

Gazetted as a national park in 1970, Porcupine Gorge was established to conserve a diverse range of plant and animal communities of the upper Flinders River catchment within two biogeographic regions. The northern section of the park is in the Einasleigh Uplands Biogeographic Region and the southern section is in the Mitchell Grass Downs Biogeographic Region. The park is important for its geological features which are a significant part of the landscape and of high scenic value. No similar parks exist in the region.

2. Basis for management

2.1 Bioregional context

- visitor information about the park's natural and cultural values is available to the public.
- natural geological processes are not accelerated by inappropriate visitor or management activities; and undertaken;
- research into the park's natural values is encouraged and undertaken bush-setting;
- camping opportunities cater for moderate visitor numbers and low levels of isolated backpacking in an maintained;
- the scenic integrity of the natural landscape is maintained;
- migrating animals to transport seeds between adjoining dry vine thicket communities are protected, enabling animal species are conserved;
- rare and threatened regional ecosystems, and plant and The major purposes of management will be to ensure that:

1.2 Purposes

Ranger presence and is patrolled from Hughenden. available on-site. Currently, the park has no permanent park attractions. A park information brochure will be service the camping nodes and provide access to some key visitors. Vehicle tracks suitable for conventional vehicles will day use and moderate camping levels for self-sufficient weed control programs. Visitor management will focus on maintain habitat types through fire management and strategic The major management priority for the park will be to animals.

reliable water supply provide significant habitat areas for thickest vegetation communities. The diverse vegetation and River. It contains a selection of eucalypt, acacia and dry vine Porcupine Creek, a major tributary of the upper Flinders Porcupine Gorge National Park protects 5410ha along

1.1 Management direction

1. Management directions and purposes

Management plan



Einasleigh Uplands and Mitchell Grass Downs Biogeographic Region

Porcupine Gorge National Park

The park's southern section contains Aboriginal cultural sites. A well-known site called the Tatooo Hole has a variety of documented art over a relatively large area. Artefact scatters can be found around the gorge where they are protected from flood waters. The Kutjaja, Jiradali and Mitjumba people have traditional links to the area, including Porcupine Gorge National Park.

Cultural heritage

The park is an important refuge for animal species. Its wildlife includes 80 birds, 30 reptiles, 30 mammals, eight fish, as well as frogs, insects and arachnids.

- pink gidgee *Acacia crombiei*.
- river red gum *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* on alluvial soils; and springs;
- dry vine thicket with *Shefflera actinophylla* associated with slopes;
- dry vine thicket with *Brachychiton* species on basalt

Four endangered regional ecosystems occur in the park: focus for a wide variety of terrestrial animals. during the dry season. These waterholes also provide a communities. Porcupine Creek has many permanent waterholes which provide habitat for aquatic wildlife species high habitat diversity and many ecotones between vegetation communities. Porcupine Creek has many permanent waterholes which provide habitat for aquatic wildlife species. Mapping is incomplete and additional communities may be identified. Vegetation is dominated by eucalypt, acacia and melaleuca woodlands, and dry vine thicket. The park has a Ten vegetation communities containing at least 270 plant species have been identified at Porcupine Gorge National Park. Mapping is incomplete and additional communities may be identified. Vegetation is dominated by eucalypt, acacia and melaleuca woodlands, and dry vine thicket. The park has a

Plants and animals

Porcupine Creek is a major tributary of the Flinders River which flows to the Gulf of Carpentaria. It cuts through a hard basalt cap to form a deep gorge of about 120m in the underlying sediment and metamorphic rock. The gorge's geological history dates from between 5–500 million years ago and includes areas containing Permian glacial sediments and a section of Cambrian–Ordovician Cape River beds. The gorge is surrounded mostly by flat plains. The gorge's eastern rim has a five million-year-old basalt flow, indicating the creek cut the gorge after this time.

Geology and landform

2.2 Values of Porcupine Gorge National Park

The southern boundary of the park is 45km north of Hughenden along the Kennedy Development Road which passes to the park's west. The Pyramid camp area is a further 30km north. While the area has long been a well-known local recreation area, tourism is becoming increasingly important as the park's values become better known.

