



Trial Wildlife Protection Areas at Bonnie Doon Reserve, Katoomba and Sassafras Gully Reserve, Springwood Proposal

Background

Following adoption of the Council's *Companion Animals Management Plan (Cats and Dogs)* 2008-11 there was a request by the community to consider the declaration of public lands as a Wildlife Protection Area, as defined in the *NSW Companion Animals Act 1998*. Under this Act the local authority, in this case the Council, can prohibit cats and/or dogs from public lands for the protection of wildlife and these lands are referred to as a Wildlife Protection Area (WPA).

Wildlife Protection Areas can be declared as one of two categories:

- Category 1 lands prohibit both cats and dogs as per S.30 c.1(b) and S.14 c. 1(h) of the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998.
- Category 2 lands prohibit cats as per S.30 c.1(b) of the NSW Companion Animals Act 1998. Dogs that are on a leash will be permitted on formed tracks, pathways or roads in Category 2 lands.

In response Council developed and adopted the Wildlife Protection Area Policy on the 23rd November 2010. The Wildlife Protection Area Policy provides the framework for the Council to declare public lands, or part thereof, as a WPA.

The Wildlife Protection Area Policy has the following objectives:

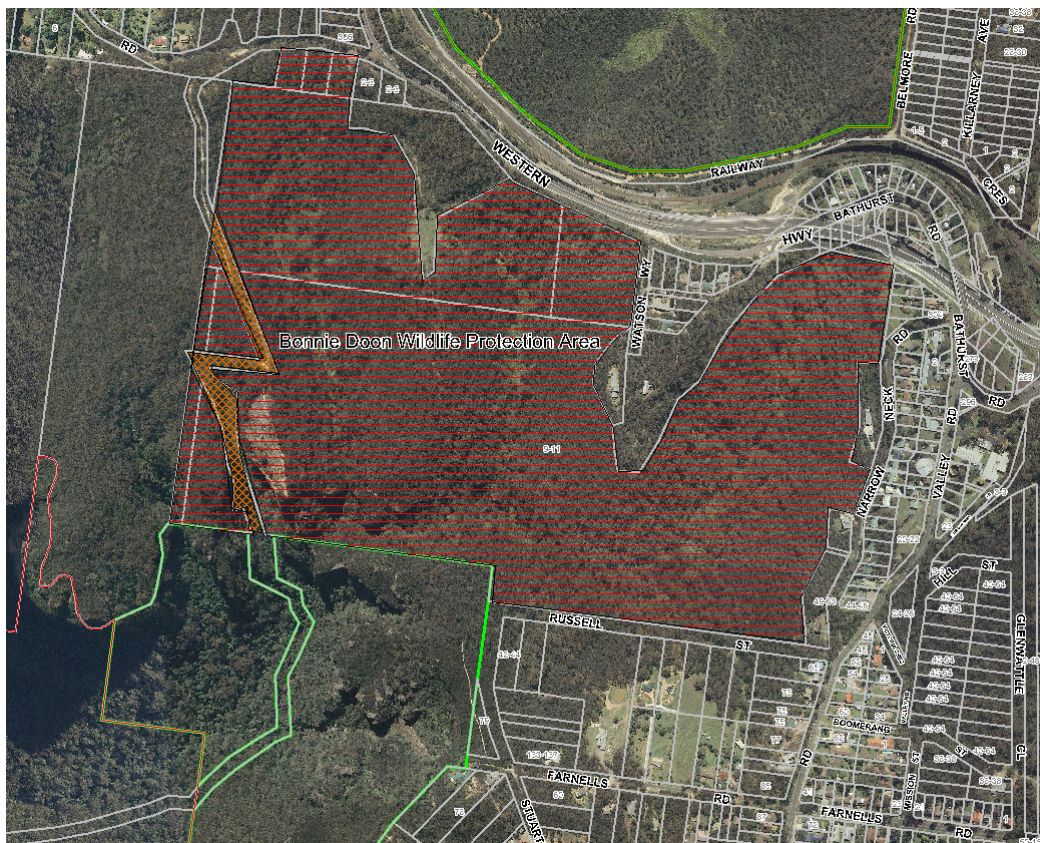
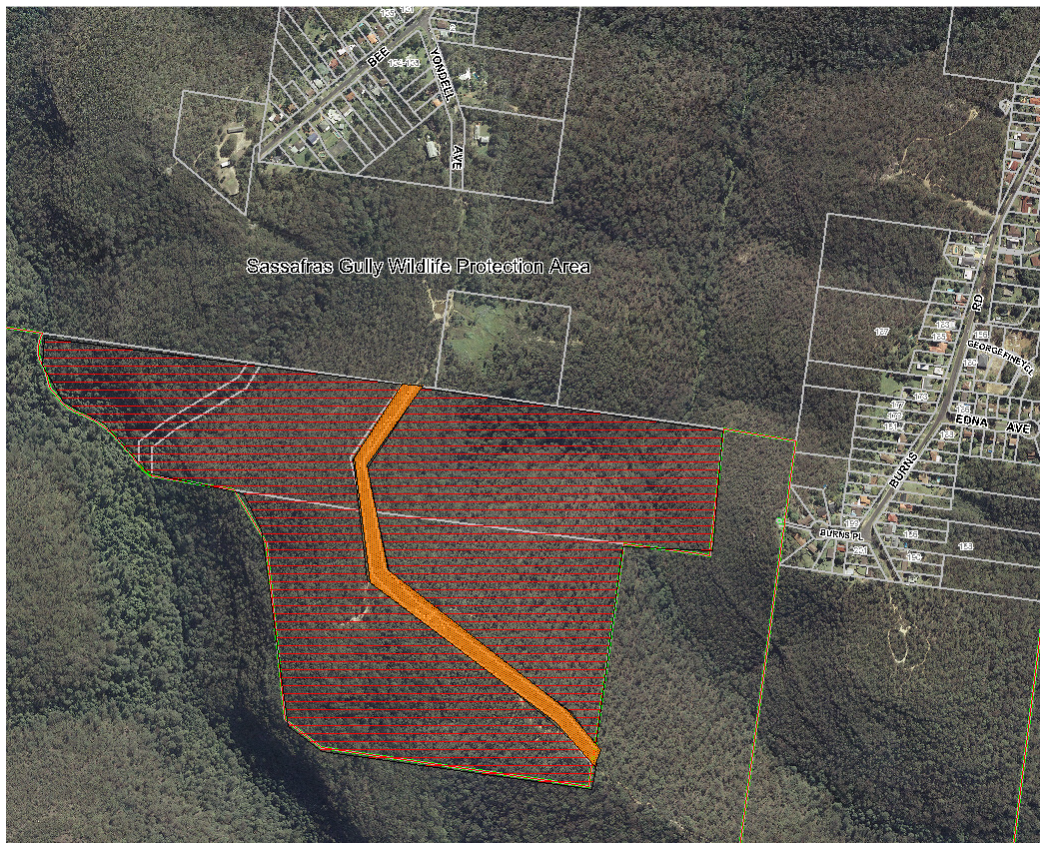
