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Protecting the nature of the Kimberley wins Premier's Award

The visionary work underway as part of the *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy's* Landscape Conservation Initiative has won a prestigious Premier's Award in the Environment category.



Landscape Conservation Initiative Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy

The Premier's Awards for Excellence in Public Sector Management were instituted in 1996 to recognise and reward the most outstanding initiatives and the most extraordinary achievements for the State's public sector.

The Landscape Conservation Initiative was established in 2011 to retain and enhance the high biodiversity and landscape values in the north Kimberley.

The largest conservation project ever undertaken in Western Australia, it is being implemented by Parks and Wildlife with traditional owners, government agencies, non-government organisations and pastoralists to protect biodiversity values across property boundaries in the north and central Kimberley.

The project manages fire, feral animals and invasive plants across more than 65,000km² of pastoral properties, Aboriginal Lands Trust reserves, private conservation areas and parks and reserves managed by Parks and Wildlife.

Landscape Conservation Initiative program coordinator Amanda Moncrieff said it was fantastic to have the project recognised with such a high-profile award.

"It's been a big focus not only for the regional staff in the Kimberley, but for staff across the State, and this award is a credit to their hard work, dedication and professionalism in implementing operations in incredible yet often remote and challenging field conditions," she said.

"I would also like to acknowledge our partners, the Australian Wildlife Conservancy and the Kimberley Land Council, who in collaboration with Parks and Wildlife have implemented significant fire management programs across the Kimberley.

"Parks and Wildlife have worked with these groups over the last three years to plan and implement many feral animal and weed control projects, both on and off land managed by the department."

To find out more about the winners and finalists of the awards please see www.publicsector.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/premiers_awards_2014.pdf



Above: Quade Martin with a native mouse.
Photo – Ben Corey/Parks and Wildlife



Eighty Mile Beach Marine Park plan released

The future of one of the Kimberley's most important marine parks is secure with the release of the management plan for Eighty Mile Beach Marine Park.



Above: Nyangumarta traditional owners overlooking coastal waters of the marine park. Photo – Chriss Nutt/Parks and Wildlife.

Right: Flatback turtle. Photo – Dave and Fiona Harvey/Naturalist Volunteers



The plan is available from the Parks and Wildlife website at www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/management/marine

Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the plan ensured that Eighty Mile Beach Marine Park would be a jointly managed place for marine turtles, shorebirds and other wildlife to breed and thrive, and where Aboriginal culture and heritage were recognised and conserved.

“Covering more than 200,000ha, the marine park is the 13th to be established in WA and the second park to be reserved under the *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy*,” he said.

“Importantly, it is the first marine park in the State to include special purpose zones for the recognition and protection of sites of cultural significance.

“It will be jointly managed with the Nyangumarta, Ngarla and Karajarri traditional owners, with Ngarla and Nyangumarta traditional owners today signing joint management agreements for the park with the Department of Parks and Wildlife.”

The joint management agreements with the Ngarla and Nyangumarta native title holders have been developed in parallel with Indigenous Land Use Agreements that will provide for the establishment of the intertidal portions of the park and a range of benefits for traditional owners including funding for joint management to look after their land and sea country, employment as Parks and Wildlife officers and other training and fee-for-service opportunities.

The Minister said Eighty Mile Beach Marine Park was an extensive stretch of remote and remarkable coastal country located between

Port Hedland and Broome, stretching for some 220km from Cape Missiessy to Cape Keraudren.

“The marine park includes Eighty Mile Beach, Cape Keraudren and the diverse marine environments west of Cape Keraudren to Mulla Mulla Down Creek,” he said.

“It is one of the world’s most important feeding grounds for migratory shorebirds and a major nesting site for flatback turtles, which are only found in northern Australia.

“The park provides for nature-based recreation and tourism, and recreational and commercial fishing, which occur within the distinctive seascapes of the marine park and in the adjoining landscape.”

The Minister said the plan included a zoning scheme to meet the range of uses for the park including conservation, cultural heritage, public enjoyment, recreational and commercial uses, nature appreciation and scientific study.

- The \$81.5 million *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy* is a bold plan to conserve the region’s natural and cultural values.
- It provides opportunities for Aboriginal involvement and employment in land management, and promotes nature and culture-based tourism.
- The centrepiece of the strategy is the creation of the Kimberley Wilderness Parks, one of the most significant environmental initiatives in Western Australia’s history.
- It involves many partners in the community, industry and in government and non-government organisations.



Monitoring toads on Adolphus

Surveys underway on Adolphus Island, in the Ord River north of Wyndham, will help Parks and Wildlife assess and manage the effects of cane toads on native wildlife.



The island was recently colonised by cane toads that probably rafted there on floodwaters. The Kimberley Islands Survey Program identified this island as a high priority for conservation due to its population of the endangered northern quoll (*Dasyurus hallucatus*) and the yellow-spotted monitor (*Varanus panoptes*). Both species are susceptible to cane toad poisoning.

