of Aboriginal cultural practices in, and the natural and cultural resource management of the country. Traditional Owners have achieved legal ownership of small parcels in proximity of the Park through the *Pastoral Land Act*.

Mining – The Park is relatively small and any mining or extractive activities would adversely impact the cultural values of the Park. Under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)* Traditional Owners have the right to control mining on Aboriginal Land. Currently, Traditional Owners feel strongly that mining is not consistent with the values of the Park and are unlikely to approve it.

Dealing with proposals not in the Plan – Any proposal not addressed in the Plan will be initially considered by the partners through the East MacDonnells Joint Management Committee. Any matter that may affect the interests of Traditional Owners will require the consent of affected Traditional Owners via a consultation process conducted by the CLC.

Aims

- The Aims and Directions in this Plan achieved with resources used effectively on agreed priorities; and
- Traditional Owners benefiting economically through joint management.
- A community supportive of joint management.

Management Directions

2.6 Management strategies and operational programs – Through meetings of the East MacDonnells Joint Management Committee and designated working groups, the partners will prepare and implement integrated management strategies and operational programs for parks and reserves of the East MacDonnells district, including N’Dhala Gorge Nature Park and Corroboree Rock Conservation Area. Traditional Owners, Park staff, contractors and volunteers will implement operational programs as directed.

2.7 Day-to-day management – Parks and Wildlife will be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Park.

- **Financing** – Parks and Wildlife will finance and resource the Park’s ongoing management including administrative functions, staff, infrastructure and services taking into account the funding available to the Service and the priorities determined across the NT. Opportunities to supplement the funding of Park operations and programs will be closely examined and could include revenue obtained from sub-leases, commercial agreements, permits etc. External funding may be sought for specific projects.
- **Waste Disposal** – Alternatives to landfill style waste disposal will be investigated. Recycling will be encouraged wherever possible.

2.8 Work experience, training and employment – The partners will commit to building capacity, employment and career development opportunities for Traditional Owners.

- **Indigenous Training and Employment Strategy** - This strategy will be prepared at an agency level to maximise Aboriginal employment and include progressive targets for specific employment of traditional landowners across the park estate. This strategy will inform local initiatives to increase the employment of Aboriginal people on the Park. Aboriginal employment will remain a standing item at Committee meetings.
- **Indigenous employment opportunities in Parks and Wildlife** – Parks and Wildlife will continue to provide opportunities for work experience, training, casual work and direct employment of Aboriginal people from the east MacDonnell district where possible. Steps will be put in place to facilitate the uptake of higher level positions including Rangers, managers, technical, administrative and professional specialist positions subject to any applicable laws or policies in force in the Territory.
- **Partnerships with community-based Indigenous Rangers and special interest groups** – Local Indigenous Community-based Rangers, community volunteers, and sponsored training and employment programs will be encouraged to assist with Park management.
- **Enterprise** – The private sector and Traditional Owners will be encouraged to take up commercial opportunities associated with the Park.
- **Contract services** – Parks and Wildlife will encourage private sector participation. Initiatives to build the capacity of Aboriginal organisations to fulfil works and service contracts will be encouraged. Preference will be given to Traditional Owners of the park participating in any commercial activities conducted under the lease subject to any law in force in the Territory. If other contractors are used, those providing training and employment to local Aboriginal people will be preferred.

2.9 Tourism – The partners will liaise with the tourism industry through established fora and organisations. Sustainable commercial cultural and nature-based tourism will be fostered. The partners will actively seek the assistance of Tourism NT, Tourism Central Australia and CLC for Traditional Owners to take up commercial tourism opportunities including campfire talks, cultural tours or other viable enterprises.

2.10 Cultural advice – Traditional Owners will be paid for specialist cultural advice and supervision consistent with the Parks and Wildlife Indigenous Fee for Service Policy.

2.11 Research, survey and monitoring – Programs will be approved in operational strategies and subject to annual review. Participation by Traditional Owners and employment in research, survey and monitoring projects will be maximised. Indigenous knowledge components will be incorporated in project objectives and outcomes where appropriate.

2.12 Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) – Traditional Owners will retain ownership of their ICIP and control the use of cultural information in keeping with standard policies developed and agreed by the CLC and Parks and Wildlife.

2.13 Regulated Activities

- **Permit Policy and Guidelines** – The East MacDonnells Joint Management Committee will establish local guidelines and conditions for the issue of permits, subject to the provisions of the TPWC Act and TPWC By-laws. These will consider the interests of Traditional Owners, industry needs and Parks and Wildlife policy. In the absence of guidelines, the CLC will consult with Traditional Owners over permit applications and advise Parks and Wildlife when appropriate.
- **Standard permit applications** – Delegated Parks and Wildlife staff can approve permit applications that involve activities or commercial concessions which comply with

agreed guidelines and conditions, require no special access, and are of a nature or type that has already been considered by the East MacDonnell Joint Management Committee.

- **Non-standard permit applications** – The Committee may be convened to provide direction to Park operations if a permit application involves special access or activities not addressed by agreed guidelines or conditions. A permit holder's rights, obligations and conditions will be detailed in conditions or operational agreements attached to the permit. Proposals that are culturally sensitive, large or complex, or part of a major commercial project may require the informed consent all affected Traditional Owner estate groups.
- **Routine commercial tours** – Permits for tour businesses making normal use of the Park will continue to be issued through the Tour Operator Permit System.
- **Remote Area Camping** - Remote area walkers will require a permit to camp outside a designated campground in accordance with TPWC By-laws.
- **Special events** – Proposals for special events will be encouraged if the likely impacts on other visitors and Park values are minimal.
- **Research** - Wildlife researchers require permits to interfere with, take or keep wildlife. Parks and Wildlife staff and Traditional Owners should be consulted in developing research proposals and proposals should be consistent with TPWC By-laws, Park policies and guidelines including ICIP (see Management Direction 5.2).

2.14 Development proposals – Any proposal will require informed consent of affected Traditional Owners, consistent with the Park Lease and appropriate assessment processes.

- **Impact assessment** - The potential impacts of all proposed activities and developments will be considered and assessed commensurate with the scale of potential impact as appropriate.
- **Commercial sub-lease** - To provide long-term security for commercial proponents the partners can provide long term sub-leases and operational arrangements and conditions for an enterprise.
- **Benefit-sharing agreements** –The partners may enter into benefit-sharing arrangements for commercial operations and developments within the Park.
- **Infrastructure sublease** – With approval of affected Traditional Owners, consistent with the Lease and appropriate assessment processes, this Plan provides the Territory Government the right to sub-lease or license portions of the Park for specific purposes, including public infrastructure.
- **Sacred sites clearances** – The Central Land Council will have sacred site clearance responsibility for all proposed work on the Park. However the joint management partners may agree from time to time that a proponent may require an Authority Certificate under the NTASSA, issued by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.
- **Heritage approvals** – Consent will be sought under the *Heritage Conservation Act* for works to prescribed Aboriginal Archaeological Places and Objects in the Park, historical sites and any significant development involving land disturbance. Sacred site clearances through the Central Land Council will also be sought for works to any archaeological sites on Park.
- **Cultural objects** - All archaeological materials are protected and must not be disturbed. A person who discovers an archaeological place or object must report the discovery to the NT Department responsible for environment and heritage. Traditional Owners also request that if any artefacts are immediately reported to the senior men

through the Central Land Council.

