

Parks and Visitor Services Strategy 2007 – 2011



“ Before nature-based recreation or tourism ventures can be developed, it is imperative to understand nature and manage ecological sustainability. If we do not, we risk losing our natural attractions” (Peter Sharp, Director, Parks and Visitor Services, Department of Environment and Conservation)

DEC's vision and objectives

More than 25.5 million hectares of the State's public conservation and forest estate is managed by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) on behalf of the people of Western Australia. Natural and cultural areas are protected for future generations to enjoy as part of DEC's vision to have a healthy, diverse and well-managed WA environment.

Working with the community, we will ensure that WA's environment is valued, protected and conserved for its intrinsic value and for the appreciation and benefit of present and future generations.

The PVS strategy outlines the framework for DEC to provide recreation and tourism opportunities, services and facilities on the public conservation and forest estate.

It describes the focus of DEC's Parks and Visitor Services program and articulates a number of key focus areas or principles and strategic actions in relation to managing natural areas for public use. It also proposes some ways of measuring the department's effectiveness and efficiency in delivering recreation and tourism services and facilities, and the effect recreation and tourism has on the natural environment.

This strategy is set against the backdrop of DEC's Corporate Plan. DEC works to achieve its vision by employing the following strategic directions, objectives and strategies:

Conserving biodiversity: To protect, conserve and, where necessary and possible, restore Western Australia's biodiversity.

Managing natural resources and promoting sustainable practices: To protect, manage and, where necessary and possible, restore Western Australia's natural resources, including land, water and air, and promote the adoption of environmentally sustainable practices in the community, industry and government.

Leading climate change actions: To provide leadership in the development and implementation of strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and adaptation of initiatives to reduce the impact of climate change for Western Australia.

Creating a world-class parks system: To generate environmental, social cultural and economic benefits through the further development of a world class parks system in terms of ecosystem management and visitor facilities and services.

Implementing sustainable forest management: To generate social, economic and cultural benefits from forests while sustaining their biodiversity, health, vitality and productive capacity.

Preventing pollution and remediating contamination: To protect the environment, and people's health and amenity, by ensuring discharges meet approved criteria and contaminated sites are appropriately remediated.

Maintaining community involvement and support: To develop community awareness and appreciation of the State's natural environment and biodiversity and promote community involvement in and support for its protection and conservation.

Improving the way we do business: To foster a positive work culture of trust, continuous improvement and anticipation of environment and conservation issues and customer needs, and deliver core business activities in the most effective and efficient manner.

DEC's Corporate Plan 2007–2009 can be downloaded from the 'About Us' section of NatureBase at www.naturebase.net.



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Introduction

This strategy provides a framework for managing nature-based tourism and recreation to protect natural areas. Successfully achieving the conservation and maintenance of natural values and ecological processes while enabling the public to use and enjoy these values is a challenge which continues to confront natural area planners and managers worldwide.

DEC is a member of the IUCN (the World Conservation Union) and plays a significant role in the World Commission on Protected Areas, enabling it to keep abreast of trends and developments in global nature-based tourism.

DEC exchanges information with other protected area management agencies and encourages staff members to increase their links to and communication with international colleagues and organisations to gain a greater community involvement.

Managing the estate

During 2005–2006 more than 11.8 million visits were made to areas in the conservation and forest estate managed by DEC. The reason for such significant human interest is simple: DEC manages some of the most outstanding natural estate in WA, an area of more than 25.5 million hectares, protecting unique landscapes, geological formations, plants, animals and cultural sites.

Conserving these lands and waters for future generations, and managing them for use by the present one, is a process further complicated by the rising cost of providing services and facilities, and of managing and protecting these areas.

This strategy provides a framework for the department's staff to approach the recreation and tourism challenges of the future.



Achievements

DEC's balanced and innovative approach to providing recreation and tourism opportunities in natural areas has earned it wide recognition and community support in the past two decades.

It is the single largest manager of WA's nature-based recreation and tourism areas and facilities, and a key contributor to the leisure industry.

Its recreation developments, tourist attractions, visitor activity programs and management and maintenance operations contribute to the physical, social and economic wellbeing of visitors to our parks, reserves and State forests.

Providing sustainable and high quality nature-based tourism and recreation opportunities is an important way of helping the community increase its understanding of and support for biodiversity conservation initiatives.

