FITZGERALD RIVER NATIONAL PARK

DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Key Issues

Department of Conservation and Land Management

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The Park

Fitzgerald River National Park, about 328,026 ha, lies on the central south coast of Western Australia, 420 km south-east of Perth, between Bremer Bay and Hopetoun in the Shires of Jerramungup and Ravensthorpe. It is one of the largest and most significant national parks in southern Australia.

With proper management and education, Fitzgerald River National Park represents the last opportunity to maintain substantial parts of a large south coast national park largely undisturbed and essentially free of dieback.

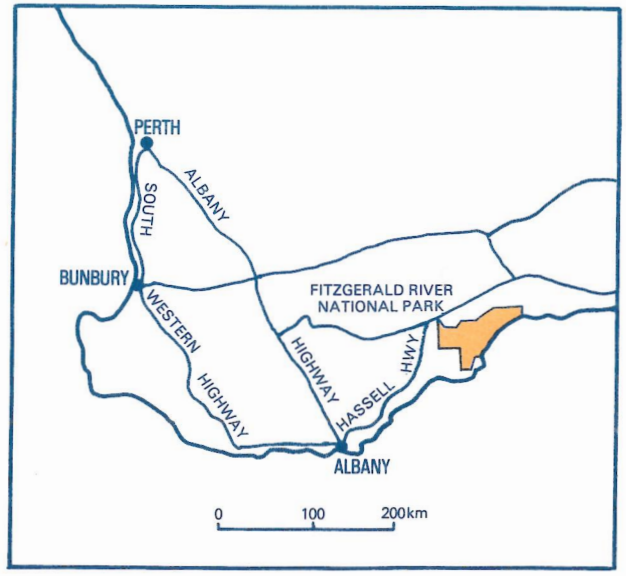
With 1748 species, it is one of the richest areas for plants in Western Australia. It contains 20% of the State's described species. About 75 of these are endemic (found nowhere else), and some 250 species are either rare or geographically restricted. The Barren Ranges have the highest concentration of endemic species.

The Park's fauna is richer than any other conservation area in the South-West. It has 184 bird, 22 native mammal, 12 frog and 41 reptile species. Several of these are declared rare or in need of special protection. The Park offers the best long-term survival

prospects in W.A. for the Ground Parrot and dibbler. It is the only conservation reserve with the heath rat and the largest reserve with tammar, red-tailed wambenger, woylie, western mouse, Western Bristlebird and Western Whipbird.

Because of its extremely high floral diversity, the Park is one of only two International Biosphere Reserves in W.A. There is strong community support for the Biosphere concept.

The Park's diverse landscapes hold great appeal. They include windswept and protected beaches, rugged sea-cliffs, the steep Barren Ranges, extensive plains and abrupt river gorges ending in inlets. Recreation opportunities include sightseeing, bushwalking, swimming, camping, fishing and nature study. The Park is also historically and archaeologically significant.



Management Concerns

The greatest management concern in Fitzgerald River National Park is dieback disease caused by a soil fungus. At present infection is confined to three outbreaks, and it is vital to contain it to these areas. Much of the regional flora is highly susceptible to dieback infection, especially as summer rainfall provides warm, moist conditions that favour its survival and spread. Dieback can be introduced and spread in infected moist soil clinging to vehicles.

The future of the rare fauna is also a management concern. Some of these species have specific habitat requirements, such as periods greater than 15 years between fires and protection from introduced predators, such as foxes.

Many parts of the Park, especially the coast, which is being increasingly used for fishing, camping and recreation, are fragile and cannot support the existing levels of use without environmental damage. These areas are likely to degrade further unless they are actively managed.

Management Goals

The principal management goal for Fitzgerald River National Park is to conserve all flora and fauna, particularly the species that are rare or in need of special protection. It is also vital to conserve the Park's landscapes.

The other important goal is to fulfil the recreation needs of visitors to the extent that they are compatible with flora, fauna and landscape conservation.

Management Recommendations

International Biosphere Reserve Status

- support the locally-based Fitzgerald Biosphere Project Committee.
- recognise the whole of the Park as the "core" of the Fitzgerald Biosphere Reserve. This means minimal human interference.

Management Zones

Four management zones have been designated in the National Park: special conservation (rare fauna), wilderness, natural environment and recreation.

The **special conservation zone** covers the northern part of the Park, where most rare fauna species are concentrated. Vehicle access through this zone is by Hamersley and Pabelup Drives. There is usually no other motorised access, except for research and management. The proposed level of management is high.

The **natural environment zone** covers much of the Park. Access is on designated 4WD tracks or on foot. Non-motorised access is preferred. The proposed level of management is low to moderate.

The **wilderness zone** is at the centre of the Park and access is non-motorised. The proposed level of management is low.