2.15 Extending the Park – Any proposals to extend the Park by including adjoining land will be considered through the East MacDonnell Joint Management Committee

2.16 Establishing new community living areas - Any proposal to create community living areas on the Park will be considered through the Management East MacDonnells Joint Management Committee.

2.17 Mining and exploration – Mining applications will be addressed through the ALRA. Soil and gravel can be extracted for soil conservation works within the Park with the approval of the partners. Fossicking will not be permitted. Nothing in the TPWC Act, limits the right of Traditional Owners to gather ochre within the Park.

2.18 Dealing with proposals not in the Plan – Any proposal not addressed in the Plan will be initially considered by the partners through the East MacDonnell Joint Management Committee. Any matter that may affect the interests of Traditional Owners will require the consent of affected Traditional Owners via a consultation process conducted by the CLC.

3. Zoning

The Park is managed for multiple purposes and different areas of the Park will be managed differently. The zoning plan is a general summary of the purpose and focus of management for all areas of the park, based on the specific values of those areas and their level of visitor access and facility development.

Table 2. Zoning Scheme.

	Visitor Zone	Service Zone	Conservation Zone	Special Protection Zone
Purpose	Concentrated visitor use whilst minimising negative impacts.	Management infrastructure and services. Specific purpose leases.	Controlled visitor use to experience remote, undeveloped areas of the Park.	Protection of natural and cultural values.
Management Focus	High standard facilities and interpretation.	Management facilities and services, minimising environmental impacts.	Land conservation programs; fire, weed and feral animal management.	Protection of culturally significant sites, threatened species and biodiversity hotspots from impacts of fire, weeds and feral animals.
Visitor Access	High standard access for conventional vehicles and coaches. High standard pedestrian access. Camping in approved campsites only.	Public access for business or emergency contact only.	Camping by permit only or in connection with approved concession.	No camping. Visitor access controlled if necessary.

	Visitor Zone	Service Zone	Conservation Zone	Special Protection Zone
Visitor Activity	Orientation and interpretation, picnicking, walking, photography and nature appreciation.	Business and emergency contact. Activities stated in a permit or lease agreement.	Overnight self-reliant bush walking, research and commercial tourism (including bush camping) under permit.	Scientific research, survey and monitoring. Interpret specific values where appropriate.
Facilities	Parking areas, walking tracks, picnic facilities, shade shelters, interpretive signs, toilets and emergency facilities if needed.	Management facilities only; office, workshop, staff residences. Facilities permitted under lease or permit.	Conservation infrastructure. General provision for nature-based tourism under terms of concession permit. Other developments are not precluded subject to good planning and protection.	Facilities necessary to ensure protection of values, ie. fences, vehicle barriers, interpretation.

Zoning Aim

- Park values protected whilst providing for public access and enjoyment.

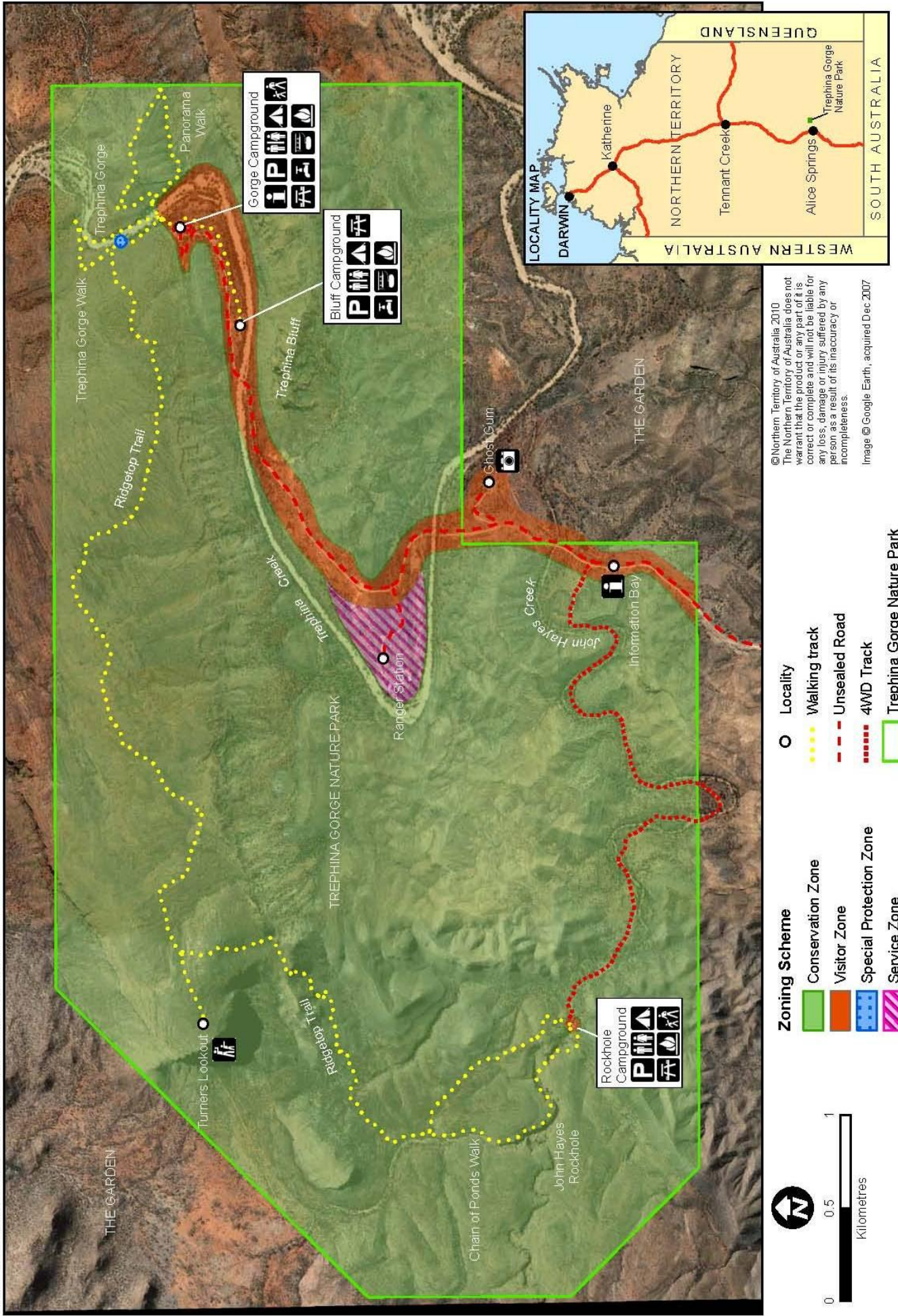
Management Directions

3.1 Zoning – Management of the Park will be in accordance with the zoning scheme (Table 2, Map 3).

3.2 Development - Regardless of the designated zone all management and development will maintain the park’s natural character and conservation values. Any new development will be subject to approval of the partners and appropriate environmental, sacred site and cultural heritage protection legislation.

