



HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"

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Platypuses protected in Royal National Park but NOT in the Coxs River

The successful reintroduction of platypuses to Royal National Park has been celebrated as a conservation triumph. Before platypuses were released into the Hacking River, scientists carefully assessed water quality, habitat condition, food availability and long-term ecological sustainability. Ongoing monitoring continues because healthy platypus populations depend on healthy rivers.

This raises an important question: what about the Coxs River platypus? Further: what about the drinking water for the city of Sydney? If stream health is considered essential for platypus conservation in Royal National Park, why is there not the same level of attention in the Blue Mountains on the Coxs River, where allowable mining contamination levels are higher or no limits exist?

A 2021 study of platypus distribution in Sydney's Cattai catchment found that platypus presence was strongly associated with healthy riparian vegetation, low sediment accumulation, limited aquatic weed growth, higher dissolved oxygen levels and lower salinity. The researchers concluded that preventing habitat degradation is critical to sustaining platypus populations.

These findings are highly relevant to the Coxs River. Parts of the catchment have experienced decades of pressure from mining, altered river flows, salinity and sedimentation.

Peabody Metropolitan Mine (EPL 767) monitors stressor limits for conductivity of 270 and 3 NTU turbidity limit on its mine water discharges into Camp Gully creek and the Royal National Park. And yet coal mines discharging into the Coxs River have no salinity limit at all, and a 30 NTU or higher turbidity limit.

Continued page 3



The grass around this old picnic shelter is closely cropped by wombats and macropods. The view from the lookout extends over the Kanimbla Valley to Mount Blackheath, the Shipley "sugarloafs" and Mount Cloudmaker and around to Mount Lambie and the Great Dividing Range. Road access to the reserve is presently restricted to people engaged in roadworks on Victoria Pass.

INSIDE

Data centres: hold on to the horse before it bolts!

Senate submissions invited

Since the Climate Council news release, summarised on page 5, controversy has intensified with a federal minister inexplicably slamming calls for a moratorium on new data centres. Some state and territory governments are obviously captured by dreams of easy money but blind to the risks.

The Climate Council report, *Clouded Future: Managing the risks of the data centre boom*, cites threats to water and power supplies that inadequate regulation of such a surge in development could pose. Legislation foreshadowed for early 2027 might be too late.

Everyone who can, needs to engage with politicians through the Senate Inquiry (submissions closing on 1 September) and contact their political representatives. Decision makers need to be far less reluctant in supervision of data centres than they have been recently with other matters of national interest.

Please read **"90 potential new data centres. One chance to get the rules right"** on page 5.

The *Hut News* Team

Modern methods of construction – and us

Are there pathways for increasing our supply of sustainable housing that Blue Mountains Council, state government and major community organisations can quickly agree on? In this issue of *Hut News*, experienced architect Nigel Bell reviews the possibilities.

Currently, our mayor and councillors are advocating to the state government on behalf of our community against a "Housing Delivery Authority" which has become enmeshed in proposals that have little to do with our long-term housing supply and against permissiveness towards a surplus of very short stay accommodation.

Nigel Bell, who was involved with the building of the Mid-mountains Community Centre at Lawson and the Wentworth Falls Conservation Hut, is one of the best grounded authorities on the modernisation of residential housing provision and he describes how modular housing and other recent developments offer rays of hope for a housing supply he regards as in crisis. Page 6.

The *Hut News* Team

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President's report

The past month has been another busy period for the Society, reflecting both our strong advocacy work and the many organisational improvements taking place behind the scenes.

During the month, the Society submitted responses on the proposed National Environmental Standards for Community Engagement and for Data and Information, and expressed our support for the *Water NSW Amendment (Warragamba Dam) Bill 2026*. At the local level, we wrote to Blue Mountains City Councillors supporting Councillor Brent Hoare's Notice of Motion to strengthen protection for the critically endangered dwarf mountain pine and continued our support for the Narrow Neck and Gardens of Stone campaigns. I would like to sincerely thank everyone who contributed to the successful Safeguarding the Gardens of Stone and our World Heritage Rivers end-of-financial-year fundraising appeal raising almost \$4,000 to support this important work.

Community engagement remains one of the Society's greatest strengths. Thank you to everyone who represented BMCS at the Winter Magic Festival and helped introduce the Society to many new supporters. Dr Melina Budden's excellent presentation on greater glider conservation is now available on YouTube, while our call for volunteers to support the Blue Mountains Wombat Conservation Group received an outstanding response. Thank you also to Elizabeth Howard for organising the successful excursion to the Blue Mountains Botanic Garden, Mount Tomah. Looking ahead, planning is underway for the Blue Mountains Sustainability Festival, Peace Day and the Springwood Festival. These events provide valuable opportunities to engage with our community, and volunteers are always welcome.

Governance has also been a significant focus, with continued improvements to Management Committee processes and preparations for the Society's Strategic Renewal process. These initiatives will help strengthen the Society's effectiveness and capacity into the future. I am also pleased to report that we have filled the Meetings Secretary and E-News Editor roles while recruitment continues for the positions of Publicity Officer, Events Coordinator and Nursery Manager. If you would like to become involved, please contact me.

Thank you to all our volunteers and supporters for your continued commitment to strengthening our Society.

Annette Sartor president@bluemountains.org.au

The deadline for September *Hut News* is **12 August**
hutnews@bluemountains.org.au

Join Blue Mountains Conservation Society
Find out how you can help preserve our beautiful World Heritage Area
<https://www.bluemountains.org.au>

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, the Dharug and Gundungurra people, and pay respect to Elders past and present.

