

Goal 7

Connecting people with nature

Encourage people to experience nature, to connect and appreciate natural and cultural heritage, and to foster a life-long conservation commitment.

Why is this important?

Contact with nature has always played a critical part in shaping how people think and feel, and in restoring and improving mental and physical well-being. Connections with nature are also important for conservation, as people most strongly care for, value and protect the things and places that they are connected to through direct experience.

Connecting with nature

In protected areas and forests people can socialise, relax and exercise. They are places for solitude and personal challenge, where people can learn about nature through observation.

Whether witnessing a turtle lay its eggs on a remote reef island, watching wildlife on the farm or the backyard, or just playing in the bush, a child's experiences can lead to a life-long emotional connection with nature. Adults, too, find that visiting natural places and hearing

cultural stories enriches their lives. This connection can be the foundation of an enduring conservation ethic for individuals, who over time make up an environmentally responsible community.

While experience itself is vital, people often need some help to understand and interpret what they see and hear. Over the past 35 years, QPWS has communicated with children and adults through inspiring interpretive programs, brochures, innovative displays, signs, and contemporary electronic media. Thousands of people have experienced the natural world through ranger presentations, children's activities, and wildlife encounters. Many others have seen television programs featuring QPWS staff and Queensland's protected areas and native wildlife.

'Interpretation is the process of inspiring an appreciation of our natural and cultural heritage and commitment to conservation ideals and practices'

QPWS Interpretation and Community Education Manual 2002

Communicating about nature and conservation

In addition to fostering connections with nature and raising awareness about conservation, QPWS communication programs aim to meet the community's need for information. This includes providing up-to-date, accurate and detailed information about protected areas and forests for intending visitors. Interpretation is integral to effective management, by promoting safe and sustainable behaviour on protected areas and forests.

People also seek information about wildlife, including threatened species programs, and practical advice about dealing with problems relating to wildlife.

QPWS provides specific information and advice to encourage people to make a positive contribution to conservation; for example, landholders who practice conservation techniques on their properties, and people wanting to attract birds to their gardens.

Towards the future

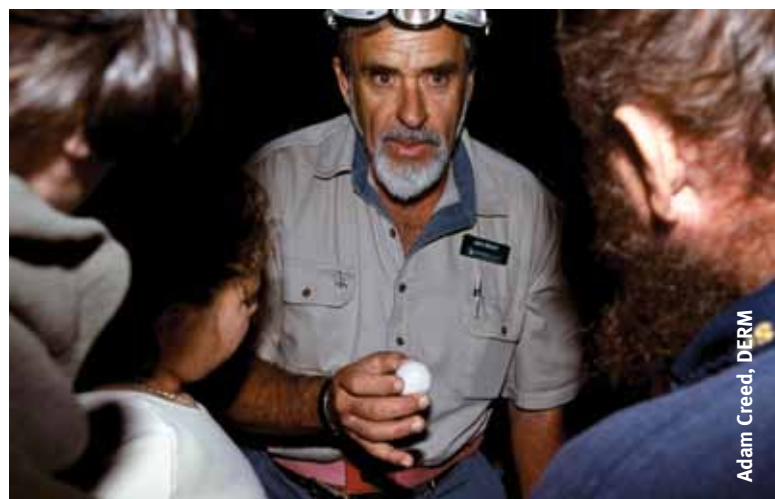
As urbanisation, technological change, and modern lifestyle choices distance many people from nature, the challenge for QPWS is to create opportunities for individuals to make their own positive connection with nature. QPWS needs to embrace new technology and communication media to reach different generations and cultures of Queenslanders as well as tourists arriving from interstate and overseas. It is important to build relationships and connect with all sectors of a multi-cultural and rapidly changing society.

The Connect with Nature program provides a consistent approach to face-to-face communication between the community and QPWS across the state. Ranger and volunteer-led activities in the city and the bush provide meaningful opportunities for adults, children and families from all walks of life to get outside, be healthy, and to discover and connect with the wonders of the natural world.



Adam Creed, DERM

▼ Interpretation is an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information (Freeman Tilden— *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 1957)



Adam Creed, DERM

What is our approach?