3.3 Special Protection Zone – To protect sites of exceptional conservation or cultural significance from threatening processes, special protection zones can be designated by the East MacDonnell Joint Management Committee in consultation with stakeholders. The Management Committee may also extend or remove Special Protection Zones based on improved scientific understanding, directions from Traditional Owners and stakeholder advice. One special protection zone has been designated associated with a cultural site.

Map 3. Zoning Map
Trepghina Gorge Nature Park Joint Management Plan (Draft)



4. Managing Visitors

Trephina Gorge Nature Park is one of the more popular parks in the East MacDonnells district, attracting approximately 20,000 visitors a year. The Park is noted for its sheer quartzite cliffs and River Red Gum-lined water courses.

The Park allows locals and domestic tourists to conveniently access the 'outdoors', as well as spirited travellers seeking to get off the beaten track. The Park provides a range of recreational experiences focused around the three major nodes of 'John Hayes Rock Hole', 'The Bluff' and 'Trephina Gorge'.

Increased visitor numbers to the Red Centre Way tourist route may increase visitors travelling through the district. It is important to maintain the remote character of the Park; and for the low key, nature based activities to be enhanced by authentic Indigenous experiences. Visitors to Trephina Gorge Nature Park rely on a moderate level of development. Most day-use visitors enjoy the Park for 2 to 4 hours. During the cooler months (April to Sept) campsites are in high demand. Most campers stay for 1 to 2 nights. The Ross River Resort located 20 kilometres east of the Park has more developed visitor accommodation.

The Park remains a moderate contributor to the local economy, however only a small number of tour operators currently use the Park. There is an opportunity to expand commercial niche operations in partnership with Traditional Owners.

Visitor management for Trephina Gorge Nature Park will focus on maintaining a low-key bush setting for visitors. It will be presented as an outdoor family escape, and provide opportunities for passive nature-based recreation. It will also provide a 'quiet alternative' to the Red Centre Way.

Commercial and other infrastructure will be developed consistent with processes identified in section 2. Through careful site planning, design, and management, a range of visitor experiences can occur without impact on the Park's values. Initiatives to expand commercial activities will be encouraged.

Visitor appreciation of the Park's values will be sustained through the Park's interpretation and face-to-face interpretation programs. Programs will focus on providing memorable experiences centred on the Park's natural and cultural highlights, including Aboriginal culture and Traditional Owners' connection to country for locals and travellers.

Principles for Managing Visitor Experiences

The joint management partners of Trephina recognise:

- Positive experiences produce satisfied visitors, who may build a sense of connection and responsibility for the Park.
- Visitors' appreciation and respect for the Park is enhanced by sharing information about the Park's unique natural and cultural values.
- A broad range of visitor experiences can occur in the Park without impact on its key values, through careful planning, design and management.
- Well-designed facilities help protect Park values and promote safe, enjoyable visitor experiences.

4.1 Engaging with the Arrernte's living cultural landscape

Traditional Owners of the East MacDonnells maintain strong connections to country through language, culture, stories and ecological knowledge. An increasing number of visitors are looking for enriching, transformative experiences. The living cultural landscape associated with the Park has yet to be presented to this market.

Traditional Owners seek the opportunity to develop niche tourism operations and share their stories with visitors. The East MacDonnells Joint Management Committee will help provide a consistent platform for the partners and the wider community to exchange ideas, develop tourism opportunities and reinforce progress.

The Park volunteer program could also be expanded to include paying holiday-makers ('voluntourism'). Cross-cultural conservation projects that enable visitors to reconnect with nature and engage with Aboriginal people could foster tremendous support and influence for joint management.

A strategic, district approach is required to develop indigenous tourism products. The local tourism industry has expressed a strong interest in a closer working relationship with Traditional Owners. The partners will actively seek the assistance from NT Government agencies associated with tourism, employment and training, as well as the CLC to support Traditional Owners who seek to develop tourism enterprises.

4.2 A low key 'bush' experience

Trephina Gorge Nature Park's primary visitor value is that it presents a natural, uncrowded, low-key setting which is easily accessed from Alice Springs. It is situated within the East MacDonnell district which provides a quieter alternative to the 'Red Centre Way'¹ and typifies the outback experience sought by 'spirited adventures'. As described by a senior Ranger: "*Trephina Gorge lies on the path less travelled, and people enjoy it for that.*"

The natural low-key character of the Park is its unique visitor value. It is important that any developments or improvements re-enforce the Parks low-key 'bush' character. Any future developments should emphasise design which sensitively blends with the landscape. In general, tourism and recreation facilities offered in the Park should be maintained at a high standard.

Pressing visitor issues the partners face include:

- addressing problems associated with day-use and campground facilities;
- accommodating occasional large events/performances;
- accommodating long camping vehicles such as camper vans and motor homes;
- addressing erosion issues within the Trephina Gorge Campground and John Hayes access track; and
- adding value to the local tourism industry and attracting private investment.

It is important that the Joint Management partners work closely with local tourism

¹ Trephina Gorge Nature Park lies on the eastern edge of Australia's Red Centre National Landscape, marketed nationally and internationally as "the best of the best" of Australia's natural and cultural assets. It includes internationally iconic national parks such as the West MacDonnells, Finke Gorge, Watarrka and Uluru Kata-Tjuta National Parks.

interests to ensure key stakeholders are informed and have the opportunity to contribute to problem solving and decision-making. The partners also recognise the need to better cater to the needs of people with impaired mobility as currently few parks in the district provide for this.

Existing management facilities on the Park include the Ranger office, workshop, residences, water supply and a power generator. Waste is recycled wherever possible and visitors are encouraged to take any rubbish out of the Park.

All future developments and infrastructure should aim to be low maintenance, with practical and environmental considerations paramount. They should also be done with a view to attracting commercial operators, or providing commercial opportunities for Traditional Owners where interest exists. Private investment should also be encouraged providing it accords with Northern Territory Government and agency policy.

Tourism planning and future developments need to be underpinned by effective research and monitoring of visitor use, expectations and satisfaction.

4.2.1 Community education and interpretation

Park interpretation is a process that helps visitors see, learn, experience and be inspired firsthand. Interpretation can significantly enrich a visitor's overall experience. Interpretation planning is needed to best communicate the Park's unique values.

Within Trephina Gorge Nature Park interpretation should:

- be integrated with other parks and reserves of the East MacDonnell Ranges; and
- promote awareness of the Park's traditional ownership.

Communication between tour operators, the tourism industry and the partners is important to ensure safe and enjoyable experiences for visitors. Programs such as the Tourism NT Desert Guides should be encouraged as they provide an essential link between tour guides and the partners.

4.2.2 Safety

All visitor activity on the Park carries some risk of injury. The major safety concerns within the Park are visitors becoming lost or affected by heat, cold and/or dehydration; injured through swimming or cliff-related accidents; and injured while using Park infrastructure.

