

Recreation in Australian Public Forests

IFA Forestry Policy Statement 5.5

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates recreation and tourism in public forests that does not negatively impact the management and conservation of other forest values.

The Issue

Recreation and tourism are accepted land uses within most public forests and have various impacts on the forest. Generally these activities pose little threat on the environment if they are pursued occasionally, at a low level of intensity and within management constraints. However, if the intensity and frequency increase, then conflicts and negative impacts on forest values can arise.

Background

Forests provide many opportunities for recreational activities sought out for social or personal benefits. Within forests, activities range from passive to active, can be spread out to remote locations or concentrated in well-developed areas. They may also be undertaken with or without the use of motor vehicles, bicycles, horses or specialised equipment.

Most public forests are open for tourists and recreational activities. Some areas have exclusions or restrictions for visitor safety, or to protect forest values: scientific, natural, cultural or water supply values.

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 in demand.

Potentially harmful impacts of tourism and recreational activities on the environment can be local (such as trampling of vegetation, disturbance to wildlife or erosion) or dispersed (contamination of water or spreading of weeds). Activities can also compete for the same space or opportunity. Active management (including zoning) is needed to control and mitigate the impacts of these issues and to reduce risks to public safety.

Policy

The IFA supports and encourages:

- Minimising conflicts between different forest uses and values through management, zoning and Codes of Conduct
- Funding for the development and maintenance of recreation and tourism facilities in public forests
- Development of specialised recreation and tourism facilities within and around public forests, including through the use of public-private partnerships.

The IFA considers that:

- Forest-based recreation and tourism should be managed sustainably and avoid adverse impacts on other forest uses and values, while avoiding unnecessary restrictions
- Activities permitted must abide by any legislation associated with that area, including fire, hunting or vehicle use
- Forest users need to be aware of the inherent dangers of the natural environment, be responsible for their actions and respect the forest owner's objectives and the rights of other users.