H5N1 bird flu

Update August 2026

Agriculture Minister Julie Collins, who is responsible for Australian Biosecurity, says CSIRO lab testing has confirmed the detection of H5N1 bird flu in a greater crested tern. It is the first time the strain has been detected in an Australian seabird, after previous confirmed cases involved migratory birds from the sub-Antarctic region. The bird was found in Robe on South Australia's Limestone Coast.

The detection of H5N1 bird flu in a local bird marks a dramatic escalation in the risk to local wildlife, with experts warning that it reveals the potential of the virus to spread across the continent.

Two confirmed cases of H5N1 bird flu have been detected in migratory giant petrel birds found at Bennetts Beach, Hawks Nest, on the NSW Mid North Coast. This marks the first and only confirmed detection of the H5N1 strain in New South Wales.

The NSW Government is working in collaboration with other jurisdictions and the Commonwealth Government, with increased surveillance now underway.

If you find sick or dead birds or other animals, the Australian Centre for Disease Control says:

- Avoid the area
- Do not handle the sick or dead birds or other animals
- Record your location and what you see (take photos or video, if possible), also GPS reading
- Report this information to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on **1800 675 888**

Chris Whiteman

BMCS 2026 Member Survey

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society is undertaking a survey to better understand the interests, experiences, priorities and aspirations of our members. The findings will help inform future planning, activities, advocacy priorities, communication strategies and opportunities for member involvement.

We are committed to carefully considering the feedback received and reporting key findings back to members as part of an ongoing process of organisational reflection and renewal. Your voice will directly shape our future.

Please respond to the survey by 9 August 2026. If you would rather complete a paper version, please email

membership@bluemountains.org.au

with that request, or phone **0408 267 078**.

The Survey is available through E-News and the following link: <https://bit.ly/4wuW0uE>

Native vegetation clearing increases

The Guardian, 21 July 2026, reports: almost 90 football fields' worth of woody habitat were bulldozed in New South Wales every day in 2024, according to new government data which shows the state has failed to rein in high rates of clearing.

"Clearing of vegetation across the state increased by 16 per cent in 2024, reaching 81,293 hectares (200,879 acres) in total – an area more than 275 times the size of the Sydney CBD. The increase was due to a sharp jump in clearing of non-woody vegetation, up 70 per cent on the previous year.

"Environment groups said the numbers, published in the annual Statewide Landcover and Tree Study (Slats) report showed the Minns government had failed to deliver its promise to stem the state's high rates of clearing. Given there's been no policy change since the government was elected in 2023 it's no surprise to see that land clearing hasn't been fixed", said Jacqui Mumford, chief executive of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW."

Go to the Nature Conservation Council of NSW website to find out more. Please write to your MP!

The *Hut News* Team



Platypuses protected in Royal National Park but NOT in the Coxs River: from page 1

The contrast with Royal National Park is striking. There, habitat quality is monitored, risks are identified and conservation action is taken before populations are threatened.

Yet there is little publicly visible discussion of long-term platypus monitoring in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area and Coxs River despite the catchment's ecological significance.

This is not an argument against the Royal National Park program. It is an argument for consistency. If healthy riparian vegetation, low sediment loads, adequate dissolved oxygen and low salinity are considered essential for platypus conservation in one river, they should be considered equally important in another.

The Gardens of Stone Alliance is working to remove the loophole in the neutral or beneficial effect test for water quality (NorBE) that allows mining company modifications to bypass the need to treat and return clean water to the environment.

Malcolm Read natpks@bluemountains.org.au

Image: Blue Mountains City Council Healthy Waterways snapshot 2022



Three Annettes (left to right) Annette Sartor, Annette Coulter and Annette Cam

Welcome Annette Coulter to the management committee

We are delighted to welcome Annette Coulter to the management committee as minutes secretary and look forward to the experience and commitment she brings to the role.

Annette is a long-standing member of the Society with an extensive history of community conservation involvement. She is currently part of the core community group advocating for the protection of Lincoln Rock, where she supports addressing the increasing visitor impacts. She also led the successful community campaign to protect the former wildlife park site at Bullaburra and has previously served on the Society's Management Committee. Annette was an active member of the Jamison Creek Bushcare group, contributing many years of on-ground bush regeneration work.

Meet our new E-News editor – Elysia Desille

We are delighted to welcome our new *E-News* editor, Elysia Desille (El), to the Blue Mountains Conservation Society team.

El brings a strong background in conservation, environmental education and community volunteering, together with a genuine enthusiasm for communicating environmental issues. As an active and engaged BMCS member, she is well placed to help keep members informed, showcase the Society's work and share inspiring stories from across the conservation community.

Reflecting on her new role, El says: "I'd like to take on the *E-News* editor role to develop my skills in editing, writing and design, while connecting with more people in BMCS who share my passion for conservation. I hope to help bridge the gap between generations of ecologists and conservationists by sharing knowledge and stories

and to keep our members informed about the important conservation actions and community events happening across the Blue Mountains. I also hope to bring a little extra flavour to the newsletter through my enthusiasm for these issues, careful research and genuine care for the stories we tell."

We warmly welcome El to the role and look forward to seeing her passion and creativity reflected in future editions of *BMCS E-News*



Hut News Trivia: Question 25

Are spiders insects?

The answer can be found on another page of this newsletter.

Living Near the Bush

HOW TO SUPPORT NATURE IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS



Blue Mountains Conservation Society

To view the online flip book or download a PDF version visit

<https://bluemountains.org.au/LNTB.shtml>

A limited number of print copies are available at Society events.

From the archives

Weed of the Month

(1996)

HONEYSUCKLE (*Lonicera japonica*) – A scrambling vine which is grown for its sweet-smelling spring flowers. It has thin stalky stems which become woody and thickened with age; leaves are usually lobed or toothed and the strongly scented flowers are yellow/white with a pink tinged tube.