Risk reduction measures include visitor education, facility maintenance and implementing management practices that remove or reduce potential harm. Rangers are trained in emergency response and first aid, and regularly patrol the main visitor areas to monitor facilities and visitor behaviour. They maintain facilities to the highest practicable standards for visitor safety. Safety information signs are located at visitor information shelters and trail heads. A district Emergency Response Plan, which is reviewed annually provides Rangers with clear direction in an emergency. Visitor safety is also promoted through permit conditions set by the partners for tour operators and school groups.

4.2.3 Access

Within the Park a partially formed gravel road leads visitors from the southern boundary to most visitor areas. A track near the Park entrance leading to John Hayes Rockhole is accessible by high clearance vehicles only. The track follows the creek line and terminates near the Rockhole at the camping and day-use area.

There has been a noticeable increase in two-wheel self-drive tourist vehicles, trailers,

camper vans, motor homes and coaches since the previous management plan. The low standard of internal road construction and poor drainage has increased erosion in some areas. Access to the Park is restricted in times of flood, and floodwaters occasionally cause damage to existing sealed causeways.

The current roads require continuous maintenance to sustain two-wheel vehicles and the 'bush' character of the Park. The alignment of the John Hayes Rockhole track within the flood zone perpetuates flood damage. Previous management practices have caused the annual grading to lower the surface of the track, aggravating erosion and drainage problems.

Roads may be closed during flooding events and repairs. In these instances, the decision to restrict road access is the responsibility of the NT Police and Departments responsible for roads, planning and infrastructure. Closures may be necessary during wildfires and during management activities such as controlled burning and aerial control of feral animals. Road and track closures could also be required to protect values of a site, during site rehabilitation or for cultural purposes. Wherever possible, any road closures are well publicised to minimise impact on all stakeholders.

4.3 Nature-based recreational experiences

4.3.1 Day-use

Scenic driving is possibly the most popular activity associated with the East MacDonnells. Most visitors enjoy the Park for only a single day. Most groups spend approximately 2 to 4 hours within the Park. Many visitors stroll along Trepkina Creek and enjoy exploring the Gorge with its wide views and sandy creek-bed. Visitors with high clearance vehicles also visit John Hayes Rockhole with its steep, narrow rock walls and waterholes. The Ghost Gum site is a popular with tour groups as a photographic stop. The site lies outside the Park boundary, and is managed by Parks and Wildlife under an informal agreement with 'The Garden Station' pastoral lease.

Picnic facilities such as platform tables, shade shelters and barbeques are provided in the three visitor nodes. A larger shelter is provided at Trepkina Gorge day-use area to cater for coach tours and large groups. In some locations picnic facilities are underused due to poor site delineation. The picnic facilities in some sites may be rationalised to encourage better use depending on available resources.

4.3.2 Bushwalking

Bushwalking offers visitors opportunities to appreciate the Park first hand. There are three short walks; Trepkina Gorge Walk (1 hour return), Panorama walk (1 hour return) and Chain of Ponds Walk (1.5 hours). For experienced walkers there is the longer Trepkina Ridge Top Walk (5 hours one-way) offering panoramic views of the surrounding ranges (see Map 2).

4.3.3 Camping

For many visitors camping in the East MacDonnell Ranges is an integral part of the outback bush experience. There are three camping areas in the Park, located at Trepkina Gorge, the Bluff and John Hayes Rockhole (see Map 2). Poor camp site delineation increases the perception of overcrowding within the camp ground during the peak season. The current design of the Park's camp grounds poorly accommodates the growing number of long vehicles such as large trailers, large towed-campervans and motor homes. Additionally large groups and the use of generators occasionally conflict

with the low-key 'bush style' experience sought by other Park users.

Several natural drainage channels run through the Trephina Gorge camp site, limiting use of the site. The natural drainage has been disturbed and is now actively eroding. Servicing the number and distribution of the BBQs, fire-pits and watering points is also resource-intensive.

If visitor numbers grow, new accommodation options may need to be considered, either within the Park or within the East MacDonnell district. There is scope for the partners to explore options to improve the campgrounds and traffic flow by centralising amenities and increasing the number of campsites. Visitors seeking higher standards of accommodation should be directed to other local providers, such as Ross River Resort.

4.3.4 Other recreational activities

Swimming - The waterholes at Trephina Gorge and John Hayes Rockhole are popular for swimming during the warmer months. However during prolonged dry periods the waterholes can evaporate leaving only a sandy creek-bed. Sometimes swimming may be discouraged in the interests of public health.

Climbing and abseiling and mountain-biking - The Park has the potential to support rock climbing and abseiling and mountain-biking. Unapproved climbing and abseiling routes are known within the Park. Mountain bike riding is an emerging interest within the district; however as yet no mountain bike trails have been developed. Consultation and sacred site assessment is required for all climbing and abseiling routes and mountain-bike trails. Collaboration with local user groups is needed to overcome potential environmental, cultural or safety issues. To ensure these activities are sustainable the partners should develop policy and guidelines in consultation with stakeholders.

Aims

- Traditional Owners participating in the local tourism industry.
- The Park's 'bush character' within the East MacDonnells district retained.
- Visitors enjoy themselves; are safe and highly satisfied.

Management Directions

4.1 Park presentation - The partners will actively seek the assistance of Tourism NT, Tourism Central Australia and other agencies to ensure the Park is promoted consistent with the values of the Park. The Park's natural low-key character and aesthetics will be protected by designing and locating developments to be sympathetic to the surrounding landscape.

4.2 Indigenous tourism – At a district level, the partners will work with the tourism industry, Central Land Council and local operators to foster Aboriginal employment in tourism and assist development of local Indigenous tourism enterprise.

4.3 Visitor interpretation and community education – The Partners will develop an interpretation strategy and annual operational program for the East MacDonnell District. They will invest in moderate levels of interpretation in the Park and deliver community education and Junior Ranger programs where possible.

- **Visitor Information** - Aboriginal people, place names and language will be represented where appropriate, in conjunction with biological and geological information.
- **Tour operator and tour guide support** – Material will be provided to tour operators, so they can provide accurate and appropriate information about the Park's values. Opportunities to Traditional Owners to train operators will also be explored.

4.4 Visitor monitoring – Visitor monitoring will be undertaken on an as needs basis for specific planning requirements.

4.5 Visitor access - The partners will seek to maintain the primary road as two-wheel drive access. All vehicle traffic will be restricted to formed roads.

