



# Finke Gorge National Park

**Joint Management Plan**    October 2011





Finke Gorge National Park Joint Management Plan

Parks and Wildlife Service of the Northern Territory, Department of Natural Resources,  
Environment, The Arts and Sport

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Cover Image: Visitors at Palm Valley (Source: Tourism NT)

This Page: Palm Valley Palms, Finke Gorge National Park

## Executive Summary

Finke Gorge National Park is located 138 kilometres west of Alice Springs within Australia's Red Centre National Landscape. The Park attracts over 28,400 visitors each year and offers some of the finest remote four wheel drive and bush camping experiences in Central Australia. The Park is jointly managed between Traditional Owners and the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service.



Source: Tourism NT

Finke Gorge National Park's key values include an outstanding representation of Central Australian flora, a continued cultural connection to an ancient landscape and a tranquil destination for four wheel drive enthusiasts. The Park features scenic palms, springs and rocky outcrops at Palm Valley and the permanent waters and historic Police Camp ruins at Boggy Hole.

The main objectives of management are to: protect the Park's cultural sites, springs, seepages and associated ecosystems; provide for safe four wheel drive and bush camping experiences; and to share the area's rich cultural heritage with visitors.

Key issues within the Park include protecting palm seedlings from trampling, wildfires and climate change and ensuring that motorists are well prepared for the challenging four wheel conditions.

The Park will receive a high level of management input from park operations with great scope for the joint management partners to increase Indigenous employment associated with the Park. In collaboration with adjoining landowners, opportunities exist to expand biodiversity conservation, four wheel drive routes and explore accommodation alternatives.

# Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
Vision for the Park .....	5
1. Introduction .....	5
1.1 Values of the Park .....	6
1.2 Purpose .....	6
1.2.1 Purpose of the Park .....	6
1.2.2 Purpose of the Plan .....	7
1.3 Joint Management .....	7
1.3.1 The Traditional Owners.....	7
1.3.2 The Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service .....	9
2. Park Governance .....	10
2.1 Planning and Decision-making .....	10
2.2 Business Operations .....	15
3. Zoning .....	20
4. Managing Country .....	23
4.1 Aboriginal and Historical Values .....	23
4.2 Natural and Ecological Values .....	27
5. Managing for Visitors.....	33
5.1 Recreational and Tourism Values.....	34
Appendix 1. Threatened Species List .....	38
Appendix 2. Information Sources.....	39

# Vision for the Park

## “Urrkapintja nyinta - Working together as one.”

The joint management partners of Finke Gorge National Park will talk and work together as one, in a strong, equal relationship to ensure:

- Country is looked after properly for future generations;
- Traditional Owners and Custodians are actively involved through jobs, training and business opportunities; and
- Visitors have a unique experience.

## 1. Introduction

At Finke Gorge National Park the ancient and majestic Finke River has deeply incised the Central Australian Ranges, giving rise to remarkable sandstone formations, varied ecosystems and a safe haven for relict species including the threatened Red Cabbage Palm, *Livistona mariae*. The Park is part of the traditional homelands of the *Arrernte* Aboriginal people, housing a number of important sacred sites and Dreamings that underpin local culture.

Located 138 km west of Alice Springs and 19 km south of Hermannsburg, this 42,253 ha Park is centrally located within Australia’s Red Centre National Landscape. Finke Gorge National Park protects one of Australia’s most stunning natural and cultural environments, contributing significantly to botanical conservation. The Park has become the most popular four wheel drive experience in Central Australia and a potential source of local Indigenous employment.

Finke Gorge National Park (Northern Territory Portion (“NTP”) 6623) is bounded by Henbury Station<sup>i</sup> (Perpetual Pastoral Lease 1094), NTP 657 to the south and Aboriginal freehold land to the north (Ntaria Aboriginal Land Trust NTP 2079, Roulpmaulpma Aboriginal Land Trust NTP 2077 and Uruna Aboriginal Land Trust NTP 2078).