This vine forms roots at the leaf joints or nodes, and scrambles to entwine with other plants, thus making it difficult to remove. Honeysuckle invades bushland from adjoining gardens, or is introduced through garden dumpings. Remove by pulling firmly at each stem until a node is reached, then cutting each cluster of small roots with a small knife. Once you reach the main root system dig it out. Parts of the vine which are thoroughly tangled in other plants and off the ground should be cut and left in place.

Do the National Park a favour and don't grow this plant in your garden. Cut it down ... put it in the big bin ... take it to the tip. Who needs to grow a weed!!

This article was published in August 1996 *Hut News*. The Society's newsletter archives can be found on our website:

<https://www.bluemountains.org.au>

(go to publications/*Hut News* archives)

Volunteering for the Society

The management committee positions are listed on page 2. You will notice that there are some vacancies. Please contact the president, Annette Sartor, by email at president@bluemountains.org.au or by phone (leave a message) 0490 419 779.

There are many other ways you can volunteer – join a subcommittee, help at one of our stalls, offer occasional clerical help – there is a long list of tasks and some we haven't thought of yet. Please contact the president and discuss what you might be able to do to help protect the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

90 potential new data centre; one chance to get the rules right

There are 90 new data centres currently proposed in Australia. That is on top of the 162 already operating, representing a significant increase in power and water demand.

Data centres have been behind the digital services we rely on for years. The new boom is driven in large part by a surge in demand for artificial intelligence. What does this growth mean for our climate?

To better protect Australians from worsening climate impacts and provide reliable, lower-cost power, we need to rapidly replace the coal and gas in our homes and businesses with renewable energy. We are making great progress: renewables now supply around 45 per cent of electricity in our main national grid. But right now, increased energy demand from data centres risks consuming all that new renewable power instead.

In our report *Clouded Future: Managing the risks of the data centre boom*, we've set the record straight on the potential climate impacts of data centres, and what governments must do to protect Australians from these risks.

Governments must urgently set enforceable, nationally consistent rules to ensure every new data centre in Australia meets stronger standards for energy and water use.

That starts with ensuring these companies fund genuinely new renewable energy and firming capacity to match their demand, not clean energy that would have been built anyway.

They must also maximise energy and water efficiency without drawing on drinking water supplies; and pay for all the energy and water infrastructure they need.

Although the industry states it already offsets much of its energy use with renewables, voluntary commitments

aren't enough. There's also a real risk of a race to the bottom between states competing for investment.

Here's how you can help:

First, you can go to the Climate Council website and read the report.¹ Then share it with someone who would find it useful.

The more Australians who understand what is at stake, the more public pressure builds, and the harder it becomes for decision-makers to delay or make weak rules that let data centre operators and their big tech customers off the hook.

If you would like to take the next step, you can make a submission to the Senate Inquiry on artificial intelligence and data centres. Submissions close on 1 September this year.

Find out how: <https://bit.ly/4bCO0Px>

You can make an online submission, or you can send your submission to Committee Secretary, Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications, PO Box 6100, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600. Phone: **02 6277 3526** email ec.sen@aph.gov.au

You can use the findings from our report¹ to inform your own personal submission, or you can check out what we had to say in our submission to the enquiry <https://bit.ly/4pdClqt>

The data centre boom is just getting started here in Australia. When as many Australians as possible make thoughtful, climate-focused submissions, it gives decision-makers a clear public mandate to better regulate data centres and mitigate their climate impacts.

References and links:

¹ The Climate Council. Download the report. <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/>

Over 40 years of community effort: Part 1

A history of community involvement in planning to protect the Blue Mountains environment is now on the website.¹ It outlines the sustained community effort to ensure that planning instruments were in place to protect the Blue Mountains environment.

These efforts culminated in the current Blue Mountains Local Environmental Plan 2015 (LEP 2015) and the work continues to today (50+ years).

The planning document that directs and restricts developments within the Blue Mountains is primarily the Local Environmental Plan 2015 (LEP 2015).

The history of the process and the issues demonstrates sustained community effort and a recurring theme of gains and losses. The history also demonstrates years of tireless effort from dedicated planners, environmental scientists and councillors.

The first record of community action and campaigns to influence planning in the Blue Mountains was in 1973 when the *Draft Blue Mountains Planning Scheme* was exhibited for public comment. This plan allowed for a



Draft LEP rally on 18 July 2015 (Rob Linigen)

population growth to 170,000 from the existing level of 38,000.

Both the Katoomba and District Wildlife Conservation Society (KDWCS) and the Lower Blue Mountains Conservation Society were actively involved in generating the majority of the 3,700 responses received. Undoubtedly there was a history of active community involvement in planning before this, maybe dating back to the decision of council in 1958 to prepare a planning scheme for the city? The KDWCS protested and raised the question "what population can the Blue Mountains support?"

Continued page 11

'Modern Methods of Construction' ... and us

Well over a century ago, standard timber-framed home kits at low cost were selected from a Mark Foy's catalogue. At a given price you could choose from one pre-fabricated room up to a timber mini-mansion, depending upon your budget. These simple structures were assembled on site, with the dunny always 'out the back'.

As the economy grew, in later decades full-brick standardised homes gained market approval and became ubiquitous, before the brick-veneer (resource-efficient and cost-effective) innovation that followed World War II. 'Pattern-book' standardised housing (and 'social housing') became mainstream again, before project homes took over the market from the early 1970s. Since then housing wealth status and investment have grown on steroids, creating a crisis in housing affordability that affects homes right across the Blue Mountains.

In recent decades, planning and construction regulations have grown enormously (environmental, bushfire, heritage, electrification ...) with comparatively little change in building techniques. Meanwhile, barriers to innovation have grown through ever-tighter regulations and 'tick-the-box' approvals.

