

Our reference:

DOC13/38366

Contact:

DOC13/55792
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02 64505556

Dr Christopher Watson
President, Ginninderra Falls Association
79 Denny St
Latham ACT 2615

Dear Dr Watson,

I refer to your correspondence on 12 September 2013 where you are seeking an update on the feasibility report into the area known as Ginninderra Falls.

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has completed an assessment of the properties offered for sale and determined that purchase of this land for gazettal is not a current priority.

The assessment included consideration of the landscape, conservation, heritage and socio-economic value of the properties, along with the indicative establishment and ongoing management costs should they be acquired for gazettal as a national park.

While the conservation value and recreational opportunities are acknowledged, the establishment and management costs would be prohibitive. One of the key issues identified in the assessment of the properties was the cost of making the area safe for visitors. I understand the area was once a recreational facility but was closed following a number of serious accidents and subsequent litigation.

NPWS receives many requests to purchase land and these need to be prioritised according to a range of criteria including conservation value and representation across the landscape. At present, these lands are not a priority for purchase and local resources are better directed to management of existing reserves, such as the nearby Brindabella National Park.

Attached is a summary of the NPWS assessment report carried out for the area. As the full report contains sensitive and confidential information, I am not at liberty to provide you with a copy. I trust you can appreciate the need for this confidentiality for all the landowners involved.

I appreciate your interest in this proposal and should you require further information please feel free to contact the Area Manager Mr Anthony Evans on 02 6450 5556.

Yours sincerely

Ann King
Head - National Parks and Wildlife Service
Enclosure

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Summary of property assessment conducted by National Parks and Wildlife Service at Ginninderra Falls

Introduction

The Ginninderra Falls area is located north west of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) border in the vicinity of the Murrumbidgee River corridor and Ginninderra Creek confluence. Three parcels of land in this area totalling 274 ha's have been offered to NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) for potential acquisition.

The owner of another key property has offered access to their land, but has not made an offer to NPWS, to date. The creation of a national park in this area has been proposed by the Ginninderra Falls Association. The following points summarise the preliminary assessment:

About the area

The Area of Interest (AOI) is located within the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative corridor and within the Murrumbateman subregion (including 1.42% reserved lands) being part of the South Eastern Highlands Bioregion.

The mapped vegetation communities within the AOI, being Riparian Forest and Tablelands Dry Tussock Forest would contribute 5.1 % and 2.6% respectively, to these communities under reservation within the Murrumbateman subregion. However, the field assessment identified a different vegetation community on site.

Although none of this community has yet been mapped in the Murrumbateman subregion (NSW) the AOI would represent a useful addition to the reserve system in NSW (although it is represented in the Murrumbidgee corridor of the ACT).

Fauna identified in the A01

A preliminary assessment of the AOI identified a range of very likely threatened fauna such the Glossy black and Gang-gang cockatoo, Spotted-tailed quoll and Sooty and Masked owl. Other possible threatened fauna include Booroolong frog, Eastern pygmy possum and Rosenberg's goanna. An external survey has also identified the Pink-Tailed Worm Lizard, which is listed as vulnerable under TSC Act 1995 and the EPBC Act 1999. This habitat is considered to be of national importance.

Aboriginal sites in the AOI

The AOI traverses two Local Aboriginal Lands Councils, being the Brungle/Tumut and Onerwal. A previous survey has identified nine Aboriginal sites and two sites just south of this area.

Recreational use in A01

Locals have used the Ginninderra Falls area recreationally since the 1920's and more formally since the early eighties. Some of the activities included picnicking, bushwalking, scenic lookouts, rock climbing, abseiling (courses), swimming, fishing, canoeing, children's playground, kiosk and an animal enclosure. The site was attracting 15,000 visitors per annum and up to 35,000 visitors in one year when advertised. The site was closed in 2004 and three serious accidents had occurred prior to closure. Due to a steep dissected landscape with many cliff edges, a formal risk assessment would be required.

Land acquisition costs

The estimated land acquisition costs for three properties are thought to be between \$1.5 and \$2 million. This is indicative only and would be subject to an independent market valuation.

To meet the community expectations for public use of this proposal, the indicative reserve establishment costs are thought to be in the range of \$1.8 to \$2.5 million with staffing of around \$840,000 over three years. These are indicative costs only. Significant expense items include visitors/recreational facilities, safety measures, sealing the internal access road and carpark, toilet amenities and property acquisitions costs.

Ongoing park management would include activities such as fire, weeds and pest control, visitor experiences and infrastructure (particularly roads), staffing, and potential entry fee collection. While it is very difficult to accurately identify management costs without detailed planning, initial estimates are thought to be in the range of \$260,000 for ongoing management costs \$280,000 for additional ongoing staffing. Some of these costs could be at least offset by park entry fees and other leasing revenue.

Legal access to all three properties would need to be negotiated if any acquisition was to proceed. Current internal roads and tracks would potentially need significant upgrade to meet management standards.

Planning issues in the A01

In addition to negotiating legal access, subdivision is potentially required for all properties. The ACT Government recently approved the construction of 4500 homes in Canberra's north west near the AOI and the border of NSW.

The developer for this project has indicated there is potential for the development to expand into NSW at some point in the future. Such an expansion would bring it within close proximity to the AOI.

Based on population projections for Canberra to 2050, the Ginninderra Falls Association suggests that a national park for the Ginninderra Falls area could see in excess of 50,000 visitors per annum.

The Ginninderra Falls AOI contains significant scenic as well as natural and heritage values. The AOI has a range of recreational opportunities for the increasing population of the ACT and Yass Valley Council areas. Establishment of any reserve would require significant commitment from the NSW, ACT and local governments, the community and potentially private enterprise.