NT Portions 929 and 996 were proclaimed “Palm Valley Flora and Fauna Conservation Reserve” in October 1966 under section 103 of the *Crown Lands Ordinance*, from lands surrendered by Henbury Station and the Finke River Mission. They came under the control and conservation management of the Northern Territory Reserves Board in February 1967. Oil Lease No 3 was granted over the northern portion of the Park taking up most of NTP 929, being Palm Valley and the north-east corner of NTP 996. This area became NTP 5787 and was not declared in the 1978 declaration of the remainder of Finke Gorge National Park.

NTP 5787 became subject to an Aboriginal Land Claim. The Palm Valley Land Claim was heard and the Aboriginal Land Commissioner recommended it be granted to a land trust for the benefit of Aboriginal people entitled by Aboriginal tradition to the use or occupation of the land. The Commissioner’s 1999 report observes that during the hearings both the traditional

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<sup>i</sup> In July 2011, Henbury Station was purchased by R.M. Williams Agricultural Holdings in partnership with the Federal Government. The land will be naturally regenerated for carbon credits to be sold under a carbon farming initiative. The Park shares 50 percent of its boundary with Henbury Station.

Aboriginal owners and the Parks and Wildlife Commission expressed confidence in the likelihood of an agreement for co-operative management of the area.

In 2004, the Park was included in Schedule 1 of the *Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Act*, facilitating the transfer of the land to an Aboriginal Land Trust on the behalf of the traditional Aboriginal owners. The Park was resurveyed into two portions, NTP 6623 (effectively being the part of the Park declared in 1978) and NTP 5787 (which was recommended for grant through the Aboriginal Land Commissioners report). The two portions were scheduled in September 2008 to make up the Lhere Pirnte Aboriginal Land Trust.

To facilitate title transfer the 1978 declaration over the Palm Valley Flora and Fauna Reserve was revoked on 11 June 2010 and Finke Gorge National Park was re-declared a park under section 24(2) *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*. A separate process under section 12 of the *TPWC Act* is required to declare NTP 5787 a Park.

On 7 June 2011, title was transferred to the Lhere Pirnte Aboriginal Land Trust to be held on trust for the Traditional Owners and was leased to the Northern Territory for 99 years to be jointly managed as a National Park.

## **1.1 Values of the Park**

### **A Living Cultural Landscape**

The cultural values of the Park stem from the Arrernte Traditional Owners' long association with the area, as demonstrated by archaeological remains, a number of significant sites and strong ongoing cultural connections. For the Traditional Owners, Finke Gorge is a landscape imbued with cultural, spiritual and historical significance that forms part of their contemporary identities.

The European historic values of the Park relate to a small number of historical sites associated with the explorer Ernest Giles and early pastoralism. The ruins of the Boggy Hole Police Camp are of particular significance.

### **An Internationally Significant Botanical Conservation Area**

The Park's international conservation significance derives from the outstanding representation of Central Australian flora and unique collection of rare and relict plants. Over 684 species exist across a wide variety of ecosystems and habitats including sheltered river valleys, gorges and creeks, fed by constant seepage from sandstone aquifers.

The internationally significant assemblage of rare and relict plants and the Park's potential to provide refuge for threatened fauna are of scientific value. Palm Valley is a National Site of Botanical Significance (Harrison et al 2009).

### **A Remote and Tranquil Four-wheel Drive Tourist Destination**

The spectacular landforms, unique palms of Palm Valley, and remote four-wheel drive experience provide the basis of the recreational values of the Park. Approximately 28,400 visitors a year have excellent opportunities for camping, bushwalking and sightseeing.

A variety of interesting geological and ecological features are of education and interpretation value to visitors, scientists and students.

#### **1.2.1 Purpose of the Park**

Finke Gorge National Park is an IUCN Category II National Park, managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation. The Park will continue to be managed as a significant

conservation area and a remote four wheel drive tourist destination. A collaborative approach will ensure effective management of resources and appropriate tourism development.