The industry and consumer push for more housing, faster construction and quicker/simpler approvals has been largely accepted by the NSW government. One unfortunate local example is the large multi-unit proposal in Narrow Neck Road, Katoomba, to be assessed by the three-person Housing Delivery Authority that overrules Council and with limited community input.

More positive is the government's new 'Modern Methods of Construction' (MMC) program. Recently launched to improve building efficiency and sustainable construction quality through more industrialised building techniques, it updates many construction and regulatory norms. MMC suggests a welcome reduction in building construction time of up to 50 per cent and a likely 20 per cent reduction in building cost. Associated regulatory changes to the National Construction Code and integrated approvals will assist, filtering more

directly for new builds than our many local alterations and additions. The four key construction changes are:

- Prefabricated and modular construction of kitchens, bathrooms and/or whole house components craned onto site. Off-site construction allows for material efficiencies (less waste), reduces labour costs, fewer weather delays, better quality control, plus integrated plumbing and electrics, before all is connected onsite.
- System 600 arises from considering how to plug together a house 'kit-of-parts' to a standard 600 x 600 mm module with components made by a variety of manufacturers. You could choose factory-made wall or ceiling panels, windows and doors, a pre-made balcony, fit-out components and the like, all assembled more readily onsite by a builder.
- Pattern book design brings us back to the future, with more standardised but adaptable dwellings than today's 'one-off' designs with lengthy approvals and sluggish onsite construction. The recent Medium Density Pattern Book (good design, cost-effective, easier approval) has had an immediate uptake, so simple house pattern-book collaborations are being developed.
- Advanced manufacture has already been making inroads. The new intention is to develop it further with financial grants and pilot programs (small businesses) and larger grants for medium-rise building prefabrication. Housing possibilities include 3D printing onsite, development of robotics, design for manufacture (DfM) through to Design for Manufacture and Dis-assembly (DfMaD).

With a housing crisis, regulatory delays and increasing building costs, any means to improve construction speed, efficiency, site safety, design flexibility, reduced maintenance, ease of component replacement and more is inevitable and welcome. So, bring it on.

Nigel Bell (retired)
ECObuild Architects

Protecting our precious Minnehaha Falls

Minnehaha Falls in Katoomba is a favourite place for bushwalkers and local residents. Nowadays they are also a favourite place for tourists and visitors from Sydney. This adds up to a lot of people walking on an unformed track through swamp and riparian vegetation beside a creek.

The walking track is in shocking condition: it is a muddy stream of flowing water with crayfish holes being trampled. The swamp plants habitat for the endangered giant dragonfly (*Petalura gigantea*) and Leura skink (*Eulamprus leuraensis*) are being trampled as walkers step on them to keep their feet dry. The endemic mallee *Eucalyptus moorei*, which only grows at high altitudes in places like Katoomba and Blackheath, has its stumps exposed and is trampled too. In other places the rocky track is narrow and is not a suitable place for dogs on or off leash. Sections of the track are dangerous for both inexperienced and local experienced walkers.

"Just jump" says a social media video showing a person jumping from a high rock overhang into



BMCS member Wendy Whitton on Minnehaha walking track:
Meredith Brownhill

the waterhole at the base of the falls.

This is dangerous and, unfortunately, there have been serious accidents including fatalities in recent years.

So how can tourism be better managed? How can the walking tracks be repaired and a board

Continued page 7

If you would like to join the bushcare group and help, go to <https://bushcarebluemountains.org.au/groups/minnehaha-falls/>

The latest from the Gardens of Stone Alliance

Our campaign to protect the Gardens of Stone and strengthen protections for Sydney's drinking water catchment is entering an important new phase.

Over recent months, the Gardens of Stone Alliance has been building political support for reinstating a robust and durable Neutral or Beneficial Effect (NorBE) test for all developments affecting the catchment, including coal mining. NorBE is a simple principle: developments should protect water quality, not make it worse.

Following meetings at NSW Parliament in May, questions about NorBE have now been formally put to the NSW Government. We have continued to receive support from the Greens, Independent MPs and supporters within NSW Labor. Work is also progressing with legal and technical experts to explore stronger legislative protections — watch this space!

In June, the Alliance met with groups from the Illawarra whose communities and waterways are also affected by coal mining within the Sydney drinking water catchment. By exploring how we might join forces, we can demonstrate that this is not a narrow local issue, but one affecting the security and health of Greater Sydney's water supply and the precious places through which that water flows.

June also brought the successful Catchment Futures Forum in Wallerawang. Local residents, campaign supporters and volunteers gathered at Lake Wallace for a practical demonstration of community water-quality testing. The forum celebrated the extraordinary contribution of Julie Favell and Chris Jonkers, who received Lifetime Achievement Awards after more than two decades of conservation and water-monitoring work.

Importantly, several new volunteers expressed interest in helping continue this monitoring. Independent



“Catchment Futures Forum” Wallerawang, 13 June 2026

community data has played a vital role in documenting the impacts of mining and maintaining pressure on regulators and decision-makers.

Finally, this will be my last update as Gardens of Stone Alliance campaigner. After a jam-packed June, I have accepted a place in a writers' residency in France, so will be leaving the role to spend extended time in Europe.

As you read this, I will be finalising some strategic communications and preparing to hand the reins back to my Alliance colleagues, who will carry the work forward.

I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the Alliance and benefiting from the expertise and dedication of everyone who contributes, many of whom have been working to protect the Gardens of Stone for decades.

It has been a privilege to lend my skills to the cause of protecting a part of NSW I dearly love. I am deeply grateful to the Blue Mountains Conservation Society for supporting this work and funding my role over the past eight months, and I look forward to following the campaign's continued success from afar.

