



National Parks Association of the ACT Inc.
1960-2010
50 years of conservation, nature protection and education

ACT Budget Consultation
Treasury Directorate
GPO Box 158
CANBERRA ACT 2601

CC Ms Katy Gallagher, Chief Minister
Mr Andrew Barr, Treasurer

Thank you for your invitation to make a submission to the 2012-2013 Budget process. As you know, the National Parks Association of the ACT is a community-based conservation organisation with a fifty year history of working to protect our natural environment through an active outings and workparty program; participation in Parkcare activities; an extensive publication program; public meetings and conferences and engagement with government policies and programs.

It is with some sorrow that we write yet again a Budget submission which calls for targeted, accountable spending on protection and management of ACT's natural reserves and national park. The 2011-12 Budget failed yet again to set any accountability indicators for – or even to specify the amount spent on - management of our conservation areas. This has been a known failing in the ACT Budget for several years now and no effort appears to have been made to redress it. We suggest the following indicators are a good start:

- water quality coming out of the national park and conservation areas catchments;
- rate of spread and actual coverage of weeds of national significance;
- the state of the heritage buildings and structures in the conservation areas;
- cost of vandalism in the conservation areas compared with previous years;
- compliance of management activities with management plans for listed species and eco-systems;
- actual status and condition of listed species and eco-systems for which there are management plans;
- compliance of management activities with management plans for reserves and Namadgi National Park;
- annual public reports on the implementation of management plans for these areas.

In our 2011-12 Budget submission we noted that “The lack of such indicators is a poor reflection on the Budget papers and we urge you to ensure that proper and adequate accountability indicators be included for the 2011-12 Budget.” The continuing lack of indicators in the 2012-13 Budget should be a matter of grave concern, one which we would not hesitate to bring to the notice of the ACT Auditor-General.

NPA ACT is calling for the publication of this data for all ACT parks and reserves in an annual "State of the Park" report. This annual report should publish a detailed assessment of specific indicators such as those mentioned above as well as those outlined in the park's and reserves' management plans. Rather than being seen as an additional task, such reporting should become an integral part of the park and reserves management system. In addition, the need for transparency and openness in joint decisions with other interstate Alpine national parks agencies should be recognised and such decisions should be disclosed within the annual report.

Our members continue to be concerned that the research and policy arms of the ACT's conservation program remain separated from the operational activities of parks and conservation management. We urge you to return to a single conservation agency where research and policy staff co-exist with conservation management staff so that the ACT may return to best practice principles of combined research, policy and action management. It is important to note that the NPA ACT 2006 symposium confirmed that park management activities should in fact be driven by research outcomes and a single conservation agency facilitates this by reducing administrative silos.

A merger of conservation land management with urban activities remains a poor fit as the 2011-12 Budget demonstrated. Provision of children's playgrounds, replacement of park benches and cleaning up after big concerts is operationally far removed from remote-area pest control and rehabilitation of alpine bogs. The continuation of the current urban focus on the land management program is maintained for the sake of administrative convenience. Again, it may be administratively convenient but it results in the neglect of our conservation areas.

Again, we must repeat the salient points of our 2011-12 Budget submission as they have still not been addressed:

- the Cotter catchment area of Namadgi National Park is an essential part of our water supply and its capacity to operate as a viable set of ecological systems is dependent on adequate feral pest and plant control, adequate fire management and control of human incursion into sensitive areas, among other things. A failure of soil stability, a reduction in water yield or pollution of the water catchment result in a deterioration of the city's water supply. Yet basic protection for this area from vandals, trail bike riders, illegal shooters and feral horse/goat/pig/cattle incursions mostly rests with a single park ranger. In any other jurisdiction this would be an unacceptable level of management risk.
- With the move to pump water from Angle Crossing, care and control over the southern part of Namadgi becomes equally essential. Again, there is often only one ranger on duty over times of heavy use such as long weekends, whose responsibilities include ensuring visitor safety over a large tract of remote country; protecting unique Aboriginal and European heritage from vandals; patrolling public roads, often under adverse weather conditions and increased public risk; supervising and managing public camping grounds and cleaning up to eight remote long-drop toilets every weekend.
- Long-term catchment protection programs will reduce dramatically as the insurance money from the 2003 bushfires comes to an end.

- We saw the impact of poor track and road grading in the loss of fire trails through heavy rain in 2010 and yet no provision is being made to increase on-ground supervision of road maintenance work in the national park and reserves.
- Crucial work on a rapidly deteriorating cultural heritage site at Glenburn has been refused for the past four years by the ACT Government. We note that a community application for a heritage grant to undertake urgent stabilisation of some structures was refused on the grounds that it was work supposed to be done under this Budget line. Yet the work remains undone.
- Essential work on the Orroral shearing shed has been delayed now for over six years and the structure is in danger of collapse.
- Over the past five years Canberra Nature Park's reserves have experienced an explosion in recreational use, including commercial Boot Camps, fitness training, mountain cycling and weight reduction programs. This has obvious benefits for health and fitness programs in the ACT but requires an increase in ranger numbers to provide adequate supervision of these areas and maintenance of suitable services.
- Some of the damage to the natural areas includes construction of illegal mountain and trail bike circuits in sensitive bush areas; cutting fences and breaking down locked gates; private service vehicles driving across endangered and listed species; massive soil erosion from inappropriately maintained service access roads; destruction of signs and barriers to direct foot and cycle traffic away from sensitive areas; unleashed dog activity destroying bird habitats and breeding sites; and deterioration of managed tracks through intensive use.
- We would like to see adequate provision made in the 2012-13 Budget to enable immediate implementation of the recommendations of the 2011 report on Canberra Nature Park by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.

Our specific financial requests for the 2012-13 Budget are:

1. Stabilised core funding over the next three years for the National Parks, Reserves and Lands program at the full cost of actual expenditure in 2009-10 for the Parks Conservation and Lands program with the addition of funding recommendations from the Worboys/Good report (see 2011-12 Budget submission).
2. Extracting only actual, demonstrable efficiencies from National Parks, Reserves and Lands program budget, not the application of an efficiency dividend as a matter of rote to create artificial savings across the programs.
3. An additional three ranger positions across the Namadgi, Googong and Murrumbidgee Corridor areas to decrease vandalism, increase feral species control and better manage the cultural precincts within these areas.
4. Additional funding of \$300,000 for specific action against feral pests and weeds including the recent appearance of Hawkweed in the area; to combat the established threat of European wasps to native plants and insects; and to combat the explosion of the rabbit and hare populations in the national park and nature reserves.
5. Additional funding of \$300,000 for essential stabilisation of European heritage buildings and sites such as Glenburn and the Orroral shearing shed.

6. A commitment to provide sufficient funds to meet recommendations from the Commissioner for the Environment's inquiry into the nature reserves in the ACT. This needs to include sufficient funding to develop, with full community consultation, an ACT Recreational Land Use Strategy which allocates adequate areas for mountain and trail biking, horse riding and other activities and resolves community conflict around inappropriate use of nature reserves for such activities.
7. Funding for the development of a new national park for the ACT that recognises the ACT's role in the management of key lowland grassy woodland ecosystems, particularly Yellow-Box Red-Gum grassy woodlands which are of national significance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rod Griffiths', is centered on a light-colored rectangular background.

Rod Griffiths
President
9 February 2012