



Report Card 2014

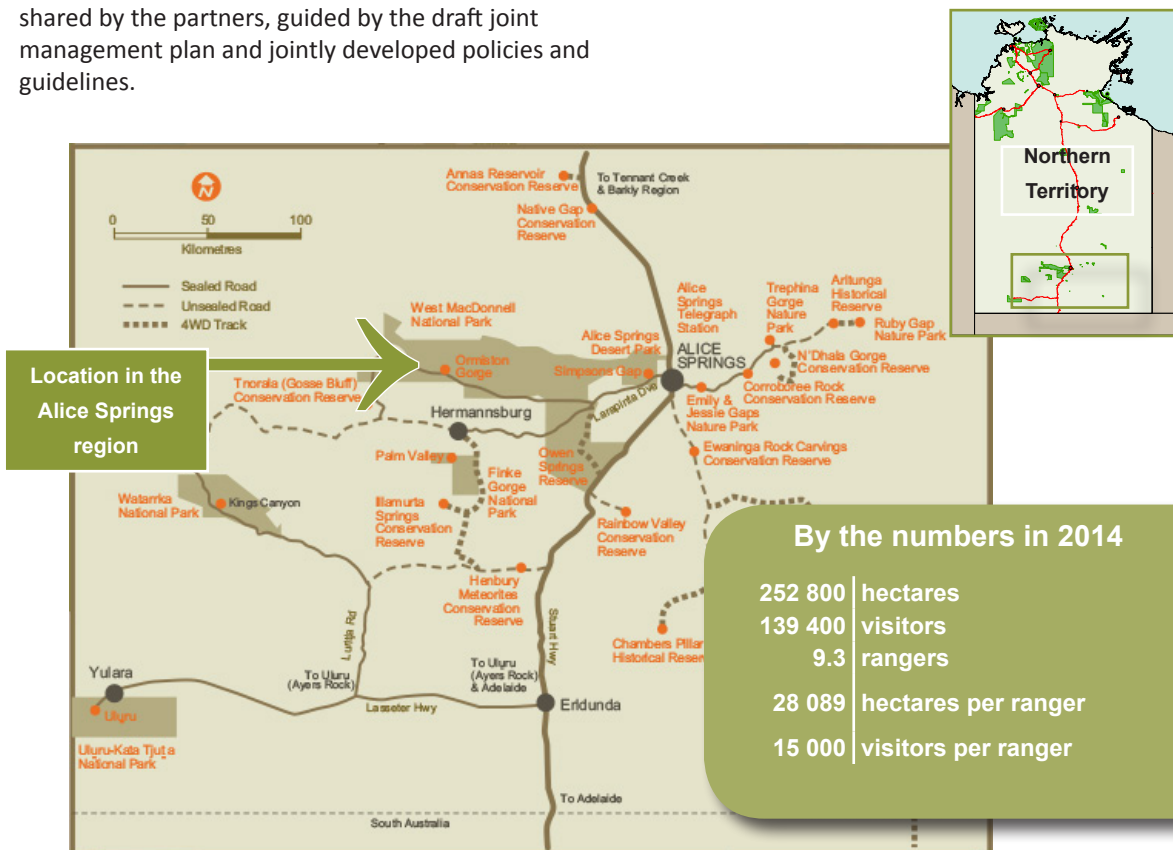
About the park

Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park is west of Alice Springs on the traditional homelands of the Central Arrernte, Western Aranda and Luritja people. At 252 800 hectares, it is the largest national park in Central Australia. The park's main function is to protect and conserve its outstanding natural, cultural and visitor values, many of which are recognised as having national and international significance.

The park is jointly managed by the Traditional Owners and the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory, who work in an equitable partnership. Responsibility for decision making is shared by the partners, guided by the draft joint management plan and jointly developed policies and guidelines.

Visitor attractions include the world renowned Larapinta Trail, a number of permanent waterholes and a diversity of experiences including hiking, sight-seeing and bush four-wheel drive camping.

NT parks and reserves have been assessed and classified for their visitor and biodiversity values. Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park is rated as one of the Territory's most valuable parks and is classified as a Class 1 Visitor park and a Class 1 Biodiversity park.