Steph Lentz

*Protecting our precious Minnehaha Falls:
from page 6*

walk be installed? Who is going to undertake rehabilitation of the swamp shrubs and trees?

There is a Blue Mountains City Council bushcare group of volunteers working there, weeding and doing their best to care for the reserve.

Funding is needed from the NSW Government for the major track reconstruction work that is needed by either the Council or National Parks and Wildlife Service.

As there is an Indigenous cultural connection to the area, as well as a significant biodiversity of plants, birds, mammals and other creatures, there is a strong case for this reserve to be included in Blue Mountains National Park. It would be marvellous if the Blue Mountains Conservation Society were to take up this worthy cause and give it the best possible protection by campaigning to have it included in Blue Mountains National Park.

Meredith Brownhill

National Heritage List: you can add your National Heritage nomination

Our National Heritage List recognises and protects places of importance to Australia. These places reflect our unique landscapes, First Nations cultures, our development as a nation. The list currently includes over 100 sites across Australia. Search for **National Heritage List Australia** and discover some of the outstanding places on our National Heritage List. More places are included on the list as our national story unfolds and the understanding of our heritage deepens.

Anyone can nominate a place for the National or Commonwealth Heritage List. Find out more at Heritage List – DCCEEW.¹ **Nominations are being accepted until 16 October 2026.** Nominations must set out the heritage qualities or values of the place. Why does the place have outstanding or significant heritage value to the nation?

This year, the Minister for the Environment and Water has set a heritage theme for National Heritage List nominations: places and related stories that have made a fairer, more inclusive Australia. This theme seeks to identify places of outstanding heritage value to the nation where Australians have advanced a fairer and more inclusive society. These places may demonstrate where rights were secured, voices amplified, and understanding what it means to belong.

Recognising these sites acknowledges complex aspects of Australia's past, honours those who drove change, and supports a deeper understanding of the nation's ongoing journey toward inclusion and fairness.

The minister encourages nominations that fit this theme and show outstanding heritage value to the nation. Nominations outside the theme are still welcome and will be considered.

¹ <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/parks-heritage/heritage/places/national-heritage-list>

Pines Wind Farm Update

Malcolm Read, National Parks and Heritage Officer and Annette Cam, Senior Vice President, met with personnel from TagEnergy and Stromlo Energy¹ on Monday 13 July via Zoom, to discuss the plans for the proposed Pines Wind Farm.

The wind farm is a 2GW project which, if approved, will power 1.25 million NSW homes and be delivered in 2031. It will be situated within a number of state pine forests, south of Oberon and north of Abercrombie River National Park. There may be up to 250 turbines placed across the state forests, with a few in private landholdings. They plan to use the existing transmission lines that travel up to Mount Piper. Any changes to the final plans will be on the website.

The purpose of the meeting was to share information with the Blue Mountains Conservation Society and to learn from us. Malcolm and Annette were keen to know how they are investigating possible impacts on the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area including the birds and bats that inhabit the pine plantations. We are also keen to know about placement of additional roads/tracks, substations, transmission lines, views that will be impacted, biosecurity issues (involving invasive species) and use of offset funds.

The ecological surveys will determine how species utilise the areas. These are taking place over a two-year period, with multiple surveys across the seasons. Currently, there are 41 bat survey points and 58 bird survey points. This may increase to include surveys on private property where landholders have shown an interest in hosting a turbine. At this stage, the main concerns are for wedge-tailed eagles, black cockatoos, white-throated needletails and various species of small bats. Thermal imaging cameras are being used to survey the bats.

There may be up to 250 turbines placed across the state forests, with a few in private landholdings. The plan is to use the existing transmission lines to Mount Piper. If the windfarm is approved, there will be ongoing monitoring of any wildlife collisions using ground searches and carcass detection dogs and these results will be published on the website. No details were shared about how frequent or extensive such searches would be and we will be looking for such details in the final EIS (environmental impact statement).

The personnel we spoke with seemed genuine in their wish to hear from the community about their concerns regarding the project, as well as those who support the project. They have agreed to have follow-up meetings with us to discuss findings and potential impacts, and gain ideas about best use of offset funds.

Email questions to

Malcolm Read natpks@bluemountains.org.au or Annette Cam seniorvp@bluemountains.org.au and we will pass them on. If you are in Oberon, call into their local office (details of location on their website).

¹ TagEnergy has been granted a permit to investigate the feasibility of the Pines Wind Farm. If built, TagEnergy will own and operate the Pines Wind Farm. TagEnergy have engaged Stromlo Energy to lead the investigations and permitting phases of the proposed development.

You can check out the plans for this project here:

<https://www.thepineswindfarm.com.au>

Environmental weeds of the Blue Mountains

Portuguese/Spanish heath, erica (*Erica lusitanica*)

Portuguese heath (aka Spanish heath or erica) is primarily a coloniser of damp areas. This plant is a Local Priority Weed, but is often mistakenly thought to be a local native plant and allowed to grow and spread. In fact, it must be completely removed from a site.

The heath grows to 3–4 metres, often in thick groves. Leaves are short and narrow. Flowering occurs in winter. The numerous seeds are widely dispersed and unformed gutters, drain-lines and swamps are easily infested.

Pull out seedlings manually, ensuring that roots are thoroughly removed. Larger plants can be manually pulled but it may be necessary to use a small mattock. Follow-up treatment is often required. Weeded plants may be left to decompose in an elevated, dry position. However, it is essential to place in a BMCC green bin all branches exhibiting flowers and seed capsules.

Portuguese heath can be confused with some local native plant species, particularly several *Epacris* species, so be sure to check plant identity carefully before treatment.

For further information, see <https://bit.ly/4vZix2i> or contact the BMCS Bushcare Officer.