- 1) To provide a transparent, community supported process to enable the Council to declare a public place, or part thereof, as a Wildlife Protection Area;
- 2) To protect native wildlife in Council managed reserves;
- 3) To reduce the area of land subject to impacts associated with companion animals; and
- 4) To further communicate the responsibility of companion animal ownership.

Proposed Wildlife Protection Areas.

Council manages more than 350 bushland reserves covering approximately 9,945 hectares and has given its support for the trialling of 2 trial Wildlife Protection Areas within this reserve system.

The 2 proposed trial WPA sites are listed below along with the size of the reserve, the proposed categories of WPA being recommended and the size of the prohibition areas.

Town	Reserve	Area of WPA (Cat1/Cat2)
Springwood	Sassafras Gully	41.80 ha (Cat 1)/1.6ha (Cat 2)
Katoomba	Bonnie Doon	59.97 ha (Cat 1)/0.51ha (Cat 2)



Duration of the WPA Trial

The population dynamics of native fauna may take a lengthy period of time to respond to the implementation of the WPA and it may be many years before monitoring can accurately show any corresponding response in the abundance and diversity of fauna as a result of the establishment of a WPA. Therefore, trial WPA areas should be established and operated for a period of five years before drawing any conclusion on the efficacy of a WPA in protecting fauna.