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The most significant changes in the past 2 years

- New works, infrastructure and interpretive signs have improved the presentation of the park, supported visitor engagement and provided information-sharing opportunities for Traditional Owners.
- Title to the park was granted to Traditional Owners on 8 July 2012.
- Phase 1 of the West MacDonnell National Park Biodiversity Monitoring Program was completed and results reported in April 2014. The report provides new insights into the status of flora and fauna and informs management of the park's natural values.
- External funding through the Red Centre Biodiversity Fund has supported effective management of feral animals and fire within the park and adjoining land. This has been highly beneficial and demonstrates the importance of cross tenure management.
- Rehabilitation and realignment works on the popular Larapinta Trail have improved visitor enjoyment by providing an easier and more accessible track.
- Two exclusive-use campsite subleases were issued to tour operators on the Larapinta Trail.

The most important actions in the next 2 years

- Develop an integrated conservation strategy to better protect the natural values and better manage and monitor threats from fire, weeds and feral animals.
- Work with stakeholders to develop a visitor experience development plan to enhance visitor experiences and guide development proposals for the next few years.
- Increase opportunities for casual employment of Traditional Owners.
- Develop a cultural heritage management plan to guide cultural management programs with Traditional Owners.

How to interpret our tables

Situation	
	Great with no need to improve
	Acceptable with room to improve
	Unacceptable with improvement needed
	Critical with improvement urgent

Trend	
↑	Improving
↔	Stable / No change
↓	Declining
N/A	Not rated / Not applicable
✓	Occurred / In place
✗	Did not occur / Not in place
?	Unknown



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Planning for the park

Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park Draft Joint Management Plan 2014 guides the general management of the park. The draft plan should be released to public comment in 2015. The partners are already working to the draft plan.

The Joint Management Committee, which directs the overall management of the park, met 4 times in 2013–14 to address park management, interpretation and other matters.

An integrated conservation strategy will be developed in 2014–15. The strategy will set clear goals and actions to reduce threat levels over a 5 year period. It will set out a systematic approach to monitoring efforts to reduce the impact of fire, feral animals and weeds, and in turn the impact on the health of the park's flora and fauna. The strategy will be the basis of future report cards.

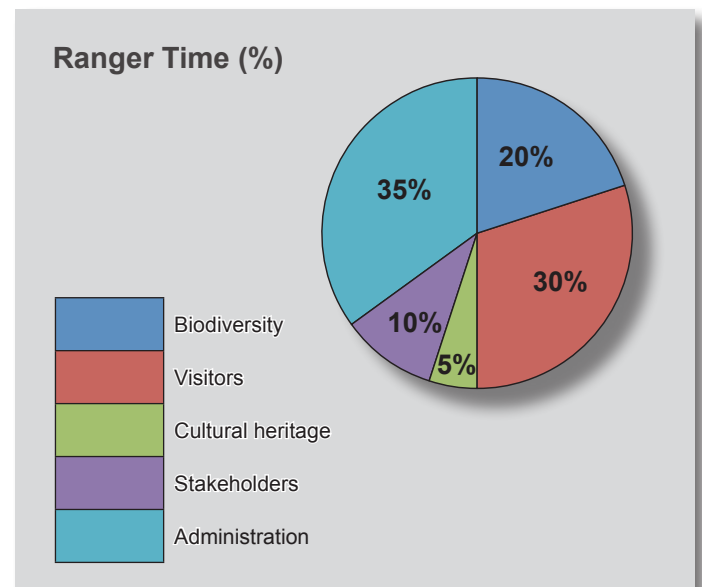
Rangers use operational action plans to assist them to manage fire, weeds and feral animals and to support visitor enjoyment of the park.

How is ranger time invested in park programs?

Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park rangers are responsible for the care and management of the park. They have a responsibility to protect the park's diverse landscapes and significant sites from threats, including fire, feral animals and weeds. They are responsible for overseeing much of the park's visitor facilities and activities and administrative functions. There is also a commitment to engaging with stakeholders and working with the interests of the broader community.

In 2013–14, a total of 9.3 full time staff worked on the park.