BMCS Bushcare Officer

bushcare@bluemountains.org.au



Erica plants spreading and close-up of flowers.



Hut News Trivia: Answer to Question 25

No. Spiders are arachnids. They have eight legs instead of six. Spiders do not have wings or antennae; insects often have both.

A report card on the Kedumba Valley escarpment

Part 6: A year of crucial decision making

Blue Mountains City Council is entering 12 months or so of important decisions about the stretch of escarpment edge between Kiah Lookout (the old Leura Falls kiosk frequently used as a restaurant) and the Cahills Lookout–Peckmans Plateau locality. This sector has long been the natural area perimeter visited possibly more so than any other in our state, offering views to the Three Sisters, Orphan Rock, Korowal (Mount Solitary) and a panorama of other landforms.

The 1930s attempt to facilitate mass car visitation through the consolidation of the predominantly narrow Cliff Drive corridor now needs to make way for the reasserting of what council calls “active transport”, mainly walking. This will include new 30 km/h speed zones and at least slight increases in the distance over which opposing streams of motor traffic are segregated. There needs to be plenty of community discussion to ensure these techniques are used to a sufficient extent.

Visitors, including families and mobility-restricted people, will have short loop options including combinations of sections of escarpment edge and the Grand Clifftop Walk. The freedom from high-speed motor traffic, e-bikes, visual clutter and the unnecessary clearing of any natural vegetation need to be treated as essential components in the delivery of this experience.

Some areas, such as the eastern portal of the Scenic Skyway ride will still need to accommodate heavy tourist coach usage. Council has been offered creative ideas on how the pedestrian experience at such locations can also be enhanced.

Other international tourist attractions of the calibre of this sector of the Blue Mountains, including Cradle Valley Tasmania, Aoraki (Mount Cook village) in New Zealand and the south rim of the Grand Canyon in Arizona have seen significant cutbacks to visitation by private cars in recent years. This is indicative of a world-wide focus on the importance of visitors feeling they are entering a natural area and temporarily leaving urbanised territory behind.

Blue Mountains City Council has this year initiated discussion on the abstract concept of “custodianship”, but the practical question of the custodianship of this sector of the escarpment will have a great impact on how people feel about the Blue Mountains natural areas for decades to come.

Don Morison

Image right: Part of a broad section of road pavement beside a spectacular viewpoint into the Kedumba Valley catchment, near Carrington Park, Katoomba. Many hope that changes beginning in 2027, including more formalised footways and 30 km/h speed limits for motor traffic, will allow pedestrians and pedal cyclists to better appreciate the mood that this escarpment environment can create.



Hail the Restocene, an era of concerted nature restoration

In a recently published article, Volker Mauerhofer (Professor in Environmental Science, Mid Sweden University) and his co-authors argue that situated within the Anthropocene are the seeds of a new, environmentally beneficial epoch, characterised by law-endorsed, planetary-scale restoration of degraded ecosystems: the Restocene.

Perhaps surprisingly, Mauerhofer's argument for the development of the Restocene is legally based: nature restoration is emerging as a structured principle of law, governance, and public policy, rather than as a marginal or merely compensatory, ad hoc activity. Surprisingly? For many decades, endless technical arguments about how best to restore degraded ecosystems (aka *Restoration ecology*) dominated restoration thinking. Move over scientists! In reality, emerging legal principles that demonstrate a duty to restore are nurturing restoration and forging the Restocene.

What are these legal principles? There is growing recognition around the world, including in Australia, that nature restoration is a government duty. Importantly, the duty to restore is not limited to recent damage of obvious origins; it extends to deeper historical damage.

Furthermore, a growing body of legislation is now ensuring that restoration obligations can be implemented by administrative authorities and enforced in courts.

For Mauerhofer, these legal and governance principles are bedrocks of the Restocene.

International, national and local government restoration contribute to the emerging Restocene. So, congratulations volunteer bushcarers and landcarers, professional nature restorationists and restoration administrators in the Blue Mountains. Collectively, you are the harbingers of a potentially bright, emerging era in the troubled Human–Nature relationship. Supported by substantial legal muscle, the Restocene will feature respect, responsibility and care for nature, manifesting as extensive restoration of Earth's numerous degraded ecosystems.

Drawbacks? Apart from references to China and Australia, Mauerhofer's analysis is particularly Eurocentric. Social and cultural dimensions, including First Nations perspectives, are only briefly mentioned.

Peter Ardill, Bushcare Officer

Reference: Mauerhofer, V. *et al.* (2026). Nature restoration legislation, implementation, and enforcement: status, challenges, and solutions for the Restocene. *Restoration Ecology* 34:1 <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec.70417>

A history of the Blue Mountains heritage walking tracks¹

Private track construction on freehold land became a fashion among wealthy residents of the Blue Mountains from the 1870s. Some of the early private track makers became trustees of public reserves who, over 50 years, extended tracks to “new sights”.

Part 5. Towns Vied for Tourism

The main attraction of the Blue Mountains tourist industry up until the late 1930s was the natural scenery. Access to this environment was facilitated by bushwalking tracks. Each town's tourism industry operated independently and in competition with the other towns. As the main tourism resource was the bushwalking tracks, each town's trustees tried to develop the local track system as much as possible. This led to a proliferation of tracks that is unique in Australian history.

Over a period of about 50 years (1885 to 1935) each town tried to get an edge over the others by extending the walking tracks to “new sights”. This process of proliferation reached its highest degree in and around the Jamison Valley.

