

Chapter 1

introduction

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Kosciuszko National Park

Kosciuszko National Park, which encompasses 690,411 hectares, is the largest national park in New South Wales (NSW) and one of the largest conservation reserves in Australia (refer Figure 1.1). Located in the southeastern corner of the state, the park straddles the Great Dividing Range, here known as the Snowy Mountains. It contains a diverse array of montane landscapes, each of which has been shaped by a series of natural and cultural influences, and each of which holds a range of distinctive natural, cultural, social, recreational and economic values.

The park contains the highest mountains in what is the flattest of continents. Although most of these mountains are subdued and rounded features, with few rising above 2000 m in altitude, they constitute the principal seasonally snow-covered region in Australia. They also exhibit a suite of glacial features and possess an exceptional diversity of alpine plant communities and species that provide habitats for a number of rare and unusual animal species. Elsewhere, the park contains significant karst systems, deep river valleys and frost hollows, and vegetation communities ranging from snowgum woodlands and subalpine grasslands, to extensive eucalypt forests, pockets of cool temperate rainforest and stands of native cypress pines.

Natural Values

Cultural Values

Economic Values

Social Values

Recreational Values

All of these environments have been subjected to varying degrees of human modification for thousands of years. Aboriginal people were supplanted by European explorers and surveyors, graziers, prospectors, miners, timber workers, scientists, construction workers, soil conservationists and recreationists. All have left tangible evidence of their passing including stone artefact scatters, campsites and ceremonial grounds, town and mine sites, huts and fencelines, networks of roads and tracks, power stations, dams, tunnels and aqueducts. Their endeavours have also created a rich legacy of stories, experiences and memories, strands of which have been recorded in literature, poetry, paintings and song. In some cases, the mountains, their people and their exploits have become part of Australian folklore and helped shape national identity.

Kosciuszko National Park is centrally located in the most densely populated part of Australia, with some parts of the park within a 500 km radius of about 8 million people (Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and surrounds). Visitor activities include cross-country skiing, car and bus-based sightseeing, bushwalking, fishing, horse riding, canoeing, cycling, caving, and alpine skiing and snowboarding at the various ski resorts located within the park.

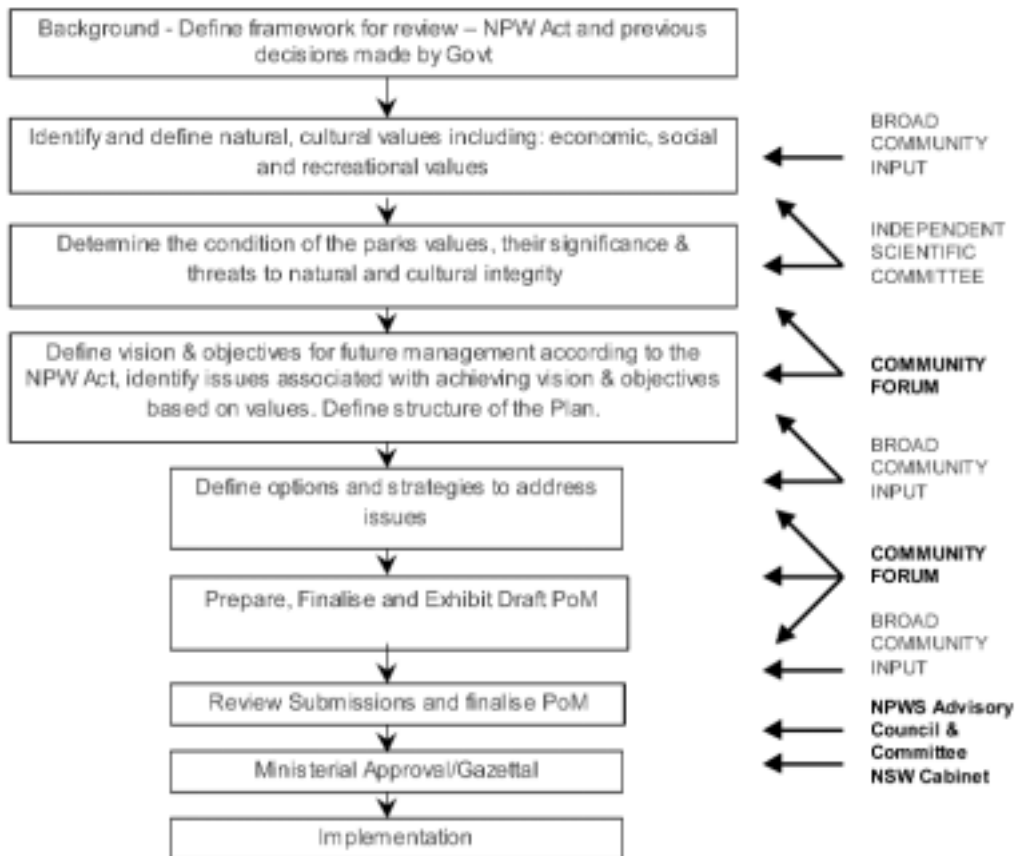
The responses of people to this place are many and varied. For visitors, it can evoke a sense of renewal and wellbeing, achievement and satisfaction, exhilaration, connection or wonder. For those with historical connections it may elicit emotions of pride, belonging, loss and lament, or sentimentality. Whatever the attachment, or motivation for visiting the place, many people cherish Kosciuszko National Park as a very special place with significant values worthy of protection.