Joint management and planning at a glance	
Governance, planning and decision-making processes are established	✓
Effectiveness of the joint management processes	↑



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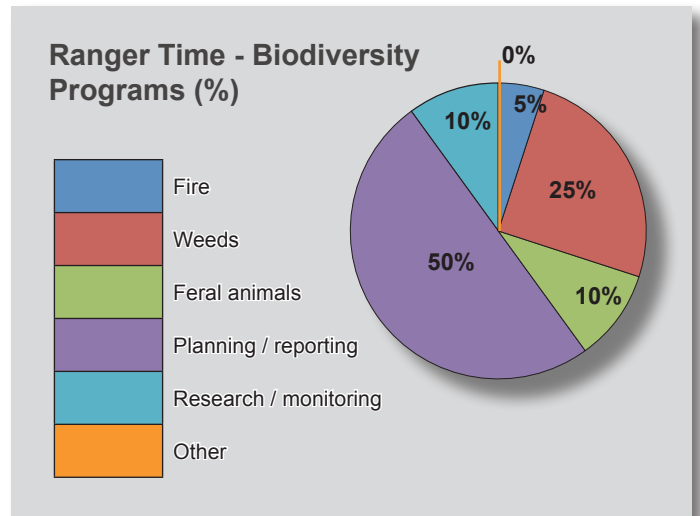
Knowledge of the park's flora and fauna

Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park is one of 3 parks with the highest biodiversity values in the southern NT. It is home to a large range of threatened plant species and supports a rich and varied assemblage of animals including a significant number of threatened and near threatened species. The Australian Heritage Council is currently assessing the park for National Heritage listing.

The main threats to biodiversity in the park are fire, weeds and feral animals.

Considerable research, species monitoring and biodiversity inventory has occurred in the past, therefore knowledge of the park's biodiversity is relatively good. Between 2011-2013 the Department of Land Resource Management commenced flora and fauna surveys as part of an ongoing monitoring program, to be repeated every 5 years. The surveys aim to detect change in plant and animal populations. The park was chosen as the first of three to be surveyed in the program due to its high conservation values and will provide a benchmark for southern NT parks. A report was recently produced that presents the results of the first phase of the monitoring.

The integrated conservation strategy will draw on the full range of knowledge about the park.



Biodiversity management at a glance

Knowledge of the park's species and communities	↑
Change in the level of knowledge of the park's species and communities over the past 2 years	↑

Managing fire

The frequency and impact of wildfire in Central Australia is extremely variable depending on rainfall and the levels of grassy fuel that result. Most years there is insufficient fuel to support extensive wildfire, and landscape-scale wildfires only occur after widespread above-average rainfall. This relationship has changed significantly with the spread of buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*), which has increased the need to reduce fuel loads with prescribed fires, even in the driest years. The Southern Region Fire Task Group provides rangers with direction, guidance and administrative support for planning, delivering and reporting on fire management (refer to the supplementary Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park Fire Report).

Very little fire management was required in 2013–14. Large areas of the park are still recovering from the fires of 2011 and low rainfall for much of the year has led to generally low fuel loads. Fire may be more of an issue in the coming year due to recent rainfall and increasing fuel loads. Fire management plans are complete for the East (Simpsons Gap area) and West (Ormiston area) and guide on-ground work such as fire breaks, fuel load reductions and protection of infrastructure and biodiversity assets. Access to formal firefighting and management training is being explored. Staff members with experience in fire management are sharing their experiences, and some in-house training has occurred.

Fire management at a glance

The park has an annual action plan for fire management that effectively directs action	✓
The achievement of high priority actions in the annual fire action plan (%)	>90%
The capacity of the park's ranger team to manage fire programs effectively	↔
Change in team capacity to manage fire programs over the past 2 years	↔
The level of threat to the park's biodiversity values presented by wildfire this year / now	↓
The trend in level of threat to the park's biodiversity values presented by wildfire in recent years	↔

Managing weeds

Limited weed management was possible over the past 2 years because there was little vegetation growth due to the previous year's fire events and this year's low rainfall. Unfortunately, buffel grass remains a major concern due to the potential for increased fuel loads and competition with native flora. Buffel grass spreads rapidly and is encroaching into new areas. The main priority is to contain buffel and couch in existing areas and try to prevent the spread to key asset areas. Class B weeds such as Mexican poppy, Bathurst burr and Mossman River grass were controlled.

Plans have been written to guide the on-ground management of weeds in each section of the park. Rangers have been working to the plans and have achieved the on-ground outcomes. New GIS tools are being developed to enable rangers to record and use weed data for improved outcomes.