Priorities will be to:

- Protect and enhance the outstanding natural and cultural values of the Park with particular emphasis on rare and relict plants;
- Provide a range of recreational and cultural experiences consistent with the remote character of the Park; and
- Meet the needs of Traditional Owners to maintain their connection to country and benefit from joint management arrangements.

### **1.1.2 Purpose of the Plan**

This is the first Joint Management Plan for Finke Gorge National Park prepared under Division 4, Part III of the *TPWC Act*. It will remain in effect until amended or replaced by a new plan. A Park Lease and Indigenous Land Use Agreement provide further background to joint management arrangements in respect of the Park.

This Plan gives direction to the day-to-day management of the Park. It also provides the primary framework against which management performance will be measured. Management success will be defined by performance measures developed by the joint management partners.

This plan was prepared by the Parks and Wildlife Service and Traditional Owners with assistance from the Central Land Council. Planning for joint management began in March 2009 with a series of meetings between Traditional Owners, Parks and Wildlife staff and the Central Land Council. Input was gratefully received from relevant government departments and the public.

## **1.3 Joint Management**

Joint Management is about Traditional Owners and the Parks and Wildlife Service working together, exchanging knowledge and expertise and sharing decisions for managing the Park. The land subject to this Joint Management Plan was transferred to Aboriginal Freehold Land held by the Lhere Pirnte Aboriginal Land Trust on behalf of Traditional Owners on 7 June 2011. Joint management has authority in law under the *TPWC Act*. The plan complies with the Act and the Park Lease and an Indigenous Land Use Agreement registered under the *Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)*.

### **1.3.1 The Traditional Owners**

The traditional Aboriginal owners of the Park area mostly identify as Arrernte. There are some people that identify specifically as Western, Central and Southern Arrernte (Pertame), and also some as Matuntara people, which is the name of a nearby Western Desert language. The majority of people are fluent in Arrernte and it is their first language.

Traditional Owners continue to observe cultural traditions and uphold traditional law, maintaining powerful connections to their country guided by the traditional Arandic model of land tenure. Under Arrernte law, the ancestors from the *Tnengkerre* (or Dreaming) created everything in the landscape, including sacred sites and other features of the landscape. People identify with relatively well demarcated totemic tracts of country called *pmere* in Western and Southern Arrernte and referred to as 'estates' in anthropological literature. Such areas are identified with groups of people, who are related to each other and to the country

through kinship, affinity, spiritual connection, and acquisition of knowledge of Dreaming stories. Each estate is associated with sites lying on particular Dreaming tracks.

These estates are identified by reference to several ancestral sites that make up a song or story line (Dreaming), or sections of such lines. Estates tend to be strongly centred on a main site and/or the major totemic ancestor. Features within the landscape of the Park are the physical manifestations of these story lines. Land association remains central to Arrernte identity despite the history of contact that has changed and shaped ways in which land ownership and group membership is realised.

Aboriginal people have rights in an estate through descent. They inherit primary rights in country from their father and father's father and are known as *pmerekertweye* ("bosses"). Rights in country through maternal connections are also important and are usually traced through one's mother's father. These people are known as *kwertengwerle* ("managers") and are required for rituals and for "looking after" sites and country for their mother's family. Other descent connections, through the mother's mother, and father's mother, may also be recognised. An additional potential base for affiliating to country in Arrernte tradition is a person's place of conception, or the conception place of one's mother or father.

Although *pmerekertweye* and *kwertengwerle* hold different rights and responsibilities, both must be involved in matters relating to the country for which they hold those rights. Under the land tenure system in this region *pmerekertweye* and (senior) *kwertengerle* are recognised as the core members of a landholding group. This is an important aspect of Aboriginal governance and management of country.

In practice it can be difficult for an individual to maintain connections to all the estate countries they are affiliated to. An individual has to make choices about where to ritually and socially realise his or her rights. This can be achieved by spending much of one's life in a particular area of country and acquiring ritual and ceremonial instructions for it from senior *pmerekertweye* and/or *kwertengwerle*. The strongest rights to country are thus based on being *pmerekertweye* or *kwertengwerle* and knowing the ancestral songs and rituals for that country.

