MACLEAY-APSLEY Natural Resources and Landuse Study

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Cover Photo: Wollomombi Falls, shown in flood, are the highest falls in Australia. There are thirteen other major falls within the Study Area, many of which are equally spectacular (see Figure 2).

Courtesy of Tim Hughes

MACLEAY-APSLEY

THE CASE FOR A NATIONAL PARK

A report by the National Parks and Wildlife Service of New South Wales to the Department of Environment and Planning as part of a Government initiated study of the Macleay-Apsley region of northern New South Wales.



10. THE PROPOSED OXLEY NATIONAL PARK

The scenic grandeur of the tract of land included in the proposed Oxley National Park has long been appreciated. In 1818 John Oxley was the first European to view the rugged terrain which makes up most of the proposal. He wrote in his dairy on September 12, 1818:

"It is impossible to form a correct idea of the wild magnificence of the scenery without the pencil of Salvitor..."

The next 150 years saw the development of the New England Tableland for agriculture. Most of the natural vegetation on the tableland was cleared, leaving few remnants.

The gorges were primarily used for rough grazing, being too steep to clear, except for some of the river flats and lower slopes. Mining was the other major land use over those years, but was restricted to small areas in a few of the northern gorges in the study area.

The first area set aside for wildlife conservation in the study area was the Rowleys Creek Gulf Nature Reserve (1,659 ha) reserved in 1962. It was formerly vacant Crown land and was the 23rd "Faunal Reserve" proclaimed by the Fauna Protection Panel, the conservation authority preceding the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The second area to be reserved in the study area was the Hole Gulf Nature Reserve, in 1965. This was a relatively small area (736 ha) of vacant Crown land along Hole Gulf Creek. In 1978 a larger area adjoining the Hole Gulf Nature Reserve was proposed for reservation as the Blue Mountains Creek Nature Reserve, this area was reserved in 1980 and, with the existing Hole Gulf Nature Reserve was renamed The Hole Creek Nature Reserve. The total area is now 5,587 ha. The three existing national parks in, or partly in, the Macleay-Apsley gorges were dedicated during the 1970's and early 1980's. Apsley Gorge National Park was dedicated in 1976 and has had a number of small areas added to it, increasing its size to 6,718 ha. Yarrowitch Gorge National Park was dedicated in 1980 and involved purchase of some lands. Subsequent additions have improved the boundaries of the park, which is now 3,456 ha.

The Kunderang Brook section (7,800 ha) of Werrikimbe National Park is the only section of this park in the Macleay-Apsley Gorges, the remainder being in the Hastings River catchment. This section was added to Werrikimbe National Park in 1984, as part of the government's rainforest conservation policy. The Kunderang Brook area containing good stands of dry rainforest.

The existing national parks and nature reserves in the Macleay-Apsley area are shown in Fig. 31. These national parks and nature reserves total 25,220 ha of the Macleay-Apsley gorges, which is 13% of the proposed Oxley National Park (Fig.33).

The concept of a large wilderness national park centred on the Macleay-Apsley gorges was first suggested in 1969 and later considered in more detail by Brickhill (1974). Brickhill proposed a national park around sections of the gorges as well as describing the major land systems in the area. He concluded that there were outstanding arguments in favour of the total area being dedicated as a national park based on its biological, scenic and recreational attributes.

Following the publication in 1976 of Helman <u>et al</u> report on wilderness areas in eastern New South Wales and the wild and scenic river reports by Helman (1981) and Hughes (1982), the concept of a large wilderness national park was reinforced.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service has, for some time, been pursuing the goal of a large "wilderness" national park in this region. The Service decided on a policy of reserving areas as they became available for purchase/acquisition, subject to the necessary statutory approvals.

Statutory objections and the tenure of the land in the study area, which is mostly leasehold and some freehold, have largely precluded the possibility of rapid establishment of the entire area as national park at the one time.

In March 1982 the National Parks and Wildlife Service consulted various government authorities about their attitude towards the proposed Oxley National Park. Several government departments advised that there were potentially conflicting land uses in the area; one of the major land use conflicts being the proposed hydro dam on the Apsley River also proposed in 1982. Other land use conflicts include mining, agriculture and forestry. As a result of these conflicts, the Government initated a land use study over an area slightly larger than the Oxley National Park proposal. This study is currently being coordinated by the Department of Environment and Planning.

The survey of the natural and cultural resources of the Macleay-Apsley area by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, as part of this land use study, has reinforced the Services' view that this area should be conserved as a national park. The area has a unique and wide ranging mixture of conservation values, from wild and scenic rivers to rare speciec. These important valus should be protected and managed so as to ensure their ongoing survival.

The proposed boundary of the Oxley National Park is shown on Fig. 33. This boundary, to a large extent, is the same as that referred to other land use authorities in 1982. Minor variations include: Following discussions with the Department of Mineral Resources, this area has for the present been excluded from the proposed boundaries of the Park. Although this area contains a large proportion of the Bakers Creek Gorge land system and a number of rare plant species it is currently used for mining purposes. Negotiations with the Department of Mineral Resources and other land use authorities over the protection of the ecologically important areas, will continue.

ii Styx River George

Two areas previously excluded from the proposed Oxley National Park have now been included. The Park, as proposed in 1982, excluded part of the Styx gorge with the boundary following the river rather than, as elsewhere, the gorge rim. Given the steepness and erodability of the country any developments on the gorge rim and/or gorge sides would create a major visual scar as well as severe management problems and would severley affect the quality of the Styx River as a wild river system. The proposed inclusion of these areas resolves a number of potentially major ecological problems.

iii Georges Creek

Included in the current proposal is a small section of land between the Big Hill road, at the Georges Creek/Macleay River junction and the Park as proposed in 1982.

Whilst this area lies outside the land use study boundary its inclusion is mentioned here as a solution to a potential land use problem.



At present there is no public road access to the river systems of the proposed National Park. The inclusion of this area would enable easy tourist access to the Park and the Macleay River at its lower reaches.

iv Timber Reserve - Kunderang Brook

This area was excluded from the Kunderang Brook section of Werrikimbee National Park as part of the Governments 1984 rainforest policy decision. However, given the current situation it appears likely that in the near future this reserve will be almost entirely surrounded by national park and nature reserve. This will clearly prove to be a significant management problem for the National Parks and Wildlife Service, a problem that will only be exacerbated by the fact that the timber reserve lies well within the catchment of the Kunderang Brook section of the proposed park.

The Service therefore proposes that, in order to solve this potentially serious land use problem, this area remain a timber reserve and that after logging it be added to the national park.

v Kunderang Brook Section of Werrikimbee National Park

This section of Werrikimbee National Park lies within the catchment of the Macleay-Apsley gorgelands. The vegetation, geology and climate tie it closely to the Macleay ara as opposed to the Werrikimbee area. For these reasons the National Parks and Wildlife Service proposes that the name of the section be altered so that it becoms part of the proposed National Park.