

NSW NATIONAL PARKS & WILDLIFE SERVICE

Kosciuszko National Park Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan

Key facts



What does the plan seek to achieve

The plan has been prepared to meet the requirements of the *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act 2018*.

The plan:

- Identifies the heritage value of wild horse populations in parts of the park
- Protects the heritage values of wild horses by retaining a wild horse population of 3000 horses in 32% of the park. Wild horses have been retained in areas that are strongly associated with wild horse heritage values
- Maintains the environmental values of the park by reducing the wild horse population from an estimated 14,380 horses to 3000 horses by 30 June 2027. Under the plan, there will be no wild horses across 68% of the park.

How was the population target of 3000 derived?

The target wild horse population of 3000 to be retained in 32% of the park protects wild horse heritage values, while maintaining other environmental values of the park in accordance with the requirements of the *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act 2018*.

The management approach considered advice from the Kosciuszko Wild Horse Scientific and Community Advisory Panels.

What does the plan say about the area of the park in which wild horses will be retained?

The plan provides for a wild horse population to be retained in 32% of the park. The identified areas in which wild horses will be retained have been selected based on their importance to wild horse heritage values, as well as the need to ensure that other environmental values are maintained.

How does the plan protect the heritage values of wild horses?

The plan requires 3000 wild horses to be retained in 32% of the park.

The wild horse populations in the identified retention areas represents and maintains the heritage values associated with wild horses.

The identified areas for the retention of wild horses contain evidence of wild horse heritage values, including the role of horses in pioneering history and pastoralism; traditional mountain practices; and, the legends, stories and myths of the Snowy Mountains. The evidence of wild horse heritage values includes both tangible (eg. huts, campsites, yards, traps and tracks) and non-tangible (eg. personal and community connections) elements.

The identified areas also ensure a representation of the different “types” of horses by reference to their history e.g. Kiandra greys and Cascade horses.

The aesthetic value of being able to see wild horses in parts of the Kosciuszko landscape also adds to the heritage value of wild horses for some stakeholders.

How does the plan maintain other environmental values of the park?

The plan requires reduction of the current population of wild horses from an estimated 14,380 horses to 3000 horses by 30 June 2027.

The area occupied by wild horses will be reduced from 53% to 32% of the park. The population of horses is currently expanding across the park. Ultimately, 68% of the park will be free of wild horses.

Wild horse density will be reduced in identified areas where horses are to be retained.

The removal and exclusion of wild horses from designated areas, and the reduction in the overall population, will provide effective protection from the impacts of wild horses for threatened species such as the northern and southern corroboree frogs, the smoky mouse and the broad-toothed rat as well as a suite of important alpine and sub-alpine ecosystems.

Wild horse control is just one component of a broader integrated approach to maintaining environmental values in the park. Other management programs in place include bushfire hazard mitigation, revegetation and the control of weeds and other introduced animal species as well as dedicated threatened species projects.

In 2020–21, NPWS implemented extensive feral animal control across the park and surrounds, removing 3665 feral animals including deer, goats and pigs.

The results of monitoring the ecological health of the park, which will include regular (annual) surveys of the wild horse population, will inform a review of the plan after 30 June 2027.

Why are wild horses allowed in some of the Assets of Intergenerational Significance (AIS) sites?

There are 40 AIS sites in the park, including sites for the conservation of species like the mountain pygmy possum, northern and southern corroboree frogs, smoky mouse and broad-toothed rat, are in areas where there will be no wild horses.

There are 10 AIS sites in areas where wild horse densities will be reduced. These AIS sites, which include sites for the broad-toothed rat, smoky mouse and several plant species, will benefit from a substantial reduction (approximately 75%) in the density of wild horses. Strategic exclusion fencing will also be considered, if required, for additional protection.

How will the wild horse population be reduced to 3,000 horses by 30 June 2027?

The removal of wild horses will occur in accordance with best practice animal welfare requirements.

NPWS will continue to prioritise passive trapping and rehoming, where it leads to the highest animal welfare outcomes. Where that is not practicable, the plan provides a range of other options including ground shooting subject to strict conditions which ensure the highest animal welfare standards are met.