Weed management at a glance	
The park has an annual action plan for weed management that effectively directs action	✓
The achievement of high priority actions stated in the annual weed action plan (%)	70-90%
Capacity of the park's ranger team to manage weed programs effectively	↔
Change in team capacity to manage weed programs over the past 2 years	↑
The level of threat to the park's biodiversity values presented by weeds this year / now	↔
The trend in level of threat to the park's biodiversity values presented by weeds in recent years	↑

Managing feral animals

Feral animal species that affect the park include camels, horses, cattle, rabbits, cats and foxes. There are low fox numbers, however, cats are a major problem. Rangers have good knowledge of feral animal numbers and distribution. Feral herbivore numbers are generally low on the park and the permanent springs sites that are ecologically and culturally significant are in good condition due to ongoing feral herbivore management.

Management has been guided by an action plan; however, the plan is lacking clear monitoring measures and there is currently no formal reporting or measuring of success in terms of specific numbers removed or damage reduced. This will be improved through the upcoming integrated conservation strategy. Quarterly fence patrols have been completed and culling has occurred on park during the year through the Red Centre Biodiversity Fund. The fund has supported the feral animal control program and has enabled management on the park and adjoining land.

Feral animal management at a glance	
The park has an annual action plan for feral animal management that effectively directs action	✓
The achievement of high priority actions stated in the feral animal action plan (%)	>90%
Capacity of the park's ranger team to manage feral animal programs effectively	↔
Change in team capacity to manage feral animal programs over the past 2 years	↑
The level of threat to the park's biodiversity values presented by feral animals this year / now	↔

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Managing for visitor safety and enjoyment

In 2014, over 139 000 people visited Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park. Visitor satisfaction is high, with 95% of respondents in the peak season survey (July 2012) being satisfied or very satisfied with their experience (326 people surveyed).

Visitors commonly remarked on feeling close to nature, beautiful scenery, sense of peace and the enjoyable nature walks. Visitors also frequently commented that the park facilities are very well maintained. Suggestions for improvement included the sealing of dirt roads, more and better signage and mobile phone reception, more shade shelters and drinking water.

Over the past 2 years about \$728 000 of new works were completed including:

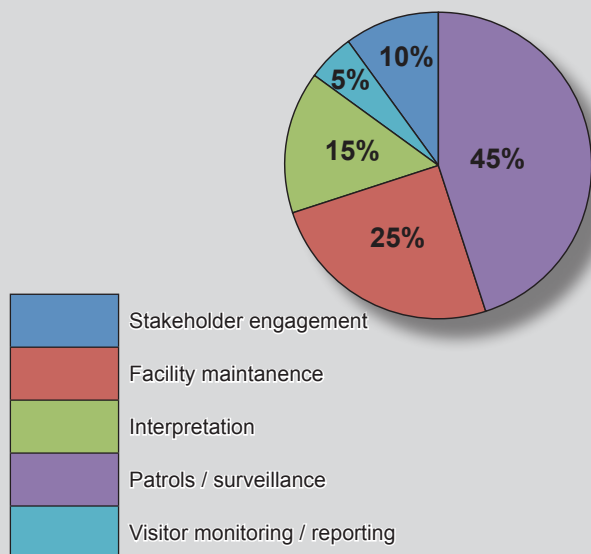
- redevelopment of Simpsons Gap Office and Ranger Station (\$180, 000)

- maintenance and realignment of some sections of Larapinta Trail (\$30 000)
- upgrades to Larapinta Trail including rehabilitation and relocation of Mulga Camp (\$48 000), facilities upgrade and new shelters at Serpentine Gorge and Simpsons Gap (\$290 000)
- Ormiston Visiting Officers Quarters (\$180 000).

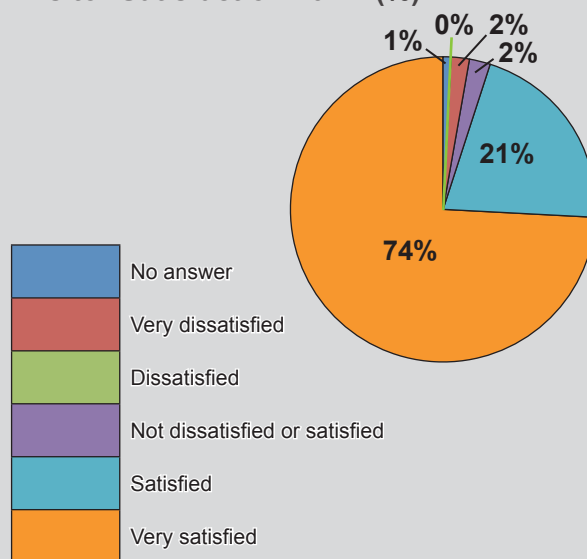
The new works and upgrades have improved the quality of services and access to the park.