The locality of Finke Gorge National Park is very dense in cultural significance given it was, and still is, a heavily populated area in Central Australia. The conditions of the region made it ecologically favourable for the Arrernte population, with the reliability of permanent water sources.

The Finke River Mission (1877-1982) began after the arrival of Pastors W F Schwarz and A H Kempe. In April 1878 they were joined by a group from Germany and the Lutheran mission settlement was named Hermannsburg. Education and literacy had a primarily religious focus and many baptisms and marriages took place at this time. The early years for Arrernte residents on the mission were plagued with hardships such as illness, lack of medical aid, droughts, severe frosts, and violent confrontations with local station owners and police.

As pastoral activities encroached more and more on Aboriginal homelands and hunting grounds, conflict between local Arrernte and Europeans increased. Police camps were established between 1889 and 1891 at Boggy Hole, and at Illamurta between 1894 and 1912. Constable Willshire was a notorious policeman whose reputation was one of uncompromising brutality. He was appointed, along with four Aboriginal constables, to the Boggy Hole police camp on the Finke River in August 1889. He was eventually arrested in 1891 for the murder of two Aboriginal people at nearby Tempe Downs for an alleged attack on his police camp a year earlier.

In 1894 Pastor Carl Strehlow was sent to Hermannsburg. His arrival saw the restoration of station buildings, dispensing of basic medical care, establishment of a school for the children, and he started learning the Arrernte language. Strehlow undertook extensive linguistic and anthropological investigations while there, which were expanded upon by the work of his son T.G.H Strehlow in later years. Carl Strehlow died in 1922 and was replaced by Friedrich

Wilhelm Albrecht, a German seminary graduate. He arrived in 1926 in the middle of an historic drought. During his time, Aboriginal evangelists were trained and mission centres were set up at Haasts Bluff, Papunya, and Areyonga, with white resident missionaries assisted by Aboriginal evangelists. Evangelists were also sent to cattle stations at Henbury, Napperby, Jay Creek, and Maryvale.

With much of their traditional lands leased to pastoralists, Arrernte previously living in an environment with vast and diverse resources eventually became dependent on a ration based economy associated with mission posts, outstations and homesteads. Many people were forced to move in to Hermannsburg. Access to water and other resources became restricted and much of the landscape was denuded by stock. Severe drought further reduced access to resources and forced Aboriginal people to move from station to station as work became available. In order to survive, Aboriginal people took up ration paying jobs and by the turn of the century low cost Aboriginal labour was fundamental to the establishment of the pastoral industry in central Australia. Arrernte people suffered during the colonial period as their traditional country was targeted by the Government for the expansion of pastoralism in the interior. The establishment of the Lutheran Mission at Hermannsburg also had a profound impact on the lives of local Aboriginal groups, in particular through education and religion.

Members of most Arrernte families in the region lived and worked together on surrounding pastoral stations and at Hermannsburg community for several generations and accordingly, have strong historic associations with the area. Despite the dislocation of many associated with the area, the Arrernte strongly maintain their culture and connection to country. This has been assisted more recently by the grant of land around the northern part of the Park to the Ntaria; Uruna; Roulpmaulpma; Rodna and Ltalaltuma Aboriginal Land Trusts and the hearing of the Palm Valley Land Claim. These events highlighted the strong relationship Aboriginal people have retained with their land.

Hermannsburg is a large community and many outstations in the surrounding area are occupied on a continuous basis. The location of the community in relation to the Park has allowed regular visitation to the area and assisted maintenance of ties to the land, its sacred sites and stories. Due to its history and accessibility, Hermannsburg is a popular destination for tourists. Many Arrernte are involved in tourist ventures within the Park and surrounding area, offering cultural tours and camping for domestic and international tourists. People also live and work in Alice Springs and some travel further to pursue careers and lifestyle. While people may be away from country for long periods of time, their strong attachment to the place remains unbroken.