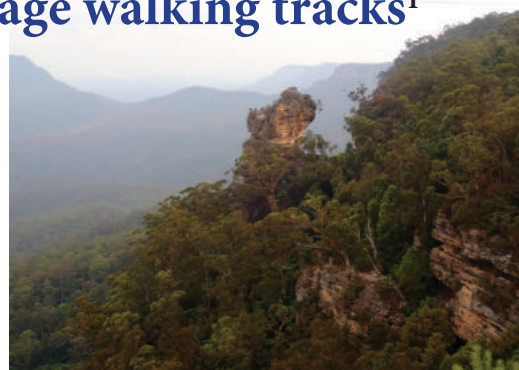
The independently developed track systems of Wentworth Falls, Leura and Katoomba began to merge. There was a continuous set of passes (Wentworth, Roberts, Lindeman and Federal) at the base of the escarpments and an almost continuous set of tracks at the top of the cliffs. A virtual labyrinth of tracks developed around the “nodes” of the system, Wentworth Falls, Valley of the Waters, Gordon Falls, Leura Falls and Katoomba Falls.

Next month: What is the connection between the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and Blue Mountains walking tracks?

¹ Excerpts from Jim Smith's *Blue Mountains Heritage Track Study, Historical Report*, 1998, a monthly series continued from the *July Hut News*.²

² Past editions of *Hut News* can be found at <https://www.bluemountains.org.au> – publications – *Hut News* archives.

Image bottom right: In 1935, the Prince Henry Cliff Walk linked a spectacular network of tracks along the escarpment between Reids Plateau, Katoomba and Charles Darwin's route to the top of Wentworth Falls. This walk would become the basis of the walk fully opened in the current decade as “The Grand Clifftop Walk”. (Image: Christine Davies)



In 1934, Orphan Rock was of such interest to tourists that Katoomba Municipal Council spent part of its £5000 development-money on the track and stairs to the summit. Previously, it had only been scaled by enthusiastic climbers but the hazardous work being completed meant many more tourists could behold a “magnificent view” of the Katoomba Falls. By 1936, Orphan Rock was floodlit at night. But safety on the rock continued to worry. In 1974, entry was closed; a mudslide “obliterated” the access track. Entry to the top of the rock was forbidden.

Source: Robyne Ridge, *Blue Mountains Gazette*, July 2019. (Image: Christine Davies)



Manoeuvring mist on a Wolgan Valley morning, northern Blue Mountains. Geoff Denee

The privilege of sight

Don Morison

From black there materialise first mists of morning,
Wispy and wandering past the dark cliffs,
Choosing a colour for sunlight's selection,
Treetops receive the moist bush air's dawn kiss.

Glad we can open our eyes in these mountains,
Watching the clouds blend this hour into next,
Fleecy or fluffy ... fleeting or frowning,
Diamond-like edges ... pink and gold flecks.

Migrating birds thread the clouds with their feathers,
Floating on thermals towards a pale sky,
Nectar from coarse shrubs that root near the cliff-face,
Sweet and sustaining for travelling flights.

Insects a-flutter ... prismatic particles,
Creatures that know light and dark ... orbs our own,
Each trust our small share of light's timeless spectrum,
Thrilling to moods that glow's patterns create.

Shades of existence ... soothing starved senses,
Clouds grace the sunrise and escort the night,
Dampness and manna ... muses and dream fodder,
Treasure for us with the privilege of sight.



BUSHWALKING: Enjoy the bush, learn about the Blue Mountains natural environment and find out why bushwalking has been a popular pastime in the Blue Mountains for more than 100 years. Our bushwalking convenor is Doug Nicholls dougnicholls@bigpond.com phone 0455 850 753.

Walks are graded and generally suitable for walkers of average fitness but may vary in degree of difficulty. Participants need to be aware of their own capabilities and can discuss with the bushwalking convenor, group coordinator or leader.

Underneath is a brief summary of walks and leaders for this month.

Please check our website for detailed walks program and program changes.
<https://www.bluemountains.org.au/bushwalking.shtml>

MONDAY LEISURE WALKS: Short day walks 3–5 hours. Bring morning tea, lunch and adequate water.

Coordinator: **Melanie Lawson 0431 214 687** melanielawson@outlook.com.au

All walks are Grade 3 unless indicated otherwise.

- 10 August **Glen and Pulpit Rock track** 7 km in total (out and back). Leader Barbara **0428 962 460**
17 August **Bowtells Bridge** 13 km from Megalong Cemetery to Bowtell's Bridge which crosses the Coxs River, 500 m ascent/descent. Leader Lyn **0432 352 850**
24 August **Mount Banks carpark to Frank Hurley Head** 12 km Leaders Lois and David **0427 184 165**
31 August **Coxs Road and Lockyer's Road circuit** 10 km, 280 m descent, with some steep and uneven sections
Leader Melanie **0431 214 687**
7 Sept **Wilkinson Hill and Jinki Ridge** 6 km with some easy off track. Leaders Wayne and Mary **0407 643 512**

TUESDAY

Please check our website for Tuesday bushwalks program.

<https://www.bluemountains.org.au – activities/bushwalks>

THURSDAY PLEASURE WALKS are 2–3 hours and are conducted at a leisurely pace.

Coordinator: **Beverley Thompson 4757 2076** denfenella12@gmail.com

- 13 August **Three Waterfalls walk, Lawson.** 3 km, 125m ascent/descent, Grade 2, Angela **0477 133 367**
20 August **Hourn Point and Boronia Point, Mount Victoria.** Take lunch. Grade 2, Leader Ros **0417 261 465**
27 August **Undercliff Pass, Wentworth Falls.** Take lunch. Grade 2, Leader Beverley **0418 372 076**
3 Sept **South Lawson mysterious convict pit walk.** Take lunch. Grade 2, Leader Gordon **0413 991 524**
10 Sept **Popes Glen to Boyds Beach, Blackheath.** Take lunch. Grade 2, Leader Tracy **0434 262 611**

NOTE TO ALL BUSHWALKERS: Meeting places and times are not given because sometimes there are changes to the program. Please check with the walk leader.