- **Road Closures** - The Park or areas within it may be temporarily closed to the public for flood, fire, feral animal control, rehabilitation works and important ceremonies. These infrequent events will be appropriately publicised.
- **Repairs** - The partners will engage with the relevant roads management and soil conservation advisory branches within the Northern Territory Government, to determine the most appropriate techniques to upgrade and maintain the Park's road access system, reduce erosion and minimise the impact of flooding on visitor access.
- **Road maintenance** - The partners will actively seek the assistance from the relevant road management and soil conservation advisory branches within the Northern Territory Government, to determine the most appropriate techniques to upgrade and maintain road access, reduce erosion and minimise the impact of flooding on visitor access.
- **Mobility impaired** – While keeping with the natural low-key character of the Park, opportunities to provide wheelchair standard access to major features in the Visitor Zone, such as Trephina Gorge and the Bluff, will be investigated.
- **John Hayes Rockhole** - Access to John Hayes Rock Hole will remain as an unsealed high clearance track with repair and maintenance directed towards erosion control, rehabilitation of degraded areas and provision of proper drainage.
- **Ghost Gum** - Negotiations will proceed with 'The Garden Station' lessee to formalise management of the Ghost Gum site.
- **Pets** - Entry of pets will be consistent with existing Parks and Wildlife policy.

4.6 Facilities – Park infrastructure will be maintained to a high standard, and subject to resources facilities will be sustained to a level of service consistent with the Park's visitor demand.

4.7 Future developments – Retaining the Park's natural low-key character will be a priority. The East MacDonnells Joint Management Committee will annually endorse rolling five-year works plans and site development plans with stakeholders, guided by the Territory Parks Tourism Plan, industry experts and visitor surveys. Decisions will be made in accordance with structures and processes outlined in section 2.

4.8 Partnerships and commercial activities - Private industry partnerships to provide infrastructure and visitor services will be encouraged. Management and maintenance of campground and picnic areas may be outsourced. Appropriate public events and performances will be encouraged.

4.9 Visitor safety – The Emergency Response Plan will be reviewed annually. Identified risks will be rectified on a priority basis and rangers will receive appropriate training. The Park's facilities and visitor management practices will be subject to ongoing monitoring, maintenance and risk assessment. Tour operators will be encouraged to report incidents and safety issues (physical and behavioural) to park management.

4.10 Bushwalking - A range of walking experiences will be offered in the Park. In highly visited areas walking tracks may be hardened to improve access and reduce erosion. As a general guide the following track standards (AS 2156.1-2001) will apply to Park's zoning:

- **Visitor Zone:** Class 1, Class 2, Class 3.

- **Conservation Zone:** Class 4, Class 5, Class 6.

All constructed walking tracks within the Park will be annually assessed to:

- determine track condition and required maintenance;
- determine adequacy and condition of directional and interpretive signage.
- **Off-track exploration of the Park** - will be encouraged. Off-track day walks do not require a permit however overnight 'off-track' walks not using a designated campground will require a camping permit (see 2.2.4).
- **Track development** - All new track development work will require appropriate site clearances and advice prior to implementation (see 2.2.4).
- **Long distance walking track** - The feasibility of establishing a walking track linking the Park with N'Dhala Gorge Nature Park and Ross River Homestead will be assessed. Consultation with Traditional Owners and neighbouring landholders will be undertaken if a long distance walking track is considered feasible.

4.11 Camping - Trephina Gorge, Trephina Bluff and John Hayes Rockhole camping areas will be maintained to provide a natural low-key bush setting.

- **Campground services** - The partners will consider options to better meet visitor needs, ameliorate erosion and take into account capacity to service the facilities.
- **Long camping vehicles** - The partners will consider converting unused day-use areas to accommodate a limited number of large camping vehicles such as camping trailers, towed-campervans and motor homes.
- **Compliance** - If needed restrictions may be placed on the maximum duration of stay for campers and a pre-visit booking system may be introduced. Camping outside designated campgrounds will require a permit issued in accordance with *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation By-laws* (see 2.2.4). Private generators will not be permitted in the campground.

4.12 Campfires - Open fires are permitted in designated fire-pits only. To minimise the environmental impacts, firewood collection will be designated on a site by site basis. The partners may investigate options to have wood supplied under contract for purchase by campers. Fire restrictions will be enforced on campfires.

4.13 Other Activities

- **Swimming** – Swimming will be promoted unless prohibited by signs and other information on site. Provision of safety information and equipment may be considered where appropriate. Sometimes swimming may be discouraged in the interests of public health.
- **Rock climbing and abseiling** – Climbing and abseiling sites will be investigated by the Committee with stakeholders. If needed the Joint Management Committee will establish local policy and guidelines. All rock climbing and abseiling sites will require sacred site clearances and be subject to environmental and safety monitoring.
- **Mountain-biking** – Mountain bike trails may be considered by the Committee in collaboration with stakeholders. Bikes are not permitted on walking tracks within the Park unless specifically designated. Bikes are not permitted off-track within the Park.
- **Concerts, public events and performances** – The partners will consider options to better address temporary traffic congestion associated with large public events and performances.

5. Managing Country

Trephina Gorge Nature Park is a small park (1,771 ha), which contributes to the Arrernte's living cultural landscape and is situated within the internationally significant MacDonnell Bioregion. While the Park itself contains registered sacred sites and biodiversity values of national significance, its contribution to conservation in the context of the National Reserve System is relatively low.

Joint management brings a new way of looking at managing country. Under customary law, Aboriginal people and land are seen as one, and country is defined by sites and dreamings not as clearly bound entities. Traditional Owners of Trephina Gorge have an obligation to protect and maintain their ancestral homelands within the Park and beyond its boundary.

Laws laid down in the Altyerre or dreaming require Traditional Owners to respect the land and their ancestors by performing ceremonies on country and passing religious and ecological knowledge onto their descendants. Caring also entails visiting and watching the country, moving appropriately on it, and passing knowledge onto family.

Park Rangers share with Traditional Owners a deep respect for the land and seek to look after it for future generations. Caring for country in a joint management context requires cross-cultural awareness and shared information, to ensure that country is looked after properly in a way that involves both partners using a combination of western science and Indigenous ecological knowledge.

Management decision-making needs to be supported by knowledge. It is essential to develop a better understanding of ecosystem dynamics and the key threats and their impacts through survey, research and monitoring.

Management programs also need to look beyond the Park boundary to be effective.

Principles for Managing Country

- Managing country means working together on country and managing natural and cultural values together.
- Management should protect and enhance Park values.
- Management of Indigenous cultural knowledge and sites is the responsibility of Traditional Owners.
- Adverse impacts of wildfire, weeds, feral animals and erosion should be minimised.

5.1 Cultural Heritage Values

5.1.1 A living cultural landscape

Pwenye is the Eastern Arrernte name Traditional Owners of Trephina Gorge Nature Park use to refer to themselves as being part of their country. For Pwenye there are many sites of strong cultural significance throughout the East MacDonnell Ranges. Trephina Gorge Nature Park is part of this extensive living cultural landscape in which knowledge is transmitted through the dreaming stories of totemic ancestors, or the Altyerre. Pwenye remain connected to these ancestors who still reside in totemic sites across the Park.

To the Traditional Owners of Trephina Gorge Nature Park their country is sacred in Aboriginal religion and law. Dreaming stories and traditions are connected to places such as Alherrkentye (Trephina Gorge) and Atneperrke (John Hayes Rockhole) and these places remain important to Pwenye.