The strategy will build on the department's achievements of the past two decades. These include:

- catering for an increase from 2.5 million to nearly 12 million visits to DEC-managed areas since 1985,
- providing and managing more than 1100 recreation areas across the State, many of which have been redeveloped and improved significantly in the past decade,
- the development of joint management arrangements to work with Aboriginal communities to help manage 'country',
- the creation of new facilities, several of which have already become icons of national and international note, such as the Bibbulmun Track, the Munda Biddi bike trail and the Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk,
- the creation and management of an effective network of regional parks in the greater Perth Metropolitan Region in partnership with the Department for Planning and Infrastructure and various local government authorities,
- the introduction and promotion of the Healthy Parks, Healthy People program in WA. This initiative, which was originated by Parks Victoria, is designed to encourage people to get out and enjoy themselves in parks and promotes the physical, mental and social benefits of spending time in nature,
- the development of a comprehensive policy statement and guidelines to guide recreation, tourism and visitor services,
- the preparation of management plans for terrestrial parks, reserves and other protected areas,
- the development and implementation of effective public participation and feedback processes,
- the creation of a highly successful community involvement (volunteer) program that has 4000 active volunteers who collectively contributed 469,000 hours of work in 2005–2006,
- the development of a highly effective partnership with WA's tertiary institutions which undertake environmental, social and economic research studies associated with managing the community's use and enjoyment of natural areas,
- the introduction of innovative field-based activity programs for visitors to DEC-managed parks and State forest areas, such as Nearer to Nature and the Perth Hills National Parks Centre's Go Bush program,

- the production of informative, attractive and keenly sought-after visitor publications,
- support for various major recreation events such as Rally Australia, the Avon Descent and the Bibbulmun Walk,
- the establishment and maintenance of effective relationships with national recreational ethics and environmental care initiatives such as Leave No Trace and special interest groups such as the WA Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs and Track Care WA,
- the creation of a Statewide visitor data collection and visitor satisfaction survey program,
- the development of a web-based Recreation and Tourism Information System (RATIS) that is accessible to all of the department's regions and districts,
- setting up effective partnerships with the commercial tourism sector including more than 370 commercial tour operators who now operate on the public conservation and forest estate,
- the introduction of revenue-generating programs largely based on the 'user pays' principle,
- the introduction of major commercial leases involving both a financial return and the management of visitor facilities and services,
- developing design and construction standards for departmental signs, recreational structures and facilities which have been widely adopted by other State and local authorities, and
- the development of accredited in-service training programs in recreation planning and management, visitor communications and interpretation, visitor risk management and project management, and the training of department staff in these subject areas.

Two of our protected areas (Shark Bay and Purnululu National Park) have been designated as World Heritage Areas (WHA). Cape Range National Park and the Ningaloo Marine Park are in the process of being nominated for WHA status while another park (Fitzgerald River National Park) forms part of the UNESCO International Biosphere Reserve system. DEC has also received State, national and international awards for its nature-based recreation and tourism facilities and services in recent years and several staff have been singled out for recognition at a local, State and national level.



A vision for recreation and tourism

The parks, reserves and forests managed by DEC provide immense pleasure to many people. They also generate wealth through commercial recreation and tourism ventures. The department retains its recreation and tourism income, a financial arrangement that enhances its recreation and tourism programs which are enhanced by entering into partnerships with the community and industry. This contributes to resources and assists in developing additional recreation and tourism services and facilities. In particular, nature-based tourism is an exciting industry that has the potential to grow and contribute to managing the estate it uses.

DEC constantly searches for ways to improve its effectiveness while being more accountable to its partners, the State Government and the public in the way it uses its resources.

This strategy has a series of key focus areas to manage nature-based recreation and tourism. The objective of these focus areas is that they sustain the environment and meet visitors' needs, expectations and quality of visit.

The principles on which this strategy is based should ensure that the public not only enjoys and appreciates the natural environment but also helps to manage and protect it. The following pages outline how this can be achieved.



Focus 1

Ecological sustainability

Natural ecosystems are different in the way that they can cope with human use. Some environments are durable and can withstand extensive use; others are extremely sensitive to the impact of people and any disturbance.

The challenge facing nature-based tourism and recreation planners and managers is to control the type, scale, intensity, duration and frequency of human activity in ways that maintain the integrity and stability of the environment.

Each recreation opportunity and each developed tourism site has to be evaluated to determine its compatibility with DEC's conservation objectives. Acceptable levels of environmental change that can be sustained within a given ecosystem need to be identified.

DEC's ability to meet these challenges depends on its knowledge and understanding of the natural environment and how the various ecosystems respond to development and human use over time.

Before any new nature-based recreation or tourism ventures can be planned or developed, it is imperative to understand the natural environment. All new recreation developments and visitor facilities must recognise the need to manage for ecological sustainability. Failure to do so risks losing the attractions and features on which nature-based recreation and tourism depend.

