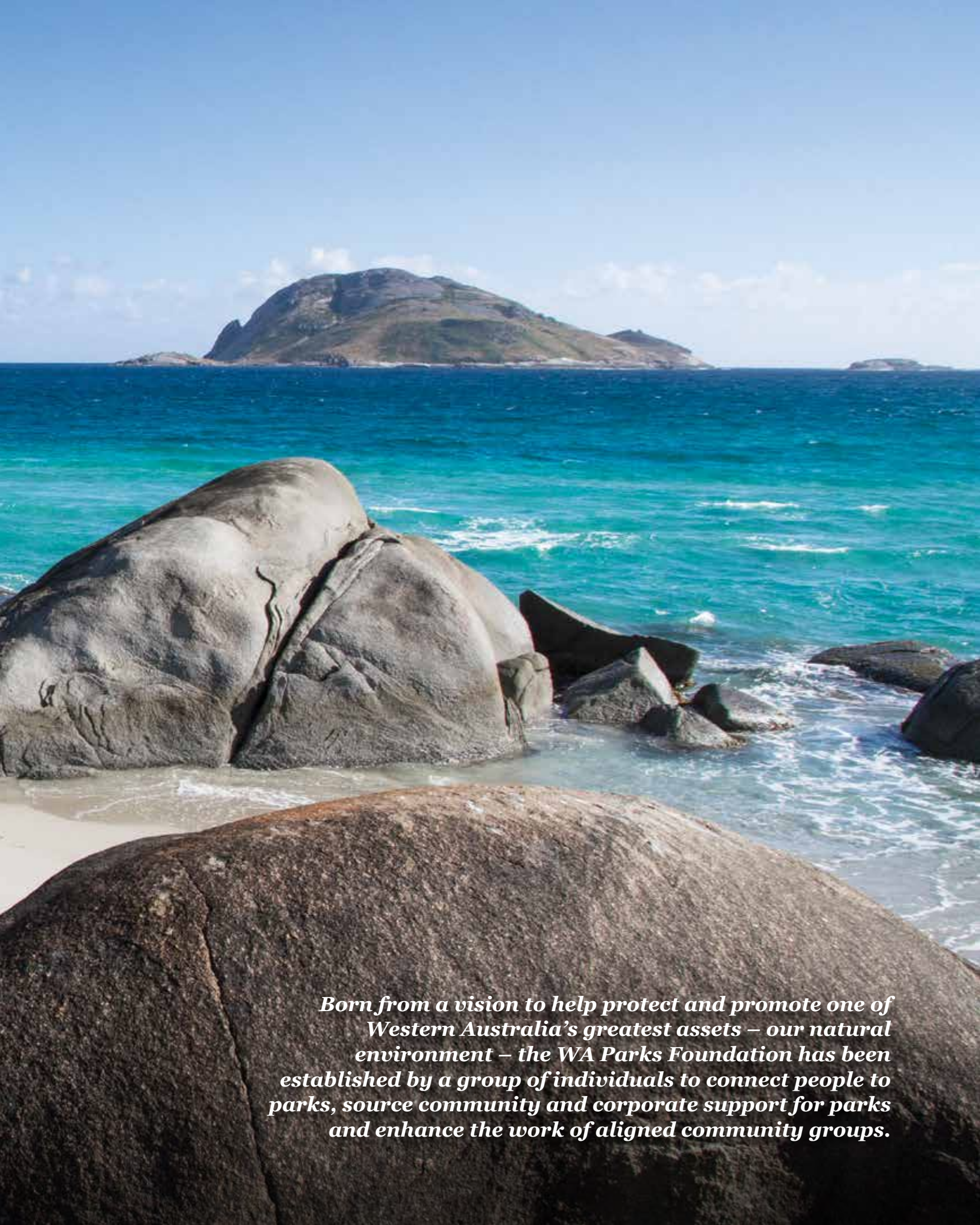


Connecting people to parks

by Caris Bailey and Lauren Emmerson





Born from a vision to help protect and promote one of Western Australia's greatest assets – our natural environment – the WA Parks Foundation has been established by a group of individuals to connect people to parks, source community and corporate support for parks and enhance the work of aligned community groups.



