

Lochern National Park

Channel Country and Mitchell Grass Downs Biogeographic Region



Management plan

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1. Management directions and purposes

1.1 Management directions

Lochern National Park is dedicated under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and must be managed in accordance with section 17 of the Act:

- to provide for the permanent preservation of the area's natural condition to the greatest possible extent;
- to protect the present area's cultural and natural resources and their values; and
- to ensure that the only use of the area is nature-based and ecologically sustainable.

Lochern National Park was dedicated in 1994 and conserves an area of 24 293ha within the Channel Country and Mitchell Grass Downs biogeographic regions. The park provides a natural setting in which a variety of western Queensland vegetation communities and animals can be appreciated.

The primary purpose of the park is to conserve and present a representative sample of several vegetation types typical of the area. Maintenance and protection of the natural and cultural values are of high priority. Management of feral animals, weed control and grazing pressures are important considerations.

Day-to-day management of the park is undertaken by resident park staff. Access is by an unsealed road from the Longreach-Jundah road. This becomes impassable in wet weather. The park has few visitor facilities, on-park interpretation or directional signs on tracks. Lochern is most suited to self-reliant visitors with interests in nature-based recreation activities in natural, undeveloped settings. Interpretive information is included in a visitor information sheet on the parks of the Longreach District. A visitor information sheet for Lochern is in production.

1.2 Purposes

The major purposes of management will be to ensure that:

- the diversity of natural plant and animal communities are conserved;

- rare and threatened species are identified and conserved through specific management strategies if appropriate;
- appropriate feral animal and weed control are implemented to protect native animal and plant communities;
- appropriate fire management regimes are adopted to maintain plant and animal communities and protect life and property from fire;
- provision is made for self-sufficient camping in a natural setting;

- the natural and cultural values of the park are maintained, with any future development of facilities appropriate to the values of the park; and
- neighbours, Local Government, Aboriginal groups and other interested parties are made aware of park management issues and are provided with opportunities to be involved in the process of managing the park, where appropriate.

2. Basis for management

2.1 Bioregional context

Lochern National Park, 40km north of Stonehenge and 150km south-west of Longreach, preserves an area of diverse vegetation, encompassing communities of mulga, Mitchell grass and channel country. Four of the nine land systems that have been identified at Lochern are not represented in any other protected area.

Lochern National Park fronts the Thomson River, forming part of the Thomson catchment, a major catchment in the Lake Eyre Basin. Surrounding land uses including sheep and cattle grazing, a local government reserve and the Over the Horizon Radar Site (Commonwealth Department of Defence facility), parts of which are covered by grazing lease.

2.2 Values of Lochern National Park

Geology and landform

The soils and geology of the park have a basic underlying value as they determine the type and distribution of plant and animal communities across the park. Quaternary alluvial plains along the Thomson River are characterised by grey clays, silt, sand and gravel. The clay plains along the margin of the river have been overlaid with alluvial sheet sand. Low dissected tablelands on the western edge of the park are predominantly quartz sandstone and sand/siltstone conglomerate, eroded from the Tertiary Glendower Formation.

Plants and animals

The vegetation on Lochern National Park is of significant conservation value, containing diverse vegetation in a relatively small area, with representative vegetation types from channel country, mulga and Mitchell grass communities. Species of coolibah *Eucalyptus coolibah*, bauhinia *Lysiphillum gilvum*, paperbarks *Meiuluca* spp. and river cooba *Acacia stenophylla* line the banks of the larger waterholes and channels.