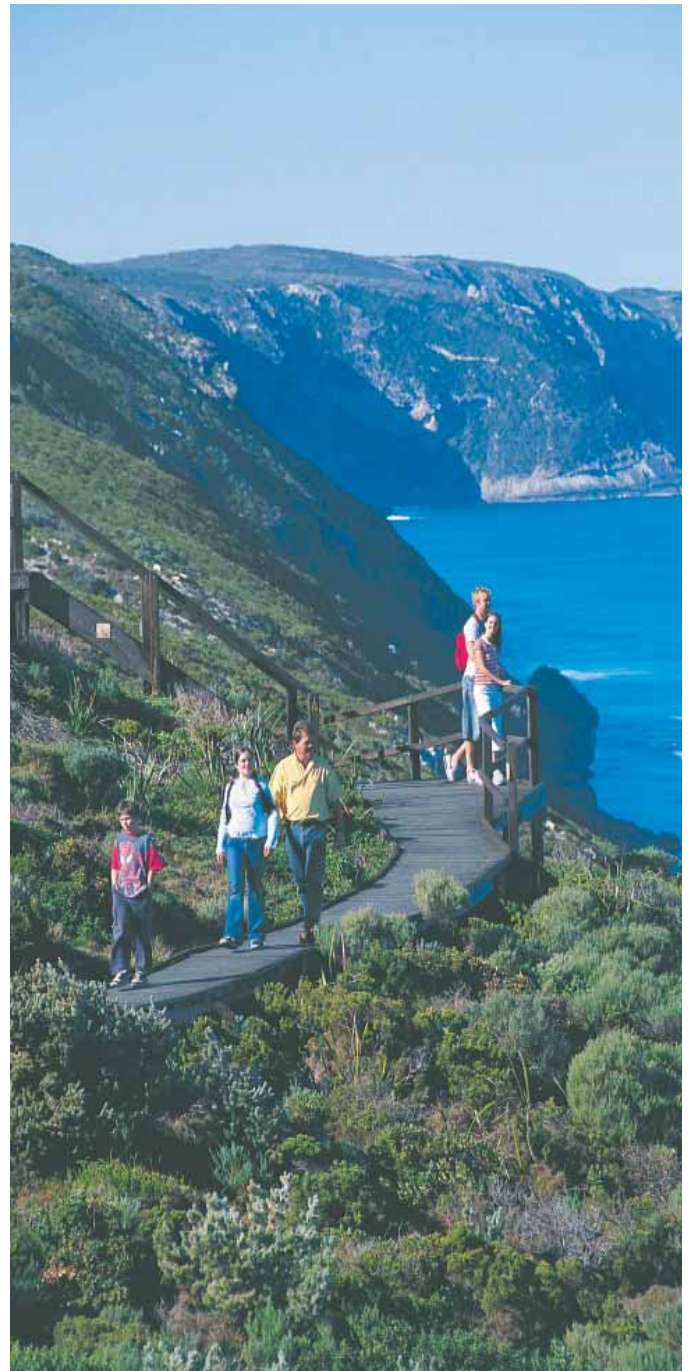
DEC's aim is to ensure that all of its recreation areas, facilities and services are planned, developed and managed so as to maintain in perpetuity or enhance the status of WA's natural environment.

This can be achieved by:

- evaluating recreation and tourism opportunities in terms of their compatibility with conservation and other management objectives,
- establishing management guidelines that recognise both the recreation and tourism potential and limits of available human, financial and ecological resources,
- training DEC staff and private tour operators in the principles of sustained management,
- assessing and planning recreation and tourism activities and facilities to minimise their impacts on nature conservation and aesthetic landscape values,
- implementing new developments according to approved management plans,
- informing the public on how the department's Parks and Visitor Services program and associated services contribute to nature conservation and other management objectives, and
- identifying acceptable levels of environmental change that can be sustained within a given ecosystem and taking direct action.

The effect recreation and tourism activities, services and facilities have on natural values can be measured by:

- the changes to flora, fauna, soils and other physical resource conditions over time in recreation areas, and
- the content of public comments about the condition of DEC's recreation areas, facilities and services and their aesthetic impacts.



Sense of place

Every natural environment has its own special characteristics or qualities that set it apart from other areas and make it distinctive. This is commonly referred to as a 'sense of place'. WA's diverse regional landscapes and climates, along with its Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture, make this State an interesting place in which to enjoy leisure.

Unfortunately, a tendency to copy and import both physical and social settings and experiences is often at the expense of the local environment and culture. To maintain its qualities, each area's environmental and cultural attributes need to be identified; and facilities, services and activities need to be designed to enable an area's distinctive attributes to be retained.

It is important in planning, developing and managing nature-based recreation and tourism services and facilities that those inherent qualities that are distinctive and contribute at a local scale to WA's attractiveness as a recreation and tourism destination are recognised and respected. The department's aim is to develop a management ethos that recognises, conserves and promotes those inherent qualities and cultural attributes.

This can be achieved by:

- establishing and maintaining a research program to identify, describe and assess an area's unique environmental and cultural qualities,
- instructing DEC staff, commercial operators and visitors on uniqueness and sense of place – what it is and how to assess, promote and conserve it,
- assessing those natural and cultural attributes that contribute to an area's sense of place before developing recreation and tourism services and facilities or undertaking management work,
- involving the local community in assessing, planning and managing development to ensure that local history and cultural aspects are incorporated, maintained or enhanced,
- designing facilities, activities and management actions that take into account and retain an area's distinctive social, cultural, physical and natural attributes, and
- recognising and retaining regional or local characteristics when providing nature-based recreation and tourism facilities and services.