Summer holidays by the beach, weekends down south and camping by the gorges are some of the experiences that define us as Western Australians and become highlights for visitors. Many of these experiences happen in Western Australia's vast and spectacular parks network, which boasts three World Heritage areas and Australia's only internationally recognised biodiversity hotspot.

This network of conservation lands and waters covers more than 29 million hectares – an area nearly five million hectares bigger than Victoria – and attracts nearly 20 million visits a year. Visitors come from the other side of the world for a major adventure, or live nearby and take in the natural areas as part of their daily lives. Others volunteer their time (see also 'Caring for our rivers' on page 28) to help protect the natural environment while, for some, these areas are a source of income through eco-tourism and regional economies. Many

locals and visitors identify with having a deep spiritual connection to the State's lands and waters and some areas provide cultural insights. These lands are also sacred to Aboriginal people who have lived there for up to 40,000 years. Despite their diverse origins and motivations, the users of these natural areas are bonded by the significant benefits brought by spending time in nature and the opportunity to enjoy WA's unique plants and animals.

A BIG IDEA FOR A BIG JOB

Over the past decade, the conservation estate has increased by 2.8 million hectares, to more than 29 million hectares in total, the number of visits has risen from 11.8 million to 19.7 million, while the number of national park rangers went from 104 to 119.

The concept for the WA Parks Foundation was developed to support the management of these areas. It is not the intention of the foundation

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Main The stunning D'Entrecasteaux National Park is one of WA's most popular areas.

Photo – Janine Guenther

Above Elephant Rocks, William Bay National Park.

Photo – David Bettini

to replace Government funding, nor replace the work currently being carried out by 'friends of' groups, but to add to what's being done, especially to connect people to parks and involve people in conservation. Similar foundations have operated around Australia and the world for decades with the first, the US National Parks Foundation, established in 1967. This organisation enriches America's national parks and programs through private support and has generated (US\$42 million per annum) in recent

“... the users of these natural areas are bonded by the significant benefits brought by spending time in nature and the opportunity to enjoy WA’s unique plants and animals.”



Left Research shows the benefits of spending time in nature, in a variety of weather conditions.
Photo – Wendy Elby

Above Her Excellency The Honourable Kerry Sanderson AC, Kanyana founder June Butcher and ‘Henry’ at the launch of the WA Parks Foundation.

Photo – Parks and Wildlife

years. Locally, organisations such as the Friends of Kings Park and the Bibbulmun Track Foundation have demonstrated how much can be achieved by the efforts of committed individuals, greatly enhancing the work of statutory bodies managing particular areas.

TAILOR MADE

The WA Parks Foundation is a big idea, extending the concept of a ‘friends of group’ to all WA parks. It has been established as a not-for-profit organisation with a board, and staff that will include paid members and volunteers. The group is led by Her Excellency The Honourable Kerry Sanderson AC, the Governor of Western Australia.

The foundation’s aim is to provide a community voice to promote the benefits of spending time in parks, to raise money for projects and programs that wouldn’t otherwise be possible, to recruit volunteers and to facilitate collaborations. “Parks” in its title has been adopted to

mean all lands and waters set aside for conservation of the natural environment.

An initial investment of \$250,000 and in-kind support was committed by supporters, including Bellanhouse Legal, key2creative, Nature Play WA, Government House, WA Tourism Council, Marketforce, FACET, Bankwest and the Department of Parks and Wildlife, during the start-up phase. Foundation members are now being sought and fundraising activities such as events and the sale of merchandise will be carried out to support the organisation. Going forward, the foundation’s primary revenue source will be donations, grants and partnerships.

DOWN TO BUSINESS

A strategic plan has been prepared, which breaks down the foundation’s priorities into three target areas – protecting our parks; connecting people to parks; and doing more through collaboration.



Discover more about the WA Parks Foundation

Scan this QR code or visit Parks and Wildlife’s ‘LANDSCOPE’ playlist on YouTube.