Recreation and tourism

Porcupine Gorge National Park is the only accessible park along the Kennedy Development Road between Hughenden and The Lynd. Conventional vehicle access is available on park although wet weather may limit access for short periods. Bush camping with limited facilities is available on the park and visitors can also walk and camp in remote parts of the gorge.

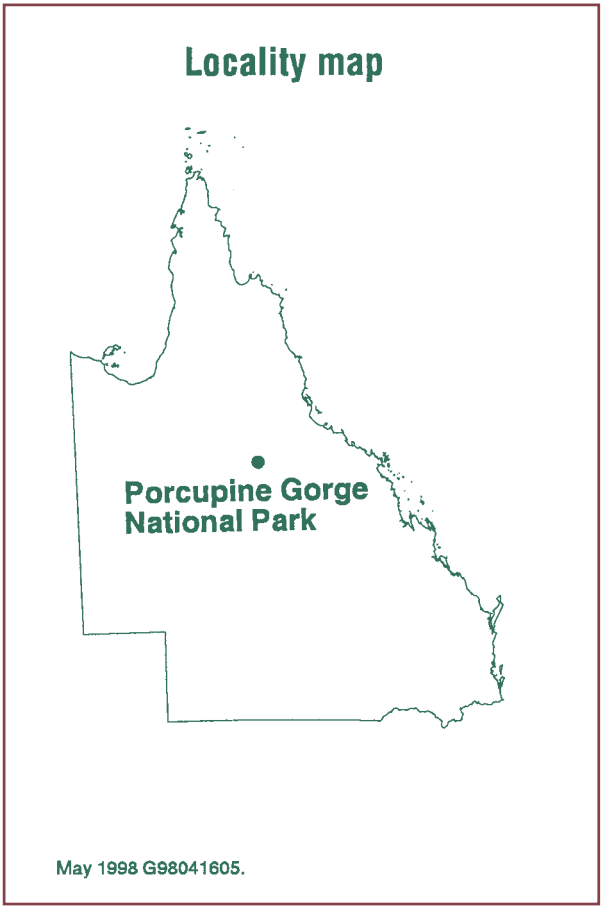
Porcupine Gorge could prepare visitors for the western Queensland and central Australian environment and conditions as it is a significant semi-arid area along the 'Reef to Rock' tourist route. Gorge features which are of research interest include remnant rainforest and associated plant communities, geology and Aboriginal artefacts. of small research projects, could be undertaken, benefiting conservation and land management in the Einasleigh Uplands and Mitchell Grass Downs biogeographic regions. Porcupine Gorge's proximity to Hughenden offers the potential for local schools to run educational programs. University study projects could also be conducted, as the park is relatively close to Townsville (about five hours' drive). Practical land management programs, including a range of small research projects, could be undertaken, benefiting conservation and land management in the Einasleigh Uplands and Mitchell Grass Downs biogeographic regions.

Scientific and educational

The park itself offers sweeping views of the gorge (which has an average depth of 120m) to the bed of Porcupine Creek. The creek bed has an interesting geological feature known as the 'Pyramid' — sandstone bluffs, windblown undercuts and numerous waterholes are present along the creek.

The park is close to the sealed Kennedy Development Road which links Hughenden to The Lynd. The plain around the park is intact and is an important component of the park's aesthetics.

Scenic and aesthetic



Summary

This management plan provides the framework and guidelines on how Porcupine Gorge National Park will be managed. It sets out the considerations, outcomes and strategies that are proposed to form the basis on which day-to-day management decisions are made.

This plan was prepared in May 1998 and, in accordance with s125 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, will be reviewed not later than 10 years after its approval. For further information on this plan or the planning process, please contact the Environmental Protection Agency's Northern Regional Centre in Townsville on (07) 4722 5211 during business hours.

This management plan was prepared by Environmental Protection Agency staff. Thanks are due to those groups and individuals who made submissions in response to the draft plan.