The success in recognising, protecting and promoting an area's unique natural and cultural attributes can be measured by:

- the number of protected areas assessed as having unique qualities or attributes and the recognition and promotion of those qualities or attributes to the wider community, and
- the identification of any adverse changes to or loss of distinctive natural and cultural attributes.



Focus 3

Customer satisfaction

DEC is concerned with satisfying customer needs and desires for well-managed nature-based tourism and recreation opportunities.

In all the department's actions, customer satisfaction must be a prime aim and should receive the same degree of emphasis as good land management. Members of the public who take their recreation on the public conservation and forest estate will expect services that are timely, responsive and appropriate. This service can best be achieved by listening to and communicating with the public and by identifying and matching community needs with sustainable recreation resource opportunities.

Community awareness, understanding and support are vital to conserving and protecting natural areas. Such support can only be achieved by working with members of the public and developing an understanding and empathy for their needs. DEC will endeavour to research public patterns of use, preferences and expectations and use this information when evaluating, planning and managing new or improved nature-based tourism and recreation opportunities. In short, the department's aim is to deliver nature-based recreation and tourism services and facilities that achieve a high level of visitor satisfaction.

This can be achieved by:

- measuring and monitoring public needs, perceptions, expectations, attitudes and behaviour,
- adopting a customer-focus for all operations and providing customer service training for staff and volunteers interacting with the public,
- using research data to help develop policy and plan and design sites,
- training staff to collect, analyse and use social research information,
- giving priority to providing public information, security and safety,
- providing facilities and services that seek to satisfy customer requirements and are based on ecologically sustainable practices, and
- monitoring and evaluating public satisfaction and promptly investigating and addressing any dissatisfaction.

Public satisfaction with DEC's recreation and tourism services can be measured by:

- an increase in visitors to and use of recreation areas, services and programs,
- an increase in the number of letters of appreciation from visitors and conversely, a reduced level of complaints about DEC recreation areas, services and programs,
- increased return or repeat visits to DEC-managed areas, and
- responses to visitor satisfaction surveys.



This is achieved by:

- preparing and implementing visitor communication plans for DEC recreation areas that incorporate personal (public contact and activity programs) and static or non-personal interpretation techniques (signs, displays, productions and facilities) to reach the widest audience,
- training DEC staff, volunteers and private sector guides and operators to communicate with visitors and interpret recreation areas, and provide scientific and other information that adds to the value of the visitor experience,
- promoting and conducting interpretive activity programs in recreation areas with significant visitor numbers and where a demonstrated desire for such programs exists, and
- monitoring and evaluating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and actions of visitors to determine the effect communication has on enriching their experience, developing environmental knowledge and skills, minimising visitor impact and increasing support for DEC and its management objectives.

Enriching visitors' experiences

Technology and an increasingly urbanised society have distanced many people from the natural environment. Many people living in cities want to reconnect with nature and to develop an awareness and understanding and appreciation of the natural environment and ecological processes.

Nature-based recreation and tourism activities and stories about the natural and cultural environment are powerful vehicles in developing public awareness, appreciation, enjoyment and support for conservation. Memorable personal experiences enrich the lives of visitors to natural areas, help develop relationships between the visitor and the natural environment and enable DEC to gain support for its natural resource management program.

DEC enhances visitor experiences by effectively managing commercial and non-profit organisations and by contributing scientific and other specialist information to those providers. It is the department's aim to enrich visitor experiences and develop their relationships with WA's natural and cultural values.

Value-added experiences and appreciation of the natural and cultural environment can be measured by:

- the percentage of DEC-managed recreation areas which are interpreted for visitors,
- an increase in the number of participants in DEC visitor activity programs and accredited guided activities for visitors and tourists,
- the number of favourable comments or letters of appreciation from people who participate in DEC visitor activity programs, and
- the number of tour operators given training and information by DEC.



Focus 5

Spectrum of experiences

WA's national parks, nature reserves, marine reserves, public forest lands, regional parks and wildlife let people experience a diverse range of natural, cultural and outdoor activities. They range from experiences in remote and rugged natural areas that remain largely unknown and unexplored to activities in intensively managed and heavily used parks and recreation areas.

DEC maintains this wide spectrum of recreation and tourism experiences and avoids pressures to promote, upgrade access and develop all sites to the same degree. Nature-based recreation and tourism opportunities vary from site to site. DEC's aim is to provide and sustain nature-based recreation and tourism experiences consistent with its conservation and land management objectives.