Over 40 years of community effort: Part 1: from page 5

In 1974 to 1976, the federal government funded an extensive process community consultation and impact assessments of a range of scenarios. In spite of this, council adopted LEP 4, which was in complete opposition to the expressed community position – it was clearly hijacked (gazetted in 1982).

Within one year of the first Blue Mountains LEP 4 it was obvious that it was not adequate to deal with the pressures of urban expansion and certainly did not offer environmental protection.

From 1983 until 2005, council undertook extensive studies and mapping to develop a new LEP. This period had many stops and starts, stopped by pro-development councillors or the NSW government at various stages. Community protests and lobbying at other times were instrumental in getting the planning back on track with an environmental focus.

By 1988 it was obvious that the task was huge and there was an urgent need to adopt a new LEP quickly to address the development pressures on the outer urban bushland and rural areas. The urban areas would be undertaken as stage 2.

In response to the draft LEP 89, both Upper and Lower Mountains Conservation Societies mobilised members to check the implications of the plan. The draft was sadly lacking in enforceability of 'protections', failed to retain the separation between towns, allowed urban

development expansion into unsewered areas and did not address catchment management.

Following a Commission of Inquiry and community protest meetings, a revised LEP was exhibited as draft LEP 91 – with further controversy over claims of pecuniary interests and secrecy, then an intensely-fought council election. The new Council made some changes in line with the Inquiry's recommendations before it was gazetted in December 1991.

Lyndal Sullivan

¹ <https://www.bluemountains.org.au/pastcampaigns/LEP-History.shtml>

Part 2 will appear in September Hut News. A History of the development of Blue Mountains Local Environment Plans – 1958–2015 can be found on the Society's website.¹ It gives more information about the detailed work of council planners and how Blue Mountains Conservation Society and other community groups went about achieving protections for the environment.

Blue Mountains Conservation Society – Planning and Development Resource Kit

Do you want to take action on an environmental issue in your neighbourhood or the Blue Mountains broadly?
Do you want information about the laws and procedures relating to development and environmental protection?

Find out what YOU can do!

Go to the Planning and Development Resource Kit:
www.bluemountains.org.au/pdrk-welcome.shtml

What to look for in the Blue Mountains

The changing seasons

At Govetts Leap a gale blowing, the wind coming from the snowfields on the Great Dividing Range. The temperature was four degrees Fahrenheit with an extremely high windchill factor. The walk along the Fairfax Track to Phillips Lookout was more sheltered.

There were signs of the changing seasons. Since the 2019 bushfire, the winter displays of *Acacia terminalis* (sunshine wattle) have been wonderful, the gold of its flowers scattered through the bushland. In mid-July it is still beautiful but it will soon begin to fade. *Acacia longifolia* (Sydney golden wattle) had begun to flower and will dominate the scene. I photographed a prickly little wattle. Can you identify it? The swelling in the stem is a gall, an abnormal growth triggered by a sap-sucking insect.

Four magpies were feeding in the picnic area. I watched as one of them pulled a very long worm out of the waterlogged soil. Life must be good for magpies when the underground microfauna they feed on is driven to the top. *Hardenbergia violacea*, planted during upgrades to Govetts Leap lookout, was flowering beautifully. I associate the *Hardenbergia* with spring.

At home, banksias are flowering. Numerous New Holland honeyeaters have arrived to feed on the nectar. On fine days, the honeyeaters come to the birdbath to drink.



Yellow-tailed black cockatoos have been feeding on the hakea seeds. I found a few flowers on a species of *Prostanthera* (mint bush). In the coldest month of the year, there are signs that spring is on the way!

Adelina



Image: Helen Yoxall

Nectar robbers

Nectar is a food source for many organisms – insects, birds and mammals – and is found in nectaries usually located within flowers at their base. Most animals seeking nectar enter a flower through its opening to reach the nectary. As they brush past the flower's reproductive structures, they often assist in pollination by collecting pollen from the stamens and depositing it on the stigma.

Sometimes, however, nectar-seekers are cheeky and bypass this process by piercing or chewing through the flower's tissue to reach the nectary directly. Here's a photo taken at Glenbrook recently of a golden-tailed spiny ant (*Polyrhachis ammon*) who I suspect was doing just that to a mountain devil (*Lambertia formosa*). It was stationary for several minutes with its mouth pressed to the base of the tubular flower. (I left him to it; I had to move on.) This behaviour is known as "nectar robbing" or "floral larceny". Robbers may be "primary", those who first make the hole, or "secondary", those who later exploit holes made by others.

Helen Yoxall

How many species of ant in Australia?

Ants are probably the most common insects encountered by humans. There are 1,275 Australian ant species described, but this could double with further research. (Australian Museum)

Next time you go on a bushwalk, stop and look around you. Look at the track. Look closely at a tree trunk. Do you see any ants? What are they doing?

Why are ants important?

Ants are important parts of food webs. They are predators, scavengers, seed collectors and prey for other animals. Birds, lizards, spiders, frogs and other invertebrates may eat ants or ant larvae. Ants also help recycle nutrients when they collect dead animals and plant material.

Ants vary in size. Some small ants are only a few millimetres long, while larger ants such as bull ants can be much bigger. Different ants eat different foods. Some hunt small invertebrates, some scavenge dead animals, and others collect nectar, seeds, plant juices or honeydew from sap-sucking insects.

Source: Field of Mars Environmental Education Centre.

What did you see in the Blue Mountains – in your garden or during your favourite bushwalk? Was it something that is not there in other parts of the year?

Please tell *Hut News*, send your stories, photos and drawings to Adelina:

hutnews@bluemountains.org.au
or post to PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782