5.1.2 Aboriginal use

For Traditional Owners looking after the country involves visiting and watching the country, moving appropriately on it, and protecting it from damage, as well as transmitting the knowledge about the land and places on it, including the use of its resources, in culturally appropriate ways. The continuation of Aboriginal cultural practices in the Park is of great importance to the Traditional Owners. It is likely that joint management will foster resurgence in traditional land use practises.

Most Eastern Arrernte people will only undertake traditional cultural activities where they have a traditional right to do so as owners of that land. Hunting, for instance, requires permission from appropriate Traditional Owners, if undertaken on someone else's country.

Visiting country, camping, hunting, gathering bush tucker in season, and teaching their children are all seen as important aspects of maintaining their traditional cultural practices. Travelling long distances in order to visit the Park to carry out cultural practices is difficult for some Traditional Owners.

Bushfoods - Traditional Owners have a great knowledge of bush foods including where and when to find them, and how to use them. Under the TPWC Act, Traditional Owners have the right to hunt wildlife and gather bush foods and medicines. To supplement store-bought supplies and to fulfil customary obligations, Traditional Owners hunt a range of game such as Aherre (Kangaroos) and Atyunpe (Perentie). They also gather seasonal bush foods such as awele-awele / alperrantyeeye (bush-tomato), arrankweye (bush-plum) and atwakeye (bush-orange). Eastern Arrernte women hunt and gather bushtucker like Tyape (witchetty grubs), Ntange (edible seeds) and merne utyerrke (fruit from bush-fig *Ficus platypoda*). Bush medicines are also collected and relevant knowledge is passed on to younger people.

Teaching - Traditional Owners take their children, nieces, nephews and grandchildren 'out bush' to teach them bush skills and knowledge about the plants and animals, where to go and how to behave on the country of their ancestors and about the stories connected to Altyerre.

Ceremony - Restricted ceremonies connected to this area ensure the passing of important knowledge to the next generation. It is likely that joint management for these Parks will see a resurgence in traditional land use practises for these areas.

5.1.3 Aboriginal knowledge

Trephina Gorge Nature Park's Traditional Owners have substantial knowledge of the Park's natural and cultural values and their inclusion and perspectives will bring changes to the way the Park is managed. The Traditional Owners provide an essential link to the integrity of the East MacDonnells cultural landscape. Senior Traditional Owners hold accumulated knowledge spanning thousands of years. They are custodians for knowledge that will continue to inform and inspire future generations.

ICIP is indigenous peoples' rights to their heritage. It includes all knowledge, objects and sites, the nature or use of which has been transmitted from generation to generation. The joint management partners acknowledge that cultural knowledge belongs to the Traditional Owners and will not use, or permit to be used, such knowledge without the prior consent of the Traditional Owners. Wherever possible, the partners will assist the

Traditional Owners assert their intellectual property rights.

While Traditional Owners are protective of their knowledge they are keen to share some knowledge with visitors through interpretive programs, particularly about bush tucker and personal histories. The recording, storage and use of cultural information will be consistent with the directions of Traditional Owners through the East MacDonnell Joint Management Committee and with policy established between CLC and Parks and Wildlife.

The need to transfer knowledge and practices from old to young people is one of the most important issues identified by Traditional Owners. They also want to incorporate Indigenous ecological knowledge, skills and experiences into operations for the Park, and ensure it is applied appropriately and in the right context.

There is great scope for Traditional Owners to interpret the significance of the Park to staff, commercial operators and visitors. Together the partners can promote an understanding and respect for the traditions, languages, cultures, customs and skills of Traditional Owners.

5.1.4 Sacred sites

The East MacDonnell Ranges abound with sacred sites and culturally significant areas. Sacred sites are integral to Traditional Owners' identity and continuing connection with the land. They are integral to their spirituality, cultural knowledge and maintenance of the country. While the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority identifies one registered and one recorded sacred site within the Park, many other significant sites remain unrecorded. In the course of joint management Traditional Owners may wish to regulate visitor access to some culturally important areas. To avoid damage to sacred sites, all works or developments in Trepina Gorge Nature Park require sacred site clearances and consultation with the relevant Traditional Owners arranged through the Central Land Council.

The Park contains small art sites which provide an opportunity for visitors to better understand Arrernte ties to country. How these sites are managed requires careful consideration and consultation with Traditional Owners.

Archaeological Places and Objects (including Art Sites and Artefacts) - It is important to Traditional Owners that rock art and archaeological materials in the Park are also protected. The *Heritage Conservation Act* gives specific protection to prescribed Aboriginal Archaeological Places and Objects in the Northern Territory. Heritage clearances must be sought under this Act for any works, including conservation, to prescribed archaeological sites in the Park.

Art sites provide an excellent opportunity to explain the cultural ties to the country. However in some areas visitors can cause impacts, such as by touching rock art. There is a need to ensure visitors are educated and understand the implications of interfering with these sites. Natural events such as flood and fire can also cause significant impacts. How these impacts are managed requires careful consideration and consultation with Traditional Owners.

5.1.5 Historic values

Many events of historical interest have occurred within the East MacDonnell's district, associated with early European expeditions in the area; contact between Aboriginal people and colonialists, the Arltunga goldfields and pastoralism.

European history of the Park began with the exploration of the area by an advance survey party for the Overland Telegraph Line led by John Ross in 1870. Pastoralism became the main land use of the Park until the mid 1950's, followed by a brief period of

logging when River Red Gums were cut for railway sleepers for the Ghan line. Tourism on a significant scale coincided with the opening of the Ross River Homestead Tourist Park (now Ross River Resort) in 1959.

There are currently no known historic sites within the Park. Should the partners become aware of any potential sites they are required to consult with NT Heritage Officers to determine its significance. Sites should be properly documented and conserved until their significance is clarified. Any proposed works at such sites requires cultural heritage clearance.

Aims

- Traditional Owners satisfied with their involvement, fulfilment of their cultural responsibilities and protection of cultural sites.
- Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK) incorporated into Park operations and managed to the satisfaction of Traditional Owners.

Management Directions

5.1 Aboriginal cultural business – Parks and Wildlife will respect advice relating to cultural matters and customary obligations from Traditional Owners. Restricted access for ceremonial purposes is unlikely to affect the main visitor areas. Ample notice will be given to the public regarding temporary closures.

5.2 District cultural heritage management strategy (5 yr) and annual operational program (1 yr) - A cultural heritage management strategy and annual operational program for the East MacDonnell district will be developed with Traditional Owners. The program will be endorsed by the East MacDonnells Joint Management Committee with consideration of advice provided by specialist groups. The partners and Central Land Council will work together to identify supporting resources if required.