This is achieved by:

- maintaining an up-to-date directory of nature-based recreation and tourism opportunities and experiences,
- developing a framework for classifying recreation opportunities and experiences that are compatible with other conservation and land management requirements,

- planning to provide the maximum range of suitable nature-based recreation and tourism experiences in each region through regional and/or 'grouped' area management plans,
- investigating the potential to source external funds and develop partnerships with other organisations to provide new and enhance existing experiences,
- prescribing licence conditions for commercial operations to ensure high standards and quality experiences and, where appropriate, provide tour operator training,
- marketing new and existing experiences and opportunities where appropriate, and
- seeking to complement recreation and tourism opportunities offered in areas outside the public conservation and forest estate.

Opportunities and experiences provided by DEC's Parks and Visitor Services can be measured by:

- including and introducing recreational activities as part of each newly-listed conservation area's future projects,
- the number of different types of nature-based recreation and tourism experiences provided on DEC-managed estate,
- the number of different recreational groups and special interests catered for, and
- the number of nature-based visitor experiences sought by the public that DEC is unable to provide.



Focus 6

Quality

Quality is one of DEC's most important Parks and Visitor Services objectives, whether it is in developing and maintaining facilities or in providing visitor services and programs. Determining the quality factors of a recreational facility, service or experience varies widely and is difficult to measure.

The department needs to continually seek to understand customer needs, perceptions, expectations and attitudes and provide high-quality nature-based recreation and tourism services. The department's aim is to provide and maintain nature-based recreation areas, facilities, programs and services to a consistently high standard.

This can be achieved by:

- planning, providing and maintaining quality visitor services and facilities throughout the public conservation and forest estate,
- seeking regular public feedback regarding the standard of DEC facilities, services and programs,
- training staff involved in the planning and management of Parks and Visitor Services and providing suitable training for others

involved in delivering services or constructing and maintaining facilities on the public conservation and forest estate,

- providing clearly defined standards for visitor services and facilities,
- adopting a strategic asset management approach and monitoring the longevity of facilities,
- evaluating services, facilities and visitor information to ensure they comply with set standards and meet public expectations and needs, and
- encouraging and assisting staff to liaise with other organisations that provide nature-based recreation and tourism facilities to ensure they are kept up to date with advances in the industry.

The standard of DEC's recreation areas, facilities and services can be measured by:

- the level of visitor satisfaction with facilities and services as determined from periodic surveys,
- comparing them with similar facilities and services in protected areas outside WA and in other areas of management such as local government reserves,
- the increased number of recorded visits to particular areas and to the public conservation and forest estate in general,
- the number of requests for improved services or changes to recreation areas via user surveys,
- an increase in the number of return visitors,
- an increase in the number of letters of appreciation or dissatisfaction about DEC-managed recreation areas, services and programs, and
- the number of awards presented in recognition of excellence.



Focus 7

Planning

Planning is essential if DEC is to continue to provide quality nature-based recreation and tourism opportunities on the public conservation and forest estate. Planning is the glue that combines values, constraints and opportunities into a workable solution. It ensures that decisions are made after considering:

- legislation such as the CALM Act and government directives such as the *Protecting our old-growth forests* policy,
- departmental policies and guidelines (for example, the 13 other focuses in this strategy),
- natural ecological and cultural values,
- the expectations of traditional owners and key stakeholders (for example visitors, local communities, advisory committees, DEC staff and other government agencies), and
- ongoing resource requirements.

Planning takes place at many levels, from regional management plans to site-specific plans for a recreation area. The components of successful planning remain the same: there needs to be a clear understanding of what is to be achieved, the key stakeholders must be involved, and all views and information must be considered in developing the plan.

This can be achieved by:

- ensuring that development of new services and facilities are consistent with legislation, government and departmental policies and guidelines and statutory management plans,
- involving traditional owners and key stakeholders at the relevant levels of planning, and providing feedback to those that have been involved,
- ensuring that planning decisions are made using the most up-to-date knowledge, and consider the key values and threats of the area/site, and
- monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the implementation of plans where appropriate.

Successful planning for providing recreation and tourism services and facilities can be measured by the:

- level of customer satisfaction of new recreation and tourism facilities and services;
- level of community and
- compliance of management plans with the audit requirements of the Conservation Commission of Western Australia.



Protecting heritage values

WA has a rich cultural heritage. Many visitors are searching for an ‘outback adventure’ or an experience of Aboriginal culture.

Cultural heritage is a blend of natural and social resources, historical features, artefacts, anthropological sites and contemporary cultural practices and features. Where any of these features occur on the public conservation and forest estate, they will be protected to retain valuable records of how current and previous generations, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, have used the land and its resources.

Land and conservation managers understand and appreciate cultural heritage features and work to enhance public enjoyment of them. It is one of the department’s aims to protect and manage features of cultural value and areas recognised as national and world heritage places, so that the public can enjoy and appreciate them.