Changes over the next 2 years will include a development plan to enhance visitors' experience of the park.

Ranger Time - Visitor Programs (%)



Visitor Satisfaction 2012 (%)



Visitor management at a glance

The park has an annual action plan to support visitor safety and enjoyment	✓
The achievement of high priority actions stated in the annual visitor action plan (%)	>90%
The capacity of the park's ranger team to manage visitor programs effectively	↔
Change in team capacity to manage visitor programs over the past 2 years	↔
Knowledge of visitor numbers, profiles, behaviours, expectations and satisfaction levels	↑
Change in the level of knowledge of visitors numbers, profiles, behaviours, expectations and satisfaction in the past 2 years	↑
Estimated visitor satisfaction with access, facilities and services	↑

Engaging with the community

Community events have been very effective and have received positive feedback from visitors. Events have provided an opportunity for rangers to engage with visitors and exchange information. Community activities included:

- Parks and Wildlife staff regularly engaged with the tourism industry and maintained professional relationships with various tour operators.
- The Friends of the Larapinta Trail volunteer group ran 3 working bees for weed control, track maintenance and guided walks attracting over 60 participants.
- Rangers presented a talk at Simpsons Gap for Heritage Week and a Camping 101 information session.
- 132 Territory Parks Alive walks and talks were delivered to over 1500 visitors.
- The Asana Sante choir performed at Ormiston Gorge in 2013 and attracted over 250 visitors.
- Night Stalks spotlighting tours were held at Simpsons Gap.
- University of Adelaide presented a geology discovery workshop at Ormiston Gorge.
- New Welcome Signs were installed at Serpentine Chalet, Ochre Pits, Redbank Woodland and Finke Two-Mile, updating information and advice and creating a more attractive entry experience for visitors.

- 2 new signs were installed at Serpentine Chalet and 4 new signs for the Dolomite Walk at Ellery Creek, replacing damaged and old style signs with colourful and up to date signs.
- QR codes were included on Parks Alive brochures to take users to a dedicated webpage for additional events throughout the Territory.
- Staff worked with Traditional Owner groups to develop all the above signs.
- Staff worked with Traditional Owners to create artworks for 4 shelters along the Larapinta Trail, at Simpsons Gap, Jay Creek, Finke Two-Mile and Serpentine Gorge. These will be installed in the next month or so after consultation and painting was done in 2013–14.
- 23 permits were issued for various activities including walking tours, nature photography and filming.

Community and stakeholder engagement at a glance

Level of engagement and support from the community / stakeholders	↔
Change in the level of engagement and support from the community / stakeholders in the last two years	↑

Managing cultural values

The cultural values of the park are highly significant. They include sacred sites, culturally significant areas and archaeological sites. A large amount of information has been summarised in a cultural values report prepared by the Central Land Council. However there is currently no specific cultural heritage management plan that directs management of cultural assets.

A cultural heritage management plan will be developed with Traditional Owners responsible for these places to ensure they are properly protected.



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Cultural values at a glance

The park has an annual action plan for cultural management that effectively directs action	x
Capacity of the park's ranger team to manage cultural heritage programs effectively	↔
Knowledge of the park's cultural values	↔

Conservation across the landscape

The Red Centre Biodiversity Fund is a 5 year project funded by the Australian Government. The project aims to protect and improve biodiversity for Australia's Red Centre region through strategic fire, weed and feral animal management. The area incorporates Tjoritja / West MacDonnell, Owen Springs, Watarrka and Finke Gorge national parks, many other reserve areas and Aboriginal Land Trusts that adjoin the Park boundaries. The project aims to reduce the number of hot fires at a landscape scale while promoting the use of small, strategic cool season fires to protect key biodiversity values. Feral animal control aims to reduce grazing pressure and reduce the spread of weeds to new areas. Control of Weeds of National Significance (WONS) in key areas is also part of the project. This integrated approach will improve the strength of native habitat and improve connections between ecosystems across land tenures at a landscape scale.

