



## Feral horses pose threat to ACT, Queanbeyan water supply

Canberra and Queanbeyan's water catchment is being threatened by an explosion of feral horse numbers in Kosciuszko National Park (KNP), a leading ACT conservation organisation has warned.

'Figures from a five-yearly aerial survey released by the Australian Alps Liaison Committee today show feral horse numbers in the New South Wales and Victorian sections of the Australian Alps have multiplied unchecked to the point of destruction of crucial headwaters wetlands of the Murrumbidgee, Murray and Snowy rivers,' said National Parks Association of the ACT (NPA ACT) president Esther Gallant.

The survey shows that feral horse numbers across the areas have risen from 9190 in 2014 to 25,318 in 2019, an annual increase of 23 per cent.

'Alarming for our catchment area, the number of horses in the North Kosciusko block, the survey area paralleling the Brindabella Range, showed a nearly five-fold increase over the five years, from 3255 in 2014 to 15,687 in 2019 – 37 per cent,' Professor Gallant said. '

'The horses are trampling sensitive ecosystems, causing massive damage to native vegetation in many areas, especially to sphagnum moss, which plays an important role in maintaining water supply during dry periods by gradually releasing stored water. These same sphagnum bogs are also critical habitat for several endangered species including the Northern Corroboree frog.'

KNP, in New South Wales, adjoins the ACT's Namadgi National Park, which includes the Cotter Catchment – the source of approximately 80 per cent of Canberra's water supply. There are major concerns that feral horses will move across the border into Namadgi NP and the catchment.

Two recent NPA ACT field trips into the region of KNP west of the Brindabella Mountains and adjacent to Namadgi NP have confirmed the severity of the damage being caused by feral horses.

'In 2009, the ACT government legislated zero tolerance for feral horses in Namadgi NP and the Cotter Catchment,' Professor Gallant said. 'The feral horse population across our border has been allowed to grow with little or no control and threatens to make implementation of this policy more difficult and costly for Canberrans.'

'Deer and pigs are already damaging Namadgi NP, although efforts to reduce the number of these ungulates – hard-hoofed animals -- are underway. If we have another bushfire in Namadgi NP of the magnitude of the 2003 fires, there would be no possibility of recovery with large ungulates immediately devouring every bit of green regrowth.'

Professor Gallant said NPA ACT was formed in 1960 to lobby for a national park for the national capital. 'Now 60 years on we find it necessary to lobby for the protection of the park from ungulates of all sorts.'

'We welcome the determination of members of the ACT Legislative Assembly to protect the Cotter Catchment in the face of these ever-increasing threats.'

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