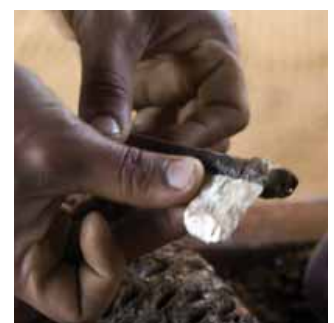
This can be achieved by:

- developing and implementing a DEC policy to protect and manage cultural, State, national and world heritage values,
- liaising with Aboriginal communities and organisations to identify and address impacts that proposed operations may have on places of cultural significance,
- seeking to develop predictive site-models that identify and avoid cultural sites in field operations,
- refining a register of non-Aboriginal cultural sites located on the public conservation and forest estate to complement the register of Aboriginal sites held by the Department of Indigenous Affairs,
- considering cultural heritage values when preparing management plans and operational procedures,

- liaising with the Department of Indigenous Affairs, Heritage Council of WA, the Australian Heritage Council, Local Government Association, Department of Environment and Water Resources and the WA Museum in regard to protecting and managing heritage values,
- applying the standards embodied in the Burra Charter in which the underlying principle is that all significant places should be conserved as an integral part of the good management of the place,
- where appropriate, and with the consent of traditional custodians, passing on knowledge of Aboriginal cultural values on the public conservation and forest estate to other staff, land users, visitors and the tourism industry,
- developing partnerships with local interest groups to assist in managing and interpreting heritage values, and
- asking Aboriginal people to prepare and deliver educational and interpretive cultural programs and materials dealing with Aboriginal heritage matters.

The protection and management of physical and social features of cultural value on the public conservation and forest estate can be measured by:

- the number of known significant cultural areas where steps have been taken to improve visitor understanding and appreciation,
- a reduction in the incidence of damage or interference to cultural sites,
- an increase in the number of Aboriginal people employed on the public conservation and forest estate and
- a level of visitor awareness, recognition and support of an area’s unique natural and cultural attributes as determined from periodic surveys.



Focus 9

Innovation

The needs, preferences and expectations of the recreation-seeking public are as dynamic and varied as the natural environment itself. Planning nature-based recreation and tourism programs and services must be forward-looking and capable of being modified, but without compromising conservation principles.

While DEC is wary of short-term fashion and fads in regard to recreation and tourism services and facilities, it welcomes the opportunity to be creative, flexible and innovative as it responds to change. Projects such as the award-winning Tree Top Walk at the Valley of the Giants and the internationally acclaimed Bibbulmun Track are testimony to the department's endeavours in this regard.

DEC's aim is to continue to develop a world-class park system, one which is not only based on sound conservation principles but is also forward-looking, innovative and responsive to changing customer needs.

This can be achieved by:

- encouraging an innovative corporate culture,
- developing an environment that fosters creativity through staff participation, information sharing, analysis of visitor needs, research and development, feedback and training,
- recognising and rewarding staff and DEC's nature-based tourism partners for their efforts and initiative in helping to plan and maintain a world class parks system,
- seeking, recognising and rewarding expertise, knowledge and skills in managing nature-based recreation and tourism facilities and services,
- sharing information internally and with other agencies, organisations and community groups, and
- encouraging staff to participate in study tours, conferences and training schemes where new and innovative ideas can be shared.

DEC's response to changing visitor needs can be measured by:

- the feedback obtained from periodic visitor satisfaction surveys,
- the number of technical innovations introduced that improve delivery of recreation services and facilities,
- the number of new or different activity programs introduced and the public's support of them,
- the number of visitor comments that appreciate DEC's positive response to their needs, and
- recognition through tourism or other awards.



Equity

The concept of 'equity' is part and parcel of the Australian ethos of ensuring a 'fair go' for everyone and is enshrined in Commonwealth and State legislation as well as departmental policies and guidelines.

Essentially these laws, policies and guidelines make it illegal to discriminate against anyone on the basis of their race, nationality, age, gender, religion, marital status or level of ability/disability.

In providing nature-based recreation and tourism facilities and services, the department is committed to providing equity of opportunity for the recreation-seeking public on DEC-managed areas. This can best be achieved by allowing the community to access and participate in the widest range of nature-based activities on the public conservation and forest estate, providing these pursuits do not:

- significantly diminish conservation and cultural heritage values; or
- impair other forms of use and/or the enjoyment of other users to an unreasonable extent.

Priority use may be allocated to specialised pursuits, events or specific user groups at sites or times that are suited to those activities. Both the costs and benefits associated with various uses must be evaluated when considering equity. DEC will not provide for activities on the conservation and forest estate that are not consistent with the purpose of vesting and which are better suited to other land tenures. The department's aim is to provide an economically feasible range of nature-based recreation opportunities compatible with conservation and land management objectives.