3 Management strategies

Current situation	Desired outcomes	Proposed policies, guidelines and actions
Native plants Complex vegetation patterns have developed mainly in response to geology, soil and fire influences. Of the ten endangered regional ecosystems in the park, dry vine thickets occur only in small pockets and have little ability to buffer a catastrophic fire event. Vegetation monitoring plots have been established in the park but not in all plant community types. The southern section of the park has a basic vegetation map.	The composition and extent of vegetation types are maintained, subject to natural change. Threatened regional ecosystems and species are protected. Habitat values are considered when managing vegetation.	Finalise vegetation mapping and continue vegetation monitoring. Establish additional plots. Protect dry vine thickets from catastrophic fire. Incorporate new information about other threatened plants into management strategies. Consider animal requirements such as breeding, nesting and feeding in relation to plant communities management.
Native animals Limited wildlife survey work has been conducted. Some threatened species have been identified, but their survival relies on protecting their habitat and corridors on areas outside the park. This is particularly important in relation to migrating birds and the koala which have very limited habitat along small sections of some streams. Other important species are: ● aquatic species (fish, turtles, crustaceans); and ● spectacled hare-wallaby and the rufous bettong.	Animal health, diversity and general patterns of distribution do not decline. Threatened species are protected. Habitat corridors are maintained.	Continue to gather data from surveys of park wildlife populations, distribution and health to form a benchmark for future monitoring. Focus protection of threatened animals on habitat management and incorporate new information about threatened animals into management strategies. Liaise with neighbours, Landcare groups and government agencies to help protect critical habitat corridors. Koala populations will be monitored as an indicator of the condition of habitat corridors along creeks.
Introduced plants and animals Controlling introduced plants is difficult due to significant weed infestations in the Flinders River catchment. The park’s major weed is rubbervine. Other weeds include parkinsonia, Bathurst burr, Mexican poppy, thornapple, noogoora burr, khaki burr and red natal grass. Control programs have included mechanical, chemical and biological treatments and the use of fire. Feral pigs, cane toads, rabbits, foxes, dogs and cats occur in the park. Cats and foxes are controlled periodically when evident. The release of the calicivirus is anticipated to assist rabbit control. Dogs and dingoes may damage or kill calves and are a source of contention for park neighbours as dingoes are protected on the park. Dogs and dingoes travel regularly using paths which cross many properties.	The effects of weeds and feral animals are not significant. Biological control of rubbervine continues. Weeds adjoining the park do not become established in the park. Dingo populations on the park do not significantly compromise neighbouring grazing operations.	The Porcupine Gorge Weed Action Plan has been functioning for the past three years and is currently under review. This details weed threats, maps distribution and develops strategic control and monitoring programs. The Porcupine Gorge Feral Animal Action Plan has been in place for the past three years and is currently under review. Conduct joint baiting of dingoes and feral dogs with neighbours who identify significant damage or loss of stock and who approach park staff for assistance. Baiting will be strategic and species-specific, only along boundary fence lines and consistent with DoE's Good Neighbour Policy. A separate control program for feral dogs will be undertaken on the park.
Fire management Fire intensity and frequency are significant factors in maintaining diversity and distribution of habitats. While eucalypt communities require regular fire to regenerate, acacia communities are more sensitive to fire and require long periods to recover from very hot fires. The park’s fire history is not well documented. A Fire Action Plan has been developed for the park.	Fire is being used as a management tool to maintain ecological processes and protect threatened communities. Fire is not threatening life or property. The impact of fires on plant communities is monitored.	Review the park’s Fire Action Plan annually to incorporate new information into strategies and to plan the burn program. Make equipment for controlling wildfires and prescribed burns available for immediate response. Regularly check all equipment to ensure proper operation. Continue to evaluate existing vegetation monitoring plots and establish additional plots in vegetation communities that do not have monitoring plots.
