

An overview of Queensland's protected areas, forests and wildlife

Why our protected areas, forests and wildlife are valuable

'Today it is clear that protected areas are fundamental necessities for the livelihood of the whole of society'

A Phillips & K Miller (2000)²

Queensland's landscapes and seascapes are home to an amazingly diverse array of species and ecosystems.

Protected areas, forests and wildlife provide a chance for people to experience the great outdoors and reconnect with nature, a place for families to visit, and a place for more active pursuits. They are a critical investment for the health of Queensland communities. For Indigenous people, connection with nature and caring for country is both a life-giving joy and an obligation.

There are many other benefits of protected areas, forests and wildlife. Some of these include:

- Protection for the unique species and ecosystems that form part of the Queensland identity and culture.

- Health and wellbeing benefits for people through enjoyment of recreation and scenic beauty.
- Ecosystem services for human populations, such as fresh air, clean water and productive soils and oceans.
- Large and stable areas for storage of greenhouse gases and the regulation of climate.
- A vibrant, growing tourism industry based on national parks and marine parks.
- Places where Indigenous culture and links to the land and sea country are celebrated.
- Employment opportunities for local communities, including Indigenous people.
- Refuges for diverse life forms.
- Genetic material providing opportunities for 'bioprospecting' for medical cures and other natural chemicals.
- Protection for cultural heritage, including important areas which contribute significantly to Queensland's and Australia's identity.
- Benchmarks for ecologically sustainable management across land and sea.

² In: Protected Areas: Benefits beyond boundaries – WCPA in action. IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Gland, Switzerland.

Nature-based tourism is an important contributor to Queensland's economy at both a regional and state level. National parks are one of the state's biggest tourist attractions; in 2009 they hosted more than 16 million visits³, and more than 40 per cent of all international visitors to Australia in 2009 included a trip to a national park. Viewing wildlife is also an important reason that people from overseas visit Queensland. It is estimated that tourists who visit Queensland's national parks contribute around \$4.5 billion annually to the State's economy, representing around 28 per cent of total visitor spend⁴. This spend is both through specific tourism on national parks and through people staying longer in the local area when visiting a protected area or forest. The economic benefits are therefore dispersed widely throughout Queensland providing economic sustenance for many regional communities.

Queensland's species and ecosystems also provide people with a range of services such as clean water, fertile soils, pollinators for crops, and many natural resources. It is difficult to provide an accurate economic value to these services. However, one study has shown that in the Wet Tropics World Heritage area alone, every

100 hectares is worth about \$23 700 each year⁵. This includes more than \$1600 a year for climate regulation, more than \$1700 a year for erosion control, and \$1000 a year for protection of water quality.

Protected areas and forests provide the cornerstones for a broader whole-of-landscape and seascape approach to biodiversity conservation. They will continue to be extremely important for biodiversity conservation in the light of growing threats such as climate change, the delayed effects of fragmentation, and increased invasive species.

In coastal regions that are under increasing pressure from development and population growth, protected areas and forests help protect catchments and provide places for recreation and tourism. In the less fragmented western and northern parts of Queensland, national parks provide refuges from grazing, mining and other land use, as well as places where the whole community can enjoy nature. Multiple-use marine parks provide refuge areas for species and ecosystems to help ensure they remain resilient into the future, while allowing for continuing use of the majority of the marine environment.

3 Department of Environment and Resource Management 2009. Unpublished master list of visitor estimates.

4 Ballantyne R, Brown R, Pegg, S, Scott N, 2008, Valuing tourism spending arising from visitation to Queensland national parks, CRC for Sustainable Tourism.

5 Curtis IA, 2004, Valuing ecosystem goods and services: a new approach using a surrogate market and the combination of a multiple criteria analysis and a Delphi panel to assign weights to the attributes. Ecological Economics, vol. 50, pp. 163-194.



Mark Nemeth, DERM

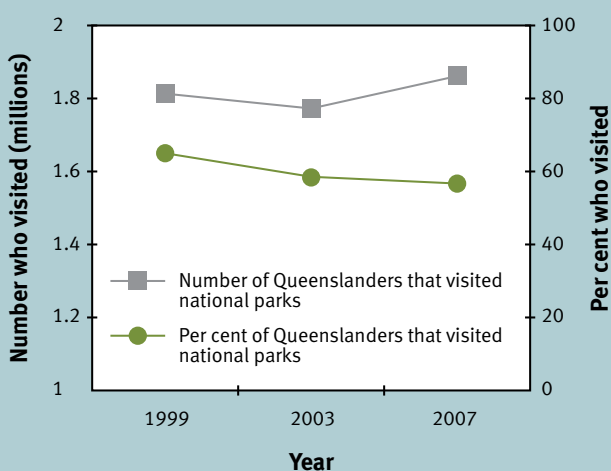
► Coolooloolo heathlands.

▲ Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park. Protected areas and forests provide an important place where people can enjoy recreation and scenic beauty.

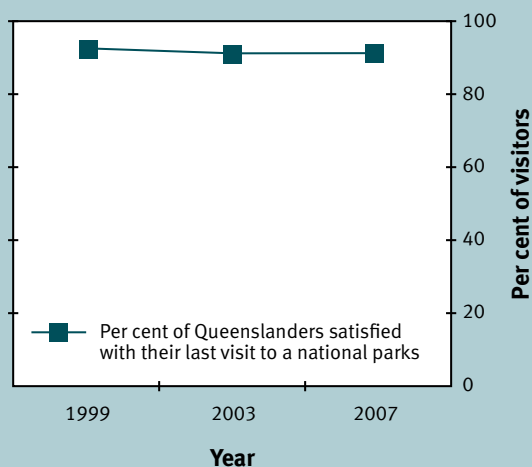
Queenslanders visiting national parks

Since 1999, regular community household surveys have been conducted to help QPWS understand the needs and values of the Queensland community. In 2007 the third survey was conducted.

These surveys have shown that eight out of 10 Queensland residents have visited a national park at some time. In 2007, four out of 10 residents had visited in the past year. The main reasons given for visiting national parks are activities such as relaxing and socialising. The graph below shows the number and proportion of Queenslanders who visited national parks in the three years prior to each survey.



The vast majority of Queenslanders have generally been very happy with their visits to national parks. In fact, in all surveys more than 90 per cent of people were satisfied with their last visit. This is an exceptional result for QPWS, and even more exceptional that this satisfaction is stable over time (see the graph below).



A fourth survey will be undertaken in 2011 to provide continued insights into how Queenslanders use their national parks.

Source: AC Nielsen 2007 Community Survey for QPWS.

Many significant ecosystems with unique species are not yet reserved in any protected area, and many other ecosystems have only very small representation. The government's 2008 commitment to double the terrestrial protected area estate by 2020⁶ will help fill many of these gaps.

For many people, protected areas provide popular places to visit on weekends and holidays—to camp, picnic, hike, climb, enjoy a change of scenery, view wildlife and explore the great outdoors with family or friends. Some visitors take extended trips visiting many protected areas and forests.

The protected area and forest system as a whole provides a wide range of opportunities for many different activities in environments which vary from tiny coral islands on the Great Barrier Reef to high, forested peaks and remote western plains.

6 2008 Toward Q2 State Government commitment.



Robert Ashdown, DERM

▲ The Carnarvon Great Walk. The Great Walks of Queensland are the result of a \$16.5 million and 10 year Queensland Government initiative to create a world-class system of walking tracks throughout the very best of Queensland's protected area estate, including four of our five magnificent World Heritage areas.