The **recreation zone** is based on proposed 2WD roads and recreation sites, and includes almost all of the Park's popular visitor destinations. Access is by vehicle or on foot and the proposed level of management is moderate to high.

Conservation

Rare Flora

- protect priority species by surveying, mapping and monitoring populations and protecting them from damaging disturbance.
- concentrate protective management and research on the Barren Ranges.

Rare Fauna

- research distribution, habitat requirements, life history characteristics and effects of fire regimes and predation on rare mammals, birds and reptiles.
- concentrate research effort on the northern part of the Park.
- develop and implement management programs to protect and enhance rare fauna habitats.

Disease

- map the current dieback distribution and likely susceptibility of the vegetation. Use these maps as the basis for management activities.
- evaluate the consequences of introducing dieback before approving any development or management actions in the Park.
- exclude vehicles from the Dempster and "Lake Nameless" catchments, to prevent dieback introduction and spread.
- monitor known infections, and continue to survey for further infections.
- request visitors to clean soil and mud from vehicles and shoes before entering the Park.
- continue to train rangers and other Park workers on dieback control and enforce such controls in day-to-day work practices.
- disseminate information widely to increase community awareness of dieback.

Fire

- provide a combination of burnt buffers, and areas from which planned fire is excluded for ecological reasons. Buffers should first be established on Park boundaries, then the southern edge of the rare fauna zone. Internal buffers should follow.
- aim to contain wildfires within a cell defined by buffers.
- ensure all strategies take full account of dieback risks.

- only use direct attack in the wilderness and natural environment zones as a last resort.
- continue mutual aid, as part of the local community, in carrying out burns and fire suppression.

Recreation

Access

- retain public access to most parts of the Park consistent with the need to control dieback.
- assess all roads, tracks and walk trails to determine realignments or treatments to minimise dieback risk. Carry out required works.
- provide two 2WD all-weather loop roads through the Park (Hamersley and Pabelup Drives) and a number of 2WD spur roads to the coast and other features.
- provide a number of 4WD tracks (Fitzgerald Inlet, Quoin Head, Hamersley Dunes/Edwards Point and Moir Track). Close after rain to reduce dieback risk.
- provide a range of walk trails. For safety, walkers to more remote areas are encouraged to self-register. Close Mid Mt Barren, Woolbernup Hill and Thumb Peak to all access, including walking, to keep these peaks free of dieback.
- retain provision for closure, realignment or treatment of roads, tracks, walk trails or areas if dieback is introduced.

- keep Trigalow, part of Point Charles Bay, Fitzgerald and Hamersley Beaches open to 4WDs. All other beaches will stay closed to vehicles and foot access will be encouraged. Use of beaches by 4WD vehicles should be re-assessed if impacts on wildlife, safety risks or damage to foredunes becomes unacceptable.
- retain a minimum number of management-only tracks that can only be used in dry soil conditions in management vehicles from which all soil has been removed.

Recreation Sites

- continue to provide a number of day use parking areas near attractions such as beaches and walk trails.
- provide a range of campsites for a variety of users:

  2WD accessible camping - St Marys, Gordon Inlet (2 sites), Paperbark Flat at the southern end of Pabelup Drive, Hamersley Inlet reserve (managed by the Shire of Ravensthorpe), Four Mile and Twertup.

  4WD-accessible camping: Fitzgerald Inlet, Hamersley River crossing and Hamersley dunes.

  foot-access-only camping: Little Beach, McCullock's Crossing, "Small Boondalup" River, Doggers Swamp and the eastern end of Fitzgerald Beach.

  vehicle-based group camping: Wellstead Flats, Kybulup Pool and Hamersley Drive.

- close camping sites behind Trigelow Beach, at Point Charles, Edwards Point and West Hamersley because of erosion and degradation.
- change the use of Quoin Head, Myles and Point Ann from camping and day use to day use. These sites are highly degraded and appear to be unable to sustain the pressures of camping in the longer term. Provide attractive camping alternatives.

Education

- provide a range of brochures and publications about the Park, keep information bays up-to-date, and provide theme-based information displays at key sites. Information on dieback should be a priority.
- run seasonal interpretive programs.
- support the use of Twertup by the FRNP Association.

Research and Monitoring

- establish a CALM Research Station to service the northern part of the Park. Jacup is a potential site.
- implement an integrated survey, research and monitoring program which addresses short and long term information needs.

Management Priorities

The six highest priorities are listed in order of importance:

- realigning or treating particular roads, tracks and walk trails designated in this plan to reduce dieback risks.
- determining practical procedures to control dieback and protect the Park's flora, particularly priority species.
- establishing an efficient system of fire buffers.
- changing Pt Ann, Mylies and Quoin Head from camping and day use to day use only and providing attractive alternatives.
- providing up-to-date Park publications, displays and signs.
- conducting research into the habitat requirements of the Ground Parrot, Western Bristlebird and heath rat.