The WA Parks Foundation will focus its efforts on parks in Perth’s peri-urban area, where the greatest numbers of visits are made and parks are therefore under the greatest pressure. Perth parks have a unique position in the State’s conservation estate, they represent less than three per cent of the area of the whole conservation estate, and are located on the doorstep of 79 per cent of the State’s total population. Perhaps not surprisingly, 45 per cent of the visits recorded across all WA parks in 2014–15 were made to Perth’s parks.



Above Mitchell River National Park.
Photo – Colin Ingram/Parks and Wildlife



Left Visitors connect to nature in a range of iconic places such as at Nature’s Window, Kalbarri National Park.
Photo – Marc Russo

Below left Mountain biking is an increasingly popular pastime in WA parks, including at Bramley National Park near Margaret River.
Photo – Erik Sandstrom



Subject to funding, one of the foundation’s first projects will be in WA’s first national park – John Forrest National Park. The proposed John Forrest renewal project will be the foundation’s template for other ventures working with Parks and Wildlife, non-government organisations and sponsors to provide a raft of improvements for conservation and recreation. The plan is to raise funds and enlist volunteers to renew and develop walk and cycle trails, including 20–30 kilometres of mountain bike trails, potentially a new lookout, and an upgrade to the picnic area.

Walyunga National Park has also been identified as a priority for upgrades that will showcase its Aboriginal values. New walking tracks and associated signage are planned to guide visitors through the area and share Aboriginal stories. Extra resources will be used to control weeds, which have developed since a bushfire burnt through the area in 2013.

Another aim is to support the roll-out of new interpretation nodes in the



Swan Canning Riverpark. Visual, audio and artistic mediums are being used together to deliver stories to help visitors learn about and appreciate the Nyoongar cultural values of the area (see also 'River Journeys', *LANDSCOPE*, Autumn 2016). The foundation is also keen to use technology to make it easier for people to access information, and to plan and enjoy their park experience. One proposed project is the development of digital maps to help visitors maximise technology to navigate around parks across the State, as well as read comments from other visitors.

The foundation will also focus efforts on the Pilbara, where improvement opportunities have been identified. Indeed, as the foundation grows, all areas of the State will benefit.

ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

The WA Parks Foundation has developed a memoranda of understanding with Parks and Wildlife, Nature Play WA and Conservation Volunteers Australia.

A number of Park Ambassadors, including Fremantle Football Club legend Nat Fyfe, and local Nyoongar man and environmental engineer Ezra Jacob-Smith (see his 'Guest column' on page 7) have also come on board to help increase awareness of our unique parks.

These developments are the first steps towards the WA Parks Foundation making a real difference in ensuring all Western Australians and visitors enjoy our parks now and into the future.

Above It is planned that John Forrest National Park will be the focus of the WA Park's Foundation's early work.

Photo – Jane van der Meer/Parks and Wildlife

Caris Bailey was involved in establishing the WA Parks Foundation after working with Parks and Wildlife and its predecessors for many years.

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For more information about the WA Parks Foundation visit www.ourparks.com.au. Or you can follow the foundation on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (@OurWAParks).

How to get involved

Applying to join the WA Parks Foundation is easy. Visit www.ourwaparks.com.au to fill out the membership application.

Individuals and businesses can contribute through:

- donations (the foundation is seeking tax-deductibility status – subscribe to their newsletter or follow them on social media to find out when this has been achieved)
- legacy bequests
- in-kind support by providing services and materials
- time and skills by working as a volunteer, or as a team of volunteers, to deliver projects funded by the foundation.

Corporate donors may elect to sponsor particular projects or a series of programs, or become one of the foundation's supporting partners, or to engage in corporate volunteering.



WA PARKS
FOUNDATION

Western Australia is known around the world for the great variety of its plant and animal life. The honey possum and Baxter's banksia, both species native to the State, were chosen for the foundation's logo to showcase WA's rich biodiversity and the connections found in nature.

The theme of connections runs through the WA Parks foundation's goals, including people's connection to the natural environment and the foundation's connection with its partners, collaborators and the community.