To map the distribution of quolls across the island and identify possible sites to investigate the use of taste aversion baits (developed to 'teach' quolls not to eat toads), Parks and Wildlife principal research scientist David Pearson, cane toad program leader Corrin Everitt and *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy* operations officer Richard Tunnicliffe hiked the 10km island in June 2014, traversing both rugged hilly terrain and extensive exposed salt flats.

Toads were found in all creeklines the team investigated, even occupying burrows up to 15m away from small pools of water. The team also discovered a native frog species and several plant species not previously recorded on the island. Unfortunately, only a few quoll tracks and scats were observed.

In September the team revisited the island to search for and trap quolls, install remote cameras (to detect quolls and toads) and to find where toads were surviving during the dry season. While no quolls were trapped, tracks and scats of quolls were found in a number of locations.

The team did find a number of species known to suffer population declines when toads arrive, including northern blue tongues (*Tiliqua scincoides intermedia*) and the black whip snake, along with numerous active yellow-spotted monitor burrows.

No live cane toads were found, but it is likely they were waiting out the dry conditions deep in burrows, until the start of the wet season rains.

There was further work in October and November to investigate the ages and sizes of toads able to persist on the island, assess control options, conduct further trapping surveys for quolls and recover the remote camera images.

Cane toad monitoring and management is an important part of the *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy*, allowing Parks and Wildlife to detect any incursions of cane toads onto the islands and ensure that the island biodiversity is protected.

Above: Salt flats at Adolphus Island.
Photo – Corinn Everitt/Parks and Wildlife

Maintaining the Bachsten Track to Munja



Above top: Walcott Inlet (Munja). *Photo – Parks and Wildlife*

Above: Traditional owner Laurie Charles with culturally significant Wanjina paintings along the Bachsten Track.
Photo – Parks and Wildlife

Stretching from Mt Elizabeth Station off the Gibb River Road west towards Walcott Inlet (Munja), the Bachsten Track is one of the most remote outback track experiences an intrepid traveller can encounter, even by vast Kimberley standards!

Walcott Inlet extends for about 30km from Collier Bay and is up to 11km wide. Its huge tides of around 11m result in spectacular tidal currents and whirlpools. The Isdell, Calder and Charnley rivers flow into the inlet and have carved spectacular gorges in the sandstone escarpments.

The rivers and creeks are fringed by paperbarks and river gums, towering over pandanus and wattle thickets. Lagoons in the watercourses are crowded with waterbirds and aquatic plants such as waterlilies. Despite its immense beauty, the area has been little visited in the past due to its rugged nature and the poor access, but this is starting to change.

Each year in May/June the wet season growth across the track needs to be slashed and the many creek and river crossings reformed to allow access to the growing numbers of travellers undertaking this journey.

For the last two years, Parks and Wildlife has provided resources for traditional owners who speak for country along the Bachsten Track to participate in the track clearing work, which assists in management of late season wildfires.

The goal is for traditional owners to hold the contract, providing them with employment to manage their own country. It also provides opportunities to discuss issues such as track delineation, protection of important sites and other management issues.

During 2014 track maintenance work, traditional owners from the Charles family recorded numerous cultural sites using Cybertracker. The data will allow better planning for site protection and the appropriate storage and transfer of cultural heritage information. This work will continue next year.

The partnership has also led to improved siting of campsites at Munja. In October 2013, Parks and Wildlife visited Munja with traditional owners and came up with a simple site development plan. Camp sites were identified according to this plan and in a joint discussion on country this year.

A second on country trip with traditional owners occurred this year to survey plants and animals and discuss further how to manage the impacts of growing numbers of visitors and protect this significant area.

Ranger training at Carson River Station

The first block of training for the newly formed Armbangardi Rangers was completed in July on their traditional country at Carson River Pastoral Station.

This training supports activities to be implemented by the Armbangardi Rangers and Parks and Wildlife staff as a part of the Memorandum of Understanding and informal joint management arrangements for Carson River Pastoral Station between the Kalumburu Aboriginal Corporation and the Department.

Parks and Wildlife workplace trainer Pat Foley and *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy* operations officer Aaron Haire provided training and skill enhancement in a number of areas including a Chemcert ticket and firearms training for weed and pest animal management, fire management training, a chainsaw ticket and senior first aid.

Further training is planned for the future, including tour guide training, rock art conservation skills, general building and campground maintenance and fencing training, to complement the commencement of new campground facilities at Carson River Station.

The Armbangardi Rangers helped Parks and Wildlife conduct the 2014 Carson River Biodiversity Survey. This survey and trapping program is important to record the variety and numbers of animals found at Carson River Station prior to the arrival of cane toads. A diversity of frog and reptile species was caught, measured and recorded during the survey, including black whip snakes (*Demansia papuensis*) and spotted tree goannas (*Varanus scalaris*).

Training of traditional owners being undertaken under the *Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy* will have important long term outcomes for communities by training to build skills for future employment, improving capacity and help traditional owners to maintain their traditional relationships with their land and sea country, share knowledge and participate in traditional practices.



Above: Parks and Wildlife trainer Pat Foley assesses Armbangardi Ranger Mathew Waina during a Chainsaw Operators course. Photo – Parks and Wildlife