This can be achieved by:

- incorporating equity considerations into planning and decision-making processes involving community, commercial and conservation interests that affect the access and use of natural areas,
- liaising with individuals and groups with special needs such as people with disabilities or specialist recreation groups and providing suitable nature-based recreation opportunities and facilities consistent with conservation and other land management objectives,
- seeking to ensure, wherever possible, that nature-based tourism activities benefit local communities and contribute to natural and economic resource management and conservation,
- using revenue from visitor fees, commercial ventures, leases and other sources to manage natural areas and, where appropriate, to allow for increased participation by the private sector in providing nature-based recreation and tourism services and facilities, and
- liaising with other recreation providers to ensure that equity exists across the range of different land tenures (e.g. private, State and local government).

The department's response to the needs of particular groups can be measured by:

- the involvement or participation of interest groups in planning and managing DEC recreation areas,
- the broadest possible cultural and demographic use of recreation areas as identified through visitor satisfaction surveys,
- an assessment of feedback from user groups such as commercial operators, local communities, people with disabilities and other interest groups with special leisure needs, and
- the number of special requests from groups or individuals that have been implemented or resolved.



Focus 11

Partnerships

Business and the community can help DEC achieve its aims. The department needs partnerships with recreation groups, private and public organisations, community groups and Indigenous organisations to provide nature-based tourism and recreational facilities, visitor services and programs.

This can be achieved by:

- increasing the number of volunteers in the management of parks and visitor services, with appropriate training and recognition,
- formalising relationships and increasing contact with user groups and recreation associations such as the Friends of the Bibbulmun Track, the Climbers' Association of WA, the Rogaining Association, Track Care WA, the WA 4WD Association and Outdoors WA,
- developing joint ventures with Aboriginal corporations and other Indigenous and community groups,
- providing a clear role and recognition for advisory committees,
- promoting opportunities for other organisations to offer services and facilities,
- forging relationships with other government agencies involved in recreation or tourism or which have resources that can assist in planning and development or otherwise be used on the estate managed by the department (for example Tourism WA and the Department of Justice),
- training commercial tour operators and volunteers to deliver recreation and tourism services,
- seeking DEC membership and participation in appropriate bodies (for example, Australian Cave and Karst Management Association, regional tourism associations),
- training department personnel to manage commercial leases and licences or employing specialists to do so in conjunction with field staff,
- continuing to work with WA's major tertiary institutions in undertaking research into the environmental, social and economic aspects of providing and managing for human use and enjoyment of natural areas and actively supporting the CRC for Sustainable Tourism,
- recognising our many partners and reporting successes, and
- continuing to identify and provide opportunities for partners in innovative, contemporary fields such as the Healthy Parks, Healthy People initiative.

Support for DEC's Parks and Visitor Services program can be measured by:

- the number of volunteer hours contributed,
- the number of registered DEC volunteers and Bush Rangers,
- the success of new volunteer projects,
- the number of established DEC 'Advisory Committees' and 'Friends Groups',
- the number of external groups or committees with which the department has regular contact or representation and
- the number of joint ventures established.

The department also seeks to broaden the financial resource base for delivering recreation and tourism opportunities, facilities and services by:

- providing a directory of targeted, client-focused opportunities for commercial interests to help provide services and facilities,
- asking visitors to contribute to the cost of providing and maintaining facilities and services wherever appropriate and equitable (adoption of the 'user pays' principle),
- developing leasing and licensing partnerships that guarantee an economic return for the right to use the public conservation and forest estate for commercial gain,
- attracting private capital to develop facilities and services, and encouraging local community financial support as a priority wherever possible,
- seeking sponsors for identified activities,
- further developing DEC as one of the primary providers of opportunities for nature-based tourism and recreation, and developing more market opportunities (merchandising),
- actively marketing DEC and joint venture products, services and skills,
- ensuring an equitable return for DEC and joint venture products, services and skills, and
- seeking grants and other forms of sponsorship according to corporate priorities and needs.

The department's endeavours in attracting financial support for its Parks and Visitor Services program can be measured by:

- the percentage of the department's budget derived from partnerships, sponsorships, grants or other sources of external funding,
- the number of commercial leases and licences issued and the net return from these,
- the percentage of visitors to the public conservation and forest estate who pay entry fees and
- an increase in revenue per visit.



Staff skills and expertise

Resources for implementing Parks and Visitor Services priorities will always be finite, while new opportunities and ideas for visitor facilities, services and activities are, seemingly, infinite.

The department's most important resource is its staff members who have an exceptional amount of knowledge and experience. Core staff resources can be augmented by employing seasonal workers and contractors and by involving volunteers, adjoining landowners or commercial interests. However, the challenge of planning, managing and maintaining a world-class parks system and associated services will largely depend on staff members' skills, knowledge and experience which will be required to provide leadership and standards for the industry. The department's aim is to provide enough people to implement DEC's Parks and Visitor Services program and provide consistently high quality services and leadership.