Traditional Owners are looking forward to the new opportunities afforded by joint management and are proud to have regained title to their land under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*. The Tnengkerre remains central to Arrernte life and the Traditional Owners are pleased to have the opportunity to ensure it remains protected and respected by all who visit the area. They are eager to be involved in all management programs in the Park and utilise time spent on country to pass on important knowledge to young people and each other.

### **1.3.2 The Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service**

The Parks and Wildlife Service is dedicated to conserving the natural and cultural heritage values of parks and reserves, while providing high-quality nature-based tourism and recreation opportunities for visitors. The Service is committed to joint management and working with adjoining landowners, the community and tourism industry.

This Plan has been developed by the joint management partners with positive intent. Like the Traditional Owners of the Park, the Parks and Wildlife Service is optimistic about the future.

## 2. Park Governance

Joint management involves Traditional Owners and the Parks and Wildlife Service working together to achieve mutual goals and aspirations, exchange knowledge and expertise and share decisions. A mutual understanding of country, law, culture and Aboriginal decision-making principles are fundamental to making good joint management decisions. For the purpose of joint management, the term **governance** is defined as “the way the partners organise themselves and the rules they put in place to realise their shared vision.” It includes all aspects of partnership, communication, planning and decision-making.

Ensuring the joint management partners have a clear structure and process for making decisions is essential for strong joint management.

### Principles for effective governance

- Decision-making and accountability should be shared equally and reviewed regularly to check that joint management is working well.
- Working together on country is important for “*listening and obeying cultural rules together*” as well as developing mutual trust, respect and understanding between the partners.
- Aboriginal decision-making processes must be respected.
- Management priorities and resource allocation will be guided by the Park’s key values and risk assessment.
- Active participation and employment of Traditional Owners in Park management is central to joint management success.
- Public support for joint management is very important.

### 2.1 Planning and decision-making

Joint management provides exciting new opportunities to make better management decisions based on a combination of Aboriginal and western approaches to land management. Successful joint management relies on a truly equitable partnership that will be measured against the achievement of the aims in this Plan and the satisfaction of the joint management partners.

Traditional Owners’ values and perceptions in relation to looking after country do not always align with conventional park management approaches that emphasise fire, weed and feral animal control. Traditional Owners’ perception of joint management is strongly influenced by what they value most highly – Aboriginal law and extended family. Respecting these differences will significantly assist the partnership and provide the basis for effective joint management and governance of the Park.

While Traditional Owners highlight the importance of involving appropriate senior people in decision making they are also realistic about managing the Park effectively and using resources effectively. They see the need for a governance system that allows a representative group of Traditional Owners to be involved in decision making and recognise their responsibility to “*make sure that person knows everything when another big meeting comes.*”

## Clear Roles and Responsibilities

Clear roles and responsibilities are essential for joint management in accordance with Aboriginal and Northern Territory law (see **Table 1** and **Figure 1**).

- A **Joint Management Committee** will be the principal decision making body for the Park. Its functions are to: share information; review progress against management directions in this Plan; review satisfaction of the partners; review and provide advice regarding policies and procedures development; and provide strategic direction to park operations. The Committee is responsible to the Traditional Owners and the Parks and Wildlife Service.
- **Traditional Owners** provide an essential contribution to the direction and management of the Park. Core members of landholding groups have responsibilities for decision making and overseeing cultural protocol. They also have responsibilities for managing traditional knowledge and passing it on to the right people, looking after the land and its resources, maintaining sacred sites and keeping the country alive. Traditional Owners are responsible to the land, law and culture.
- The **Parks and Wildlife Service** nominated by the Territory as its representative is a joint management partner with the Park's traditional Aboriginal owners. The Parks and Wildlife Service will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the Park under the direction of the Joint Management Committee. The Parks and Wildlife Service is required to finance and resource the Park's ongoing management including administrative functions, staffing, infrastructure and services. Parks employees are responsible