The review process

In February 2001, the NSW Government announced that the Kosciuszko National Park Plan of Management would be reviewed. The plan has not been reviewed as a whole since its initial preparation over 20 years ago, and in the intervening period there have been significant changes in knowledge about the park, recreation patterns, the social and economic environment, community values and legislation.

The revised plan of management, which will build on the existing plan, will contain the vision for the protection of the park for future generations and be the blueprint for management over the next 15–20 years. It will outline the park's significance, the pressures it faces and the challenges ahead; allow decisions to be based on the best available knowledge and research; and facilitate and encourage interested organisations and individuals to participate in the planning process. The process for reviewing the management plan is outlined in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 Plan of management review process



At the time of preparation of this report, NPWS proposed to place a draft plan of management on public exhibition in mid-2003, and submit the plan to the Minister for the Environment in mid-2004.

The Independent Scientific Committee

As part of the review process for the new plan of management for Kosciuszko National Park, an Independent Scientific Committee (ISC) was formed to provide the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) with independent and objective advice on the values of the park. The committee brought together prominent scientists and experts in disciplines concerning protected areas, who were asked to advise on the natural, cultural, recreational, economic and social values of the park. Expertise from a range of disciplines was needed, given the diverse range of values that Kosciuszko National Park possesses and the new legislative responsibilities for park planning in the *National Parks and Wildlife Amendment Act 2000*. This report is thus a collective effort that combines the results of individual knowledge and expertise.

The report describes the different values of the park, and provides an independent assessment of their significance, condition, trend in condition, pressures, opportunities, knowledge gaps and indicators. This information will assist the review of the plan of management by providing a reference point from which to work, and by providing key findings and recommendations that should be adopted in the revised plan.

The committee has attempted to articulate in a rigorous manner the values of Kosciuszko National Park. It is hoped that by conveying all of the park's special values in a single document, the community will be encouraged to continue to protect and enjoy this marvellous place.

The Community Forum

In addition to the ISC, a Community Forum was formed to assist the process of review for the new plan of management for Kosciuszko National Park.

Whereas the role of the ISC was to provide independent expert advice about the park's values, the Community Forum was formed to provide the opportunity for a diverse range of groups with an interest in the management of the park to listen to each other's views and provide direction on the plan.

Specifically, the role of the Community Forum was to:

- assist in defining the vision and objectives for park;
- develop strategies for ongoing protection of the park's values;
- advise on community involvement in the plan's review; and
- provide advice on matters for which the NPWS wishes to gauge community sentiment.

Community Forum meetings were held in local communities around the park during 2002, augmented by field visits to the park. A representative of the ISC attended each Community Forum meeting to facilitate information exchange.

Running parallel to the plan of management review is the development of an alpine resorts plan for the ski resort areas and related infrastructure. This plan is also subject to the *National Parks and Wildlife Act* and the objectives of the plan of management review, but transfers responsibility for planning and development within the resorts from NPWS to Planning NSW. The resorts will be developed within the strategic framework provided by the plan of management review.

The Australian Alps Liaison Committee (AALC) continues to coordinate management and cooperative research across the Australian Alps.