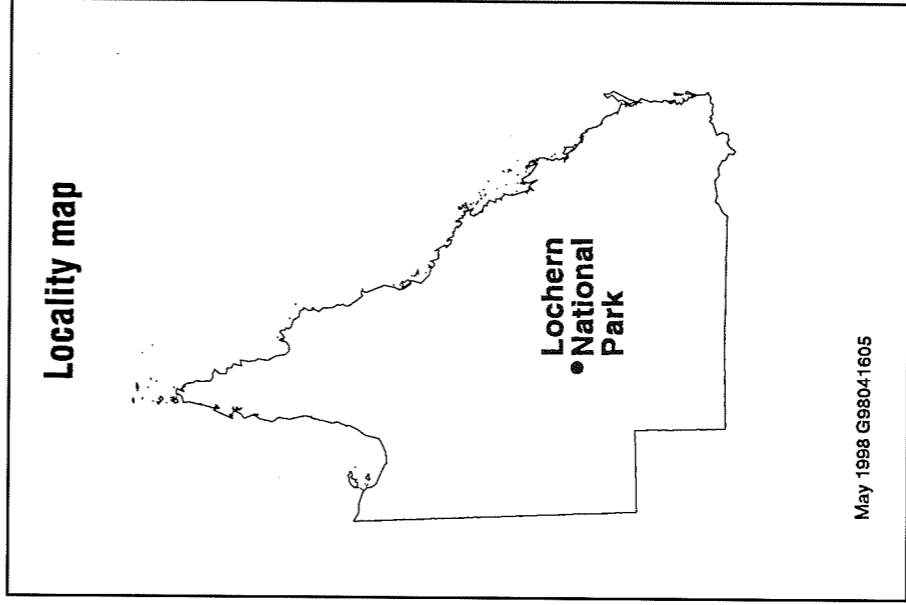
Cracking clay soils support gidgee *Acacia cambagei* and coolibah. Grasslands, herlands and forblands contain saltbush *Atriplex* spp. and all four species of Mitchell grass

Summary

This management plan provides the framework and guidelines on how Lochern 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 Department of Environment's Southwestern Regional Centre in Toowoomba on (07) 4639 4599 during business hours.

This management plan was prepared by Department of Environment staff. Thanks are due to those groups and individuals who made submissions in response to the draft plan.



Astrebla spp. Other species of significance on the park include eastern dead finish *Architedropsis basidica*, western bloodwood *Corymbia terminalis* and mulga *Acacia aneura*.

The diversity of vegetative communities and abundance of waterholes along the river support a variety of animal species. Over 100 birds have been recorded on the park, many of which are typical of western Queensland. Birds of special significance include the jabiru, which is a vagrant and rare in inland areas, and Hall's babbler, which has a restricted distribution in western Queensland and northern New South Wales. Other important fauna at Lochern includes Forrest's mouse, which is at the eastern limit of its distribution.

Cultural heritage

The Aboriginal people associated with this region are the Mallintji people. A number of Aboriginal cultural sites exist on the park, including clay ovens and artefact scatters. No research has been conducted on any sites and no Aboriginal groups have been contacted regarding Lochern National Park.

Evidence of post-European settlement on the includes a shearing shed and quarters, old shepherds' yards and poultry house. Most sites are in poor state of repair, with little research regarding their cultural significance.

Scenic and aesthetic

Lochern displays many characteristics of western Queensland, with coolibah and bauhinia lined creeks and waterholes supporting abundant, easily seen wildlife. Open grasslands on clay soils are typical of the outback's open expanses.

Scientific and educational

Lochern National Park has significant scientific values and potential for education. It is a potentially significant area for scientific research due to its diverse land systems and plant communities. Potential for education on the park includes use of Lochern as an education centre for visitors and special interest groups, such as schools, birdwatching groups, natural history associations and field naturalists.

Recreation and tourism

Lochern National Park receives approximately 100 day visitors and 500 campers annually. Most visits occurs from April to October. 16km of vehicle tracks provide for visitor travel around the park. Access to and within the park is along dirt roads, which can be periodically flooded. Nature-based recreation is popular at the park, including fishing, camping, birdwatching, viewing wildlife and tourist drives.