Effective and inspiring communication and interpretation will provide a foundation for improved understanding and appreciation of Queensland's natural and cultural values. QPWS will:

- provide a multitude of experiences and opportunities to help people connect with nature and to increase their understanding and appreciation.
- train and support protected area rangers to deliver high-quality interpretation and to communicate regularly with visitors, marine park users, neighbours and the wider community about the values of nature and protected areas, forests and wildlife.
- support Traditional Owners to share their cultural heritage on protected areas according to their wishes.
- respond to community needs and views about their experiences with protected areas and forests.
- present QPWS as a credible and responsible management agency.
- encourage schools to incorporate biodiversity conservation themes into the curriculum to build a stronger connection between children and nature.
- partner with key organisations such as the health, recreation, and tourism industries to connect people with nature, to provide accurate information and to promote conservation principles and practices to the broader community.
- collaborate with local government, industry and other non government organisations to communicate the benefits of protected areas and forests.
- encourage new ways to engage and welcome people to protected areas and forests.
- use interpretation as a key management tool to ensure safe and sustainable visits.

What we will do: priorities for 2020



7.1 Engage with the community and provide inspiring experiences with nature and cultural heritage.

- a) Deliver high quality and targeted Connect with Nature programs with a focus on experiencing nature firsthand and increasing interest in visiting protected areas.
- b) Develop and implement a communication strategy to promote the values of nature, protected areas, forests and wildlife, to connect people with nature, and to promote conservation ideals and practices to a wide range of people.
- c) Use contemporary social media and the internet as key mechanisms to engage people with nature, based on experiences, iconic places and wildlife.
- d) Encourage and support the community to implement conservation activities in their local areas, for example through property management and volunteering programs.
- e) Integrate the role of protected areas and forests in reducing the effects of climate change into interpretation programs. Promote community actions to help combat climate change.
- f) Promote community stewardship through programs and events that build community support and capacity for natural and cultural resource care.
- g) Establish new, targeted Connect with Nature programs for local communities with a focus on celebrating protected areas, forests and wildlife.
- h) Encourage family participation in outdoor activities by promoting events, such as the Great Aussie Campout weekend, when selected national park and forest campgrounds are open to the public for free (commencing 2012).

Targets

- Increase community participation in key conservation events on protected areas and forests by two per cent each year.
- By 2015, 100 per cent of high profile national parks host a Connect with Nature program during school holidays and public holiday periods.

7.2 Promote safe and sustainable visits to protected areas and forests.

- a) Use a range of media to provide information to protected area visitors and to promote safe and sustainable use.
- b) Continue to deliver excellent and innovative presentation materials (signs, displays and printed material) as appropriate to each protected area.
- c) Through effective interpretation, encourage protected area and forest visitors to be champions of conservation and protected area management.
- d) Maintain and enhance centres of excellence in nature interpretation in high profile protected areas across Queensland¹⁴.

¹⁴ Currently at Brisbane Forest Park, Daisy Hill Koala Centre, Mon Repos and the Mamu Rainforest Canopy Walkway.

7.3 Understand how the community experiences protected areas and forests and promote the benefits of these areas.

- a) Undertake a community survey every five years to evaluate community attitudes towards QPWS and protected areas and their experiences on QPWS-managed lands.
- b) Collaborate with other Queensland Government agencies to identify emerging trends and build recognition for the social, health and lifestyle benefits of protected areas and forests.

Target

- Maintain the level of national park visitor satisfaction at above 90 per cent¹⁵.

7.4 Communicate with children through innovative environmental education programs.

- a) Develop approaches in consultation with Education Queensland to incorporate more nature-based experiential learning in key curriculum areas and educational initiatives.
- b) Encourage and facilitate Queensland's schools to conduct camping or field excursions to Queensland protected areas or forests. Foster and support outdoor education activities through streamlined permitting arrangements and agreements with schools and other learning institutions.

7.5 Train and support staff to engage with the community.

- a) Equip QPWS staff to confidently engage with the community on and off-park through structured programs, events and informal contacts.
- b) Train and support park rangers to deliver high-quality interpretation and complement their efforts with interpretive specialists, seasonal rangers and volunteers who deliver interpretive programs and activities.
- c) Employ Indigenous rangers to help plan, prepare and deliver appropriate cultural interpretation.

15 Based on regular visitor surveys conducted every five years for QPWS.

- Interpretive centres such as South East Queensland's Walkabout Creek Visitor Centre provide an opportunity to see wildlife close up and learn about the unique Queensland environment.
- At Mon Repos Conservation Park visitors can learn about conservation in the information centre, and experience firsthand turtles nesting or hatching on the beach at night.



Robert Ashdown, DERMM

7.6 Partner with key organisations to communicate about protected areas, forests and wildlife.

- a) Encourage tourism organisations and operators and other community organisations to provide quality presentations and information about protected areas, forests and wildlife.
- b) Promote a strong conservation message through the domestic and international tourism sector.