Signage

Under the Act, lands declared a WPA must be conspicuously sign posted. A large sign stating the regulatory orders, penalty for non-compliance and a map of WPA will be erected at prominent entry points to both WPAs. Additional smaller signs, not including a map, will be erected elsewhere along the boundary of the WPA or at informal entry points.

Compliance

A review of the implementation of WPAs in other LGA's has indicated that self-regulation is the preferred compliance approach due to:

- the high cost associated with proactive enforcement
- the limited ability to apply a penalty to owners of companion animals, in particular cats, in breach of the local order.

Council will adopt a similar model relying primarily on education and voluntary compliance . However it is recognised that an increase in compliance demand will occur as a result of the introduction of WPAs and this will have to be monitored to assess the impact upon the Environmental Rangers' other priorities.

Measuring Effectiveness: Fauna, Companion Animal and Pest Monitoring

The Trial Bonnie Doon and Sassafras Gully Reserve WPAs will provide a trial WPA in both the upper and lower mountains and allow the evaluation of both Category 1 and 2 lands.

Fauna, Companion Animal and Pest Monitoring will be conducted using sand pad monitoring techniques. Sand pad monitoring represents the most cost effective method to assess:

1. changes in the utilisation of a reserve by dogs and cats subsequent to its declaration as a WPA;
2. changes to vertebrate pest activity in a reserve subsequent to its declaration as a WPA; and
3. changes to native fauna activity in a reserve subsequent to its declaration as a WPA .

Sand pad monitoring will commence two months prior to the declaration and installation of signage in order to establish pre-declaration base-line data. This will be used to benchmark subsequent post-declaration sand pad monitoring data collected during the WPA trial period.

Remote surveillance equipment, which is now a common tool in vertebrate pest management, will be used to:

1. to validate sand pad monitoring data; and
2. to determine the ratio of companion animals that are accompanied or unaccompanied, on or off leash, and to provide data such as the most prevalent time of the day that a track is being used.

Remote surveillance equipment will not be used for compliance purposes.

Resourcing Costs

Public Exhibition

The estimated costs associated with the Public Exhibition process are: \$3,000 in publicity costs including a one off \$1,700 for publication of information about the proposed WPAs in local print media; \$1,300 for the production of 2 pamphlets and the printing of 400 copies of each; two 2 staff days will be required for setting up and managing the public exhibition process.

Signage

A summary of the expected cost associated with the installation of signage is detailed below. The approximate life span of signage is five years.

Suburb	Reserve (area ha.)	Signage (large/small/cost)
Springwood Katoomba	Sassafras Gully Bonnie Doon	2/10/\$3,200 4/1/\$1,650
Total Signage Costs		\$4,850

Monitoring

Activity	Costs
Sand Pad Monitoring Set Up (\$200 per site)	\$400
Remote surveillance cameras (to purchase 2 units outright)	\$3,400
Monitoring cost (labour-4 staff days per annum if collected monthly)	\$900
Total Monitoring Costs (Year 1)	\$4,700

In the subsequent 4 years the costs will be \$900 in wages and \$200 in materials per annum. The costs in staff labour may be reduced if interested members of the community can be engaged to participate in the monitoring of the sand pads.

Overall costs

The estimated cost of over 5 years will be \$16,050 with the initial capital outlay of \$11,650. Costs will include public exhibition and education \$3,000, signage \$4,850, Remote surveillance cameras and monitoring \$3400, \$400 in sand pad monitoring materials and \$900 in staff costs. Ongoing monitoring costs would be \$200 in materials and \$900 in staff time per annum for four years.

The establishment of WPAs will require the reallocation of resources away from existing high-priority bushland management programs. Funds will be reallocated to commence monitoring in the 2011/12 financial year without significant impact on existing programs. The likelihood of sourcing external grant funding is not considered high as such programs including on-going maintenance costs are not considered a high priority by funding bodies.

Further Reading

NSW Companion Animals Act 1998

BMCC Companion Animals Management Plan (Cats and Dogs) 2011-2014

BMCC Wildlife Protection Area Policy

Survey results from the online survey on community attitudes to companion animal regulation, feral animal control and wildlife protection April 2011

Council Report: Wildlife Management Areas, Item 15, Looking After the Environment, Ordinary Meeting, 31.01.12