

Kosciuszko Wild Horse Community and Scientific Advisory Panels



Meeting minutes

Details

Location: via telephone
Date/time: 3 – 5 pm
Tuesday 3 March 2020
Chairperson: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Deputy Chair: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

People present

1. Member: [REDACTED]
2. Member: [REDACTED]
3. Member: [REDACTED]
4. Member: [REDACTED]
5. Member: [REDACTED]
6. Member: [REDACTED]
7. Member: [REDACTED]
8. Member: [REDACTED]
9. Member: [REDACTED]
10. NPWS representative: [REDACTED] Director
Southern Ranges Branch
11. Secretary: [REDACTED] Project Officer-
Wild Horses, NPWS

Apologies

12. Member: [REDACTED]

1. Opening and welcome

[REDACTED] offered a Welcome to Country.

2. Purpose of the extraordinary meeting

NPWS explained that post-fire recovery works are occurring in the park and on other reserves across the state. 33 % of the park was impacted by the latest bushfires. Recovery works include pest control of deer, goats and other species. Given the impact that horses can have on the recovering landscape, as identified by the Department's Science Division, horse control needs to be included in the post-fire works.

The spring 2019 horse control program commenced prior to the first meeting of the panels. As such, NPWS proceeded with the program under the 2008 *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Management Plan* and without consulting with the panels. With the panels now established, NPWS now seeks the panel's input into planning for post-fire control of wild horses and will add to advice already received at the previous combined meeting of the panels on 14 February 2020.

The Scientific Advisory Panel developed the post-fire control advice at the request of NPWS. This meeting seeks to further improve that advice with the assistance of both panels and is an opportunity for Community Advisory Panel members to seek further clarification on the post-fire control advice. This advice needs to be finalised as soon as possible given the need to commence control before winter. Control will commence in April. Monitoring, evaluation and procedures developed and implemented as part of the program will further inform the development of the new wild horse heritage management plan.

Some members of the Community Advisory Panel have already provided written responses.

NPWS suggested that the 3 April combined meeting can be reserved for confirming panel advice on the new management plan.

3. Scientific Advisory Panel post-fire control advice

██████████ stated that a summary of the Scientific Advisory Panel's (SAP) post-fire control advice has been provided to both panels. ██████████

██████████. The control program uses adaptive management ie. learning by doing, and measuring the results of actions through monitoring. Monitoring may be further refined over time. Control is focussed on removing negative impacts from horses.

The SAP's post-fire advice applies to three management areas, which are based on those from the 2016 draft *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Management Plan*. The boundaries can be altered based on advice from the panels. Dividing the park into management areas is the best way of ensuring success.

The control methods recommended are passive trapping and a ground and aerial muster trial, which may allow the capture of a larger number of horses in a shorter amount of time. Utilising established trap sites is optimal for success and muster sites will need to be identified. Removal should be targeted where there is the largest removal for the least effort. Rehoming will be the priority.

██████████ recognises there has been much debate about the number of horses to be removed, but this will be based on a population estimate in each management areas based on two surveys. Breeding rate will also be determined for each management area. The Community Advisory Panel (CAP) can become involved in these smaller scale surveys.

The key issues appear to be management area boundaries, rate of population increase and the number of horses in each area. ██████████ stated he is seeking comments on these topics from the panels.

4. CAP and SAP discussion on the post-fire control advice

A CAP member asked how the management area boundaries were identified. ██████████ replied that the 2016 draft management plan was used. The only change to the draft plan's boundaries was that the Kiandra management area was extended to include the Snowy Mountains Highway and known Broad Toothed Rat populations.

A CAP member asked who identified environmental impacts. ██████████ replies that the SAP replies on scientific papers and scientists, such as ██████████ who have been studying the area for may

██████████ Evidence already exists that there is negative impact where there are too many horses and they deplete their grazing resources.

A CAP member asked about the evidence of impacts, noting that there is uncertainty over what certain areas should look like. NPWS replied that there are scientific papers that establish the impacts. ██████████

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A SAP member asked about the ability of horses to recolonise areas without natural barriers once the population has been removed. [REDACTED] replied that horses are slow to recolonise new areas, even without a buffer area, and so areas can be maintained as horse-free. Horses will not migrate without a trigger forcing movement.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] There is a lack of movement of horses across Tantangara Mountain and there are other natural barriers. [REDACTED].

[REDACTED] stated that weather does play a role in horse movement, but there are shorter winters now so movement patters may have changed over time.

[REDACTED]

A CAP member asked whether data on fecundity and foal morbidity exists. [REDACTED] stated that Michelle Dawson's work has identified 67% survival of foals and weanlings and 90% survivability of adults. 83% of mares in good condition can be pregnant and it is possible for one foal per mare annually. As the population reaches carrying capacity, this may decrease to one foal every second year. [REDACTED] added that a multi-year population study on Coleman Plain identified 16% were foals and 16% were yearlings. [REDACTED] stated population growth rates can be higher, as recorded internationally.

[REDACTED] stated that rates can differ annually.

[REDACTED] stated that a complex approach was utilised to map the management area boundaries, and included considerations of fire, Broad Toothed Rat presence, bogs, fens, streams and the 2016 draft plan recommendations.

A CAP member asked about the priority areas for protection from horses. [REDACTED] stated that through his research, horses are attracted to creeks and their impact can cause geomorphological changes. The karst is also under threat from the action of horses.

A CAP member requested a formal count of wild horses. NPWS stated that the 2019 Australian Alps feral horse aerial survey fulfils this need and is scientifically robust. Smaller-scale population surveys will be conducted as part of the post-fire control program. [REDACTED] stated that it will never be possible to observe all animals in an area, which is the reason estimates are used. [REDACTED] stated that the extent of impacts measured at Mosquito Creek from 2007 to 2019 are consistent with a doubling or tripling of the horse population.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] stated that the 2008 management plan allows for fertility treatment and that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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6. Meeting Close

5:12 pm

██████████
CAP Chairperson

██████████
SAP Chairperson

Actions from this meeting

No.	Action	Responsible	Date Completed
1	SAP and NPWS to produce a plain-English summary of the scientific knowledge available on horse impacts on the environment.		
2	CAP to provide advice on management area boundary refinements to address horse heritage considerations.		
3	SAP to provide advice to NPWS on horse population estimate methodologies that can be utilised in the post-fire control program and how members of the CAP and SAP and/or community could be involved.		
4	Secretary to forward CAP member comments on the post-fire control advice to all panel members		3 March 2020
5	██████████ to liaise with ██████████ and ██████████ on progressing implementation of fertility treatments as part of the post-fire control program.		
6	██████████ and ██████████ to provide advice on ways to increase rehoming.		
7	NPWS to organise a site visit to the management areas for interested members of the panels.		
8	SAP to provide advice on the feasibility of using translocation as a control method.		