This can be achieved by:

- auditing DEC staff skills and experience in nature-based recreation and tourism and assessing against Parks and Visitor Services priorities,

- developing a training program based on a needs analysis and the staff audit,
- providing opportunities for exchanges and work experience where this can benefit staff development and work performance,
- developing guidelines for recruiting or contracting specialist skills that cannot be found within existing DEC staff resources,
- where appropriate, looking for opportunities to augment core staff numbers with seasonal or contract workers, and recognising the potential of volunteers, neighbours and commercial partners to help deliver the Parks and Visitor Services priorities and programs,
- recognising and rewarding staff for their efforts and initiatives in delivering Parks and Visitor Services objectives,
- seeking appropriate recognition and reward for DEC's expertise, knowledge and skills,
- ensuring DEC remains a preferred employer among recreation and land management professionals, and
- ensuring DEC provides a safe working environment that is responsive to equal employment opportunities for all personnel.

The ability of DEC's staff to meet the output's planned priorities can be measured by:

- the amount of the Parks and Visitor Services budget spent on training and development,
- the number of Parks and Visitor Services staff pursuing further education,
- the number of active volunteers who assist DEC staff in the delivery, management and maintenance of sustainable Parks and Visitor Services opportunities and
- public recognition of DEC recreation and tourism achievements from positive media reports, nominations and awards.



Focus 13

Visitor safety

Providing nature-based recreation and tourism services and facilities in natural areas has significant responsibilities. Many outdoor environments that attract the public are also potentially dangerous. DEC has both a moral and legal responsibility to consider the personal safety and welfare of staff and visitors to lands and waters it manages so recreation and tourism programs, services and facilities must minimise the risk of accidents and injury. In doing so, the department needs to reduce the potential for personal injury and property damage in a way that does not diminish visitor use or enjoyment of an area.

This can be achieved by:

- application of the policy and guidelines on visitor risk management on the public conservation and forest estate and ensuring that department staff involved in the Parks and Visitor Services program are aware of this policy,
- developing and maintaining an up-to-date register of DEC managed recreation and tourism assets as a basis for preparing and implementing recreation site and facility maintenance programs,
- ensuring DEC operations staff, commercial operators and community support groups are trained in visitor risk management principles and procedures,
- maintaining an up-to-date incident reporting system throughout the department and ensuring DEC staff are familiar with reporting forms and procedures,
- ensuring DEC recreation facility developments comply with relevant design standards and specifications where applicable,
- carrying out periodic safety audits of DEC recreation areas and facilities,
- informing visitors to department-managed areas of risks and ways of avoiding them through brochures, signs and displays and other educational means, and
- promptly investigating reported visitor accidents and injuries on the public conservation and forest estate and rectifying any identified safety problems as soon as possible.

Success in implementing visitor safety measures can be measured by:

- a drop in the number and type of recorded accidents or injuries to visitors enjoying themselves on the public conservation and forest estate (per 100,000 visits or similar unit),
- a drop in the number of claims lodged against the department for negligence or otherwise failing in its duty of care to visitors that either results in damages being awarded or an out-of-court settlement being reached,
- the extent to which the department is able to minimise its public liability insurance premiums by adopting prudent visitor risk management practices and procedures, and
- comparison with protected area agencies elsewhere.



Accountability

The department's aim is to deliver services and facilities on its estate on time and within budget.

This can be achieved by:

- putting its construction agenda into priority order,
- where appropriate, advertising opportunities for the public to be involved in planning and managing recreation and tourism services and facilities,
- reporting the progress of the implementation of this strategy to the Conservation Commission of Western Australia and the Marine Parks and Reserves Authority,
- operating local revenue-generating activities according to business plans,
- providing regular briefings and reports to relevant advisory committees on implementing management plan recommendations and Parks and Visitor Services program priorities, and
- providing information on implementing this strategy for DEC's Annual Report.

The department's actions in meeting its Parks and Visitor Services objectives can be measured by the:

- evaluation of planned achievements against actual achievements, and
- evaluation of expenditure against estimated budget.



Implementation and review

Recreation and tourism facilities in WA's national parks, nature reserves, marine reserves, public forest lands, regional parks and other public lands will be introduced on schedule and will ultimately realise the department's vision for managing nature-based recreation, tourism and visitor services. This hinges on the work of regional, district and specialist branch staff.

The department's Corporate Executive will use the strategy to help determine priorities for allocating staff and financial resources. Competing demands will always exist for these scarce resources, so the challenge for Parks and Visitor Services leaders is to ensure that nature-based recreation and tourism achievements and priorities are recognised and that those achievements are based on this strategy.

Key performance indicators about the number of visits and visitor satisfaction are established for the Parks and Visitor Services program. These are measured each year and reported in the department's annual report. The process of setting priorities and evaluating performance annually will help ensure this strategy remains relevant to DEC and the leisure-seeking public.