3 Management strategies

Current situation	Desired outcomes	Proposed policies, guidelines and actions
<p>Native plants</p> <p>Some baseline data, including herbarium samples and mapping of major vegetation communities, have been compiled by park staff. Fire monitoring sites are planned to aid management of plant communities towards specific objectives.</p> <p>Many species in the park are presently unidentified.</p>	<p>Maintain the diversity of plant communities and species within Lochern National Park.</p> <p>Increase knowledge of plant species, in particular rare and threatened species, and their distribution within the park.</p>	<p>Appropriate management of plant communities.</p> <p>Undertake searches for rare and threatened flora on the park.</p> <p>A vegetation map will be produced for Lochern National Park to aid management.</p>
<p>Native animals</p> <p>No comprehensive fauna surveys have been undertaken on Lochern National Park. Some initial survey work has been conducted by park staff, complemented by surveys of the surrounding areas on neighbouring properties and the Over the Horizon Radar Site.</p>	<p>Increase knowledge of fauna that occurs within the park.</p> <p>Conserve the diversity of animals and animal communities that occur within the park</p>	<p>Subject to available resources, continue surveys to obtain more detailed fauna information, with specific surveys for species of interest or high conservation value.</p> <p>Areas of conservation significance will be identified and specific management guidelines formulated as appropriate.</p>
<p>Introduced plants and animals</p> <p>Parkinsonia <i>Parkinsonia aculeata</i> and prickly acacia <i>Acacia nilotica</i> have been subjected to a wide-area control program in the Longreach Shire, with Parkinsonia almost eradicated on Lochern.</p> <p>Although prickly acacia and mesquite <i>Prosopis</i> sp. do not occur on Lochern, they are established on neighbouring properties. Park staff monitor the boundaries for signs of these species and assist in its control on neighbouring land. Other weeds occurring at Lochern include noogoora burr <i>Xanthium pungens</i> and Mexican poppy <i>Argemone mexicana</i>.</p> <p>Feral pigs, cats, foxes and rabbits occur on the park. Current control measures include shooting, catching and trapping where possible.</p>	<p>Parkinsonia, prickly acacia, noogoora burr and mesquite eradicated from the park where practical. Mexican poppy controlled. Feral animals controlled on the park.</p> <p>A catchment-based approach to controlling feral animals and weeds.</p>	<p>Investigate and implement the most effective measures for the control of weeds. Declared noxious species will be eradicated if possible.</p> <p>A range of feral animal control measures will be investigated, including shooting and baiting, to determine the most efficient and practical techniques.</p> <p>Implement a co-ordinated control program, in conjunction with neighbours, Department of Natural Resources, LandCare groups, Longreach Shire Council and other relevant agencies, for the control of weeds and feral animals on a wide-area basis.</p>
<p>Fire management</p> <p>No prescribed burns have been conducted since Lochern was gazetted in 1994. Information is currently being gathered on the ecological responses to fire of different vegetation communities.</p> <p>Some fire-breaks have been established for protection of life and property and for management of wildfires. Currently there is no equipment to maintain these.</p>	<p>Maintain the diversity of plant communities on Lochern National Park.</p> <p>Protection of life, park and neighbouring infrastructure, and culturally significant sites from fire.</p>	<p>A fire management strategy will be developed for Lochern. Information to be included is the ecological objectives for each community type; a wildfire response procedure; annual fire action plans; and identification of sites that require protection.</p> <p>The effects of different burning regimes will be monitored as part of a fire management program. There will be close liaison with local landholders.</p> <p>All park staff will receive appropriate fire training. Fire breaks will be maintained as appropriate.</p>
<p>Landscape, soil and catchment protection</p> <p>A number of natural waterholes along the Thomson River support diverse wildlife. As populations upstream from Lochern increase, a corresponding increase in water consumption may impact on water flows and wetlands of Lochern.</p> <p>Minor erosion has occurred along tracks, fence lines and old seismic lines in most areas of the park.</p> <p>Park staff at Lochern attend Zonal Advisory Committee meetings for Queensland Fisheries Management Authority, LandCare, United Graziers Association, Rural Fires Brigade and Catchment management groups.</p>	<p>Maintain catchment and aesthetic values, and ensure any developments are consistent with these natural values.</p> <p>Protect and conserve park soils and landforms.</p>	<p>Stabilisation of eroded areas will be carried out as required.</p> <p>Liaise with relevant organisations on the conservation of water resources on a catchment basis.</p> <p>Liaison will be continued with relevant organisations on a range of issues relevant to Lochern National Park and the surrounding area.</p>
<p>Cultural heritage</p> <p>Lochern may have important cultural values to Aboriginal groups, both in terms of specific sites and as a relatively intact natural landscape. There is a lack of information regarding culture specific to the area, with no Aboriginal groups or individuals with interests in Lochern identified or contacted.</p> <p>Post-European settlement sites, such as the shearing shed and quarters, are in a poor state of repair, with little research into their cultural significance.</p>	<p>Protection of cultural values and sites.</p> <p>Interpretation of cultural heritage values, as appropriate.</p>	<p>Aboriginal interest in the park will be identified, and those groups or individuals will be provided with the opportunity to participate in the planning and management of the park on a long-term basis.</p> <p>Aboriginal cultural values will be identified on the park, and preserved in consultation with Aboriginal groups. These values will be included in visitor information sheets, if appropriate, after consultation.</p> <p>The cultural significance of European sites will be evaluated and managed as appropriate. The shearing shed and quarters will be maintained to a level to preserve their aesthetic and historic appeal whilst allowing for limited use.</p>
<p>Recreation and tourism</p> <p>Few facilities are provided. The former shearers' quarters are used by visitors. As visitor numbers increase, these facilities may prove inadequate to cope with demands.</p> <p>The park provides for nature-based recreational activities, such as fishing and birdwatching.</p>	<p>Visitor infrastructure appropriate to visitor numbers and maintenance of Lochern's natural and cultural values.</p>	<p>Visitor infrastructure will be developed in accordance with the approved capital works program for the park. The design and placement of these facilities shall be determined in consultation with visitors and Department support staff.</p>
<p>Education and interpretation</p> <p>The park is located on a major outback tourist route, extending from Tiboburra in New South Wales to Longreach in Queensland.</p> <p>Interpretation includes a visitor information sheet on the parks of the Longreach District. A visitor information sheet on Lochern is in production. This is supported by public contact by park staff. An interpretive centre is being established on the park.</p> <p>Some visitor safety issues occur on Lochern, including poor directional and safety signs, poor road conditions and isolated areas with extreme weather conditions.</p>	<p>Awareness and appreciation of the natural and cultural values of the park and the western Queensland region.</p> <p>Visitors to Lochern are informed and self-reliant.</p>	<p>Provide interpretation of the park's values.</p> <p>Visitor information sheet for the park to include safety information on poor road conditions, visiting isolated areas and extreme weather conditions.</p> <p>Adequate directional and safety signs will be developed.</p> <p>Use of the park by educational groups, including schools, LandCare groups and other community groups will be encouraged.</p> <p>The park will be promoted as part of an integrated tourist route through the Longreach district.</p>
<p>Resource use</p> <p>Poor boundary fences have allowed significant numbers of stock to enter the park.</p> <p>Existing policy concerning rubbish removal appears acceptable to visitors to the park.</p> <p>The local Shire Council utilises material from the road reserve that crosses the park.</p> <p>Pigs and macropods are being hunted illegally on the park.</p> <p>The track system throughout the park is not well maintained.</p> <p>The old sheep yards and old house have been tested for chemical contamination and have been identified as contaminated sites.</p>	<p>Maintain the national park free from stock.</p> <p>Ecologically sustainable resource use and maintenance of a safe environment for park staff and visitors.</p>	<p>Fences will be constructed or repaired as resources permit. Costs may be shared with neighbours as set out in the Department's Good Neighbour Policy.</p> <p>The existing policy requiring visitors to remove rubbish shall be promoted in the park's visitor information sheet.</p> <p>Open areas of rubbish will be removed. Rubbish will be either buried on park or disposed off-park. Alternatives for off-park disposal of waste should be investigated and implemented once the existing, on-park landfill is full.</p> <p>Contaminated sites will be managed in consultation with the Regional Workplace Health and Safety Officer.</p> <p>Park staff will liaise with the Shire Council over use of the road reserve.</p> <p>A program to counter illegal hunting in the park will be developed. It will include awareness campaigns on prohibited activities, conducting patrols and involving neighbours.</p> <p>Tracks will be maintained as resources permit.</p>