The wild horse removal options provided for in the plan were independently assessed by the Kosciuszko Wild Horse Independent Technical Reference Group in 2015. The Kosciuszko Wild Horse Scientific Advisory Panel reviewed the Kosciuszko Wild Horse Independent Technical Reference Group’s assessments in 2020. The Centre for Invasive Species Solutions has also assessed the welfare outcomes of these control methods. NPWS will develop and implement standard operating procedures for the use of each control method in Kosciuszko National Park which will take into account advice from the RSPCA and animal welfare experts, and will be consistent with all regulatory requirements including Commonwealth and NSW legislation, codes of practice, regulations, and procedures. Annual reviews of standard operating procedures will occur to ensure continued adherence to best practice.

Will aerial shooting be permitted?

No. NSW Government policy for the last 20 years has been no aerial shooting of horses in NSW national parks. That policy is not changing.

What are the negative impacts of wild horses on the natural environmental values of the park?

Published scientific research tells us that the distribution and abundance of wild horses in the park is causing significant negative impact on natural environment values. Negative impacts include soil erosion and compaction of waterways, trampling and grazing of native vegetation,

decline in water quality, altering the hydrology of bogs and fens, and loss of threatened fauna habitat.

In recognition of the negative environmental impact of wild horses, the NSW Scientific Committee listed habitat degradation and loss by feral horses (brumbies and wild horses) as a key threatening process under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*.

When will the plan be reviewed?

The plan will be reviewed after 30 June 2027. This review will consider information on the ecological health of the park, wild horse population estimates and other relevant monitoring and research.

Is the plan consistent with advice from the Kosciuszko Wild Horse Community and Scientific Advisory Panels and Aboriginal custodians?

The Kosciuszko Wild Horse Community (CAP) and Scientific Advisory Panels (SAP) produced reports for the Deputy Secretary NPWS which were considered during drafting of the plan.

The plan was also informed by the Aboriginal Cultural Values Report, which investigated Aboriginal cultural values associated with wild horses in the park. The plan takes into account advice from the Community Advisory Panel on population targets and areas to retain wild horses. The plan takes into account advice from the Scientific Advisory Panel on the need for an adaptive approach to the management of wild horses and the selection of control methods based on maximising welfare outcomes.

Aboriginal custodians identified important cultural heritage areas. Monitoring of the impact of wild horses on the identified Aboriginal heritage values will occur. The ongoing management of wild horses will be reviewed in response to monitoring outcomes.

What changes have been made to the draft plan as a result of representations received during the exhibition period?

Changes to the draft plan include:

- A change to the boundary of the Coleman karst removal management area to include limestone areas and catchment of the karst. This adds an additional 1044 ha onto the total of the removal management areas.
- Modification of an existing wild horse retention area at Yarrangobilly to incorporate the Yarrangobilly karst into a removal management area. This adds an additional 2562 ha onto the total of the removal management areas.

- A change to the area at Tom Groggin and Riley's flat from a removal to a retention management area. The change takes into account a small mob known as 'Riley's horses'. This change adds an additional 731 ha onto the retention management areas.
- Changes to the boundaries do not change the percentage of areas, since the changes are small.
- Acknowledgement that rehabilitation may occur in wild horse removal management areas (section 5.2).
- Acknowledgement that monitoring and research will be undertaken over the life of the plan (section 7).
- A small number of corrections were also made by NPWS.

When will implementation of the plan commence?

Now that the plan has been adopted, operations will commence as soon as practicable. The resumption of passive trapping and rehoming will be the priority.

NPWS-specific standard operating procedures will be developed for all capture and control methods in accordance with the plan and in consultation with RSPCA NSW.

Updates on the plan's implementation will be provided on the Department's website. However, to protect the safety of NPWS staff, contractors and visitors, and the welfare of wild horses, operational details will not be publicly released.



Photo: Gorge walking track. Murray Vanderveer-Clark/DPIE

For more information visit environment.nsw.gov.au/protectsnowies

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