



Recreation in Australian public forests

(IFA Forest Policy Statement No. 5.5)

Key Statement

Recreational and tourism opportunities in public forests should be encouraged within the limits imposed by conservation and management of other forest values.

The Issue

Recreation and tourism are in accepted uses of most areas of public forest. The various activities undertaken differ in their impact on the land, vegetation, wildlife and other forest values such as water quality. Generally, any activity pursued occasionally and at a low level of intensity, and within management constraints, poses little threat to the environment. However, as the intensity and frequency increase, or when constraints are not followed conflicts and negative impacts on forest values can arise. There is always the potential for recreation to damage the environment it uses.

Background

People seek a variety of recreational experiences during their leisure time and forests provide a myriad of opportunities for recreation and tourism. Some use areas with well-developed and maintained facilities where large numbers of people would be expected, and a management presence is obvious and regular. Others seek remote locations where they can avoid the intrusions of vehicles and other people and where the emphasis is on self-dependence and self-sufficiency. Between these extremes, recreation settings with a variety of facilities, access and levels of use are sought.

Recreation is an activity or planned inactivity undertaken without compulsion during a person's leisure time. Most recreation is undertaken for personal or social benefits. Tourism (recreational travel) tends to focus on the marketing of travel and generally visitors travel to multiple destinations in a region and have packaged commercial services and itineraries.

While various outdoor recreation activities may be undertaken in most public forests, some areas have exclusions or restrictions for visitor safety, or to protect specific scientific, natural, cultural or water-supply values. State forests complement recreational opportunities in National Parks by permitting activities that are not allowed or are restricted on parks. Clubs and recreation providers increasingly are organising large recreation events in public forests.

Recreational activities undertaken in forests range from passive to active, may be dispersed or concentrated, and may be undertaken with or without the use of motor vehicles, bicycles, horses or specialised equipment, such as for climbing. Some activities, like nature study, photography and bushwalking are dependent on access to the natural environment; for others, such as camping or picnicking, the natural environment provides a pleasant backdrop. In other cases, the infrastructure within the forest, such as a challenging four-wheel-drive track network, or the activity, such as fishing or hunting are more important than the natural environment itself.

Recreation and tourism can consume resources, provide educational opportunities and economic benefits, create employment and improve community health. Many regions in Australia rely significantly on public forests to contribute to the diversity of tourism opportunities demanded by tourists.

The potential beneficial or harmful effects impacts of various recreational and tourism activities on the environment can be local (like trampling of vegetation, disturbance to wildlife or erosion) or dispersed (contamination of water or transport of weeds). Recreation users also can compete for the same limited space or recreational opportunity. Active management, including zoning, is required to control and mitigate the impacts of these issues and to reduce public liability risks.

Policy

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates for the ongoing provision for a wide range of recreation and tourism opportunities in public forests, in a manner that protects other forest values and doesn't limit options for future generations.

The IFA supports and encourages:

- The use of management plans, zoning systems, Codes of Conduct and permits to minimise conflicts between different forest uses and values;
- The provision adequate funding for the development and maintenance of recreation and tourism facilities in public forests; and
- The development of specialised recreation and tourism facilities within and adjacent to public forests, including through the use of public-private partnerships.

The IFA considers that:

- Forest-based recreation and tourism should be managed according to the capability of the respective areas to sustain such use and to avoid adverse impacts on other forest uses and values, while avoiding unnecessary restrictions;
- The nature and extent of activities permitted in a specific area must be consistent with the legislation under which the area is reserved and other relevant legislation (such as for fire, hunting, vehicle use or fossicking for gold or minerals); and
- Forest users should be aware of the inherent dangers of the natural environment, be responsible for their own actions and respect the forest owner's objectives and the rights of other users.

Further Information

Australian Forests, Why forests matter, Social and cultural values.

<http://www.australianforests.org.au/australiasforests/why-forests-matter.htm>

Living, working, playing.....forests 2005-2009. Sustainable recreation, sport, tourism and training in State Forests. NSW Department of Primary Industries, Forests NSW.

<http://www.forest.nsw.gov.au/policy/forestry/recreation/default.asp>

Policy for sustainable recreation and tourism on Victoria's Public land. Department of Sustainability and Environment.

<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/dse/nrenrt.nsf/LinkView/9AF29927FB6EF83CCA256C61001794D640805DA7754769794A256DEA00241084>

Buultjens, J., Davis, D., Duthy, S. and Tiyce, M. (1998) Forest based tourism and recreation in the upper and lower north east regions of NSW. Southern Cross University, National Parks and Wildlife Service. NSW Comprehensive Regional Assessments project number NA48/ES. http://www.daff.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/49513/nsw_ne_na48es.pdf

Forestry Tasmania, Tourism and Forestry Protocol.

http://www.tasforestrytourism.com.au/pages/general_protocol.html

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