Landscape, soil and catchment protection Continuing use is degrading recreation areas. The walking track and camp area erode during the wet season. Some vegetation loss also occurs during the dry season because of visitors and stock. The flat nature of the area adjacent to the gorge rim results in sheet runoff during wet weather. Formed tracks can significantly impact on water movement if improperly drained. Changing water flow may significantly impact vegetation patterns and aquatic wildlife in creeks, especially by transporting sediments.	Water flows are not significantly modified. The effects of non-natural erosion are not significant and badly eroded areas are revegetated.	Install gully head protection measures where gully erosion is significant. A co-operative approach with neighbours will attempt to minimise gully erosion across property boundaries. Do not form park tracks above the existing land surface where natural water movement may be modified. Install piped drainage or floodways along the main access. Install drainage and repair damaged areas when maintaining tracks and fence lines. The camp area will be properly drained and delineated to protect vegetated areas.
Cultural heritage Park surveys have identified Aboriginal cultural heritage sites in the southern section of the park, including a small number of artefact scatters, paintings and engravings. The Kutjala, Jirandali and/or Mitjumba people are believed to have traditional interests in the area. The park is included in an area subject to a native title claim. Park management requirements are not compromising any native title rights which may exist. Non-Aboriginal heritage sites are located near the park boundary.	Aboriginal people with traditional affiliations in the area are involved in the management of Aboriginal cultural heritage issues. Management actions do not compromise any native title rights. Non-Aboriginal heritage is protected.	Identify sites of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal significance. Management will ensure protection measures are implemented. Encourage Kutjala, Jirandali and Mitjumba people to assist in identifying, documenting and protecting Aboriginal sites in the national park and to provide advice on other traditional cultural interests and concerns. Consider the requirements of native title legislation in work programs to ensure any native title rights are not compromised. If a native title claim is successful, the plan will be revised as required in conjunction with the native title holders.
Recreation and tourism The local community’s demands for recreation at Porcupine Gorge vary seasonally. Visitors numbers peak following good wet seasons during the first half of the year. In recent years, the number of visitors has steadily increased. The park has basic facilities. A walking track takes visitors to Porcupine Creek and the Pyramid waterhole and rock feature. The Pyramid camp area has a shelter shed, toilets and lookout.	The park is used for low-impact, nature-based, self-sufficient camping and day use. Impact from recreational activities is not significant.	Conduct an assessment of environmental impacts caused by proposed park developments. This will ensure park values are not significantly compromised. Provide the following: ● a defined vehicle-based, low-key camping area with nodal sites for privacy; ● a walking track with wheelchair access to lookouts at the gorge lookout and the Keyholes; ● a defined day-use area and carpark at the Pyramid camp area with access to a semi-developed walking trail to the bed of Porcupine Creek to provide access to the Pyramid; ● access to the gorge via marked trails from the Keyholes lookout which return to the Pyramid camp area; and Allow bushwalking and backpacking and/or camping (fuel stoves only) along the riverine areas of the gorge. Advise visitors that no fires are permitted and that they must remove their rubbish. Provide information to visitors to emphasise the arid nature of the area and the need to carry ample water. Conduct regular patrols of the park.
Education and interpretation The park has no regular education or interpretation programs. Rangers have presented holiday programs and presentations to organised and educational groups on request. A visitor information sheet has been developed for the park.	Park visitors are provided with appropriate information to allow them to enjoy their visit and understand their obligations.	Develop a sign plan. An education and interpretation plan will be developed, focusing on educational programs for visitors, the local community and schools. Porcupine Gorge National Park will provide a focus for field activities relating to local history, geology, catchment management, pest management and nature conservation issues.
Access and fencing The park has a limited number of management tracks to help maintain boundary fences, act as firebreaks and provide for other management activities. The park does not have a boundary fence and only the northern boundary is fenced. Stock can access the grassy woodland areas of the escarpment to the gorge rim.	Suitable public vehicle access is available. No new tracks are developed and unneeded tracks are rehabilitated. No cattle are on the park and a stock proof fence is in place.	Tracks not necessary for public access will be closed to vehicular access by the public, but will remain open for walking. Develop fencing agreements with neighbours. This will involve identifying boundaries, firebreaks and access needs, and fencing development and maintenance.