- **“Back to Country”** – With support from the Central Land Council the partners will spend time on country together, facilitating transmission of cultural knowledge and skills between Traditional Owner families, to the younger generation and to the rangers, as appropriate.
- **Indigenous ecological knowledge** – Indigenous ecological knowledge and priorities will be incorporated into natural resource management through the active involvement of Traditional Owners in planning and implementation activities.
- **Indigenous cultural and intellectual property (ICIP)** – Cultural knowledge will not be used, or permitted to be used without the prior consent of the Traditional Owners. Wherever possible, the partners will assist the Traditional Owners assert their intellectual property rights, consistent with standard policies developed and agreed by the CLC and Parks and Wildlife.
- **Traditional hunting and gathering** – Rights in relation to hunting and gathering from the Park for traditional purposes will extend to Traditional Owners and Aboriginals who have traditionally used the area in accordance with Aboriginal tradition. To ensure public safety and the protection of Park’s values local hunting and gathering guidelines will be established by the East MacDonnells Joint Management Committee and approved by all Traditional Owners.

5.3 Culturally sensitive areas – Park operations will uphold restrictions and guidelines for sacred sites or culturally sensitive areas of the Park as directed by senior men or the Central Land Council as their representative and subject to any relevant laws in force in the Northern Territory.

5.4 Sacred site clearances – see Management Direction 2.14.

5.5 Cultural heritage approval – see Management Direction 2.14.

5.6 Cultural objects - see Management Direction 2.14.

5.7 Archaeological and historic sites - will be properly documented and assessed for their significance and heritage value, incorporating significance to relevant Traditional Owners where appropriate. The Burra Charter principles and process will guide this assessment.

- **Research including recording oral histories and Indigenous knowledge** - will be encouraged consistent with ICIP Policy.
- **Sites of significance** - may be submitted for nomination to the NT Heritage Register under the *Heritage Conservation Act*. Sites may be interpreted for the public, with the permission of the partners.
- **Archaeological and historic sites** - will be maintained until they can be properly assessed for their significance and heritage value. Sites containing rock art and wooden artefacts will be protected through operational strategies and implemented through annual operational fire management programs.

5.2 Natural Heritage Values

5.2.1 Natural character

The natural character of Trepina Gorge Nature Park underpins the low-key bush and recreational experiences valued by visitors. The Park is noted for its sheer quartzite cliffs and River Red Gum-lined watercourses. Two gorges within the Park dissect the East MacDonnell Ranges; Trepina Gorge, with wide views and sandy creek-bed and John Hayes Rock Hole with steep, narrow rock walls.

Soils - The Park's soils are moderately to highly susceptible to erosion. Some areas of the Park have been degraded through rill, gully, stream bank erosion, scalding and loss of ground cover. Areas of existing erosion should be addressed to reduce remediation cost over the long term.

Catchment, Watercourses and Waterholes - Watercourses and waterholes provide critical ecosystem functions which underpin natural, cultural and recreational values well beyond the boundaries of the Park. Waterholes in the park are invaluable to Traditional Owners and continue to retain cultural significance. Today Trepina Gorge itself and John Hayes Rockhole are the main tourist destinations within the Park. Visitor activities that concentrate at these sites include swimming, bush walking, nature study and scenic appreciation. Despite irregular flows the Park's waterholes provide habitat for Spangled Perch (*Leiopotherapon unicolor*) which may aestivate in damp soil or debris at the bottom of the waterholes in order to survive periods of unfavourable conditions.

The upper catchment areas of Trepina and John Hayes Creeks extend beyond the Park boundary and any influence on the upper catchment will require collaboration with neighbouring landholders. Much of the Park's infrastructure is situated on the active floodplain of Trepina Creek and may be at risk during larger floods.

5.2.2 Biodiversity

Trepina Gorge Nature Park is situated within the internationally significant MacDonnell Bioregion. It contains some values of national conservation significance; however its overall comparative contribution to conservation and the National Reserve System is limited. Approximately 33 land units have been identified and mapped across the Park. The broad vegetation types of the Park include:

- Tall Open Shrublands *Acacia kempeana* (Witchetty Bush) Acacia tall open-shrubland with cassia, *Eremophila* (Fuchsia) open-shrubland understorey.
- Mixed Species Low Open Woodland consisting of *Triodia clelandii* (Weeping Spinifex) hummock grassland with mixed species low open-woodland overstorey.
- Hummock Grasslands and Tall Shrublands consisting of *Triodia longiceps* (Grey Spinefix) hummock grassland with Acacia tall open-shrubland overstorey.

Of the 256 native plants recorded in the Park, it directly contributes to the conservation of two plant species *Minuria tridens* and *Ricinocarpus gloria-medii* recognised as vulnerable both in the Territory (TPWC Act) and nationally (EPBC Act). There are recovery plans for both species (*M. tridens* (Nano and Pavey 2008) and *R. gloria-medii* (Nano *et al.* 2007). *Ricinocarpus gloria-medii* is endemic to the MacDonnell Ranges bioregion, where it is only known from four discrete populations (Nano *et al.* 2007).

Fire-sensitive plant communities occur on the southern slopes of Trephina Bluff and the Main Range and include *Eucalyptus thozetiana*.

A very large and attractive Ghost Gum situated off the Park entrance road is of interest to visitors. An informal agreement between the Partners and 'The Garden Station' recognises maintenance of the site for park visitors.

The Park contains five native mammal species, 14 reptile species, 80 bird species and one fish species. The Park contributes to the conservation of Bednall's Land Snail (*Sinumelon bednalli*), listed as Endangered nationally (EPBC Act) and recognised as Critically Endangered in the Northern Territory (TPWC Act). The Black-footed Rock Wallaby (*Petrogale lateralis*) is Vulnerable nationally (EPBC Act). Two other Territory-listed species, the Australian Bustard (*Ardeotis australis*) and the Emu (*Dromaius novaehollandiae*) have been recorded in the Park, but the Park does not provide substantial habitat for these species.

5.2.3 Managing threatening processes

Fire management - Fire has long been a part of the environment and has played a major part in shaping the district's vegetation. However rapidly changed fire regimes and increased intensity of wildfires, fuelled by Buffel and Couch Grass are damaging the fire-sensitive plant communities and ecosystems of the broader district.

Long-term fire management goals in the Park are avoiding large catastrophic wildfires and protecting fire-sensitive communities. Fire planning requires an emphasis on burning large strategic breaks at every appropriate opportunity, patch burning and prescribed burns in fire-tolerant vegetation such as Spinifex-dominated communities. Good fire management should result in a greater diversity of vegetation types at different stages of recovery from fire.

It is important for Traditional Owners to be actively engaged in integrating Indigenous ecological knowledge and priorities into fire planning and implementation. District fire planning and liaison with adjoining landowners remains a critical part of effective fire management.

Weed and introduced plant management - Eleven introduced plant species have been recorded within Trephina Gorge Nature Park. Buffel Grass and Couch Grass are the highest priority weeds for control as they increase the threat of frequent, intense fires. Buffel Grass extends well into the range country, whilst Couch Grass is largely confined to waterways and springs. Mossman River Grass (*Cenchrus echinatus*) and Noogoora Burr (*Xanthium occidentale*) are recorded within the Park and declared Category B under the *Weeds Management Act 2001* requiring growth and spread to be controlled.

Feral animal management - Large introduced herbivores, particularly stock, are the

greatest threat to the Park's natural and cultural values. Other introduced animals occurring in the Park including cats, foxes, rabbits, and European honey bees. The extent and numbers of these animals varies with environmental conditions. Stock has been excluded from the Park since perimeter fencing was completed in 1979.

Large introduced herbivores need to be controlled to reduce impacts on native vegetation and visitor values. Perimeter fencing remains as the most effective way to exclude stock from the Park. The partners will need to liaise with adjoining landowners to negotiate effective and acceptable methods to exclude stock from the Park.

Aims

- No significant wildfires.
- No large introduced herbivores.

Management Directions

5.8 District operational strategies (5 yr) and annual operational programs (1 yr) - All fire, weed, feral animal and erosion management will be directed through regional operational strategies prepared by the partners approximately every 5 years. The strategies will specify targets, nominal management regimes and a framework for adaptive management. Annual operational programs implement the strategies and need only be brief documents specifying the inputs and outputs needed to meet defined strategic targets. Annual operational programs will take due consideration of available resources and priorities at a district and Territory level. Operational management strategies will:

- take an integrated approach between parks and reserves of the East MacDonnell district.
- focus on key values and set clear 5-10 year targets to attain long-term aims (10-20 years) of this Plan and other Park Plans of the district; and
- be prepared with Traditional Owners and endorsed by the East MacDonnells Joint Management Committee with advice provided by specialist groups, such as the Fire Task Group.

The operational management priority for Trepina Gorge Nature Park is to protect the natural character of the Park's landscape.

5.9 Catchment management – Water quality in the major visitor nodes and waterholes will be monitored as required for pathogens. Swimming may be prohibited in waterholes considered a risk to visitor health and safety.

- **Fishing** - will be prohibited in the Park. Traditional rights to use the Park's resources will be respected. Use will be consistent with Aboriginal hunting and gathering policy as determined by the partners and the TPWC Act.

5.10 Biodiversity conservation – will be addressed through district operational strategies and implemented through annual operational programs. Traditional Owners will be involved in biodiversity conservation activities where possible.

- **Research** - will be encouraged. Any improved understanding of species, habitats, Aboriginal use and natural processes will be incorporated into Park management programs. Species distribution and status information will be recorded and entered into relevant, centrally-held databases.
- **Conservation management links** - will be encouraged between Park and off-Park lands at a district scale through collaboration with nearby landholders, including Loves Creek and the Gardens pastoral stations to gain better conservation and employment outcomes.

5.11 Fire management – will aim to (1) Protect life and property, and (2) reducing the risk of large wildfires.

- **Prescribed burning** - Fuel reduction burns in fire-tolerant communities will occur during cooler months, or after rain. Nominal targets will include burning greater than 5% of fire-tolerant communities each year, while ensuring no more than 10% of fire-sensitive vegetation is burnt within a 10 year period.
- **Fire Monitoring** - Fire history and ecological responses to fire will be recorded and entered into relevant, centrally-held databases.

5.12 Weed management – (1) Buffel and Couch grasses will be controlled to create breaks in otherwise continuous wildlife-carrying fuel, and (2) control the growth and spread of Category B weeds. Good weed management will result in discontinuous stands of Buffel Grass and/or Couch Grass in strategic locations to reduce fuel capacity for wildfires and to protect fire-sensitive vegetation.

- **Minimising spread** - where possible soil and gravel for vehicle tracks, trails and maintenance will use locally sourced materials.
- **Weed Monitoring** - The risk posed by new weed species outbreaks will be assessed as soon as possible following detection.

5.13 Feral animal management – will aim to exclude large introduced herbivores from the Park. Boundary fencing will be maintained and large introduced herbivores removed as soon as possible.

5.14 Soil conservation – will aim to (1) minimise disturbance to Park soils, and (2) rehabilitate areas which degrade visitor experiences.

- **Soil rehabilitation** - Degraded sites in the visitor area will be identified, prioritised and progressively rehabilitated using expert advice.
- **Extraction** - soil and gravel may be extracted for local soil conservation works within the Park with the approval of the partners. No other soil or gravel will be removed or disturbed except subject to conditions of a Sacred Site Clearance, Heritage approval and a permit issued under the TPWC By-laws as necessary.

References

Nano, C. and Pavey, C. (2008) *National Recovery Plan for Olearia macdonnellensis, Minuria tridens (Minnie Daisy) and Actinotus schwarzii (Desert Flannel Flower)*. Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport, Northern Territory.

Nano, C., Harris, M., and Pavey, C. (2007) *National recovery plan for threatened Acacias and Ricinocarpos gloria-medii in central Australia*. Northern Territory Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, Northern Territory.

Appendix 1. Selected Performance Indicators

These performance indicators are an additional tool to assist the joint management partners to measure the success of management. They are not the only measures of success and other measures may be developed over time. There is a reasonable expectation that they will be achieved, if not year by year, then over the longer term of this plan. When indicators are not achieved, the reasons need to be established and steps taken to improve outcomes.

Aims	Performance Indicators	Targets	Means
Managing Visitors			
Visitors enjoy themselves; be safe and highly satisfied.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visitor satisfaction - Number of safety related incidents 	<p>High</p> <p>Low</p>	<p>Visitor surveys for specific planning requirements.</p> <p>Ongoing reporting.</p>
Traditional Owners participating in the tourism industry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traditional Owner satisfaction 	High	Partner satisfaction monitoring (see Mgt. Dir. 2.4).
Managing Country			
Traditional Owners satisfied with the protection of cultural sites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traditional Owner satisfaction. 	High	Partner satisfaction monitoring.
Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK) incorporated into Park operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indigenous Ecological Knowledge, mutual understanding and park operation capability 	Increased	Partner satisfaction monitoring.
No significant wildfires.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Area burnt in fire-tolerant vegetation communities - Area burnt in fire-sensitive vegetation 	<p>> 5% annually</p> <p>< 10% over 10 years in total</p>	Fire mapping, ongoing data management and review.
No large introduced herbivores	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presence of large introduced herbivores - The Park boundary is maintained 	<p>Nil</p> <p>stock proof</p>	Opportunistic sightings.
Park Governance			
Equitable partnership with effective governance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint Management Partners Satisfied with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication and Engagement - Representation and Decision-making processes 	High	<p>Partner satisfaction monitoring.</p> <p>Ongoing record-keeping, reporting and review.</p>

Aims	Performance Indicators	Targets	Means
	- Building capacity		
The Aims and Directions in this Plan are achieved with resources used effectively on agreed priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Achievement of Aims and Management Directions in this plan - Implementation of strategies and annual operational programs 	<p>Outcomes realised</p> <p>% of priority actions completed</p>	<p>Partner satisfaction monitoring.</p> <p>Ongoing record-keeping, reporting and review.</p>
Traditional Owners benefiting economically through joint management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New skills acquired by Traditional Owners - Number of days employment in relation to the Park - Number of contract opportunities created and taken up 	<p>Increased</p> <p>Increased</p> <p>Increased</p>	<p>Partner satisfaction monitoring.</p> <p>Ongoing record-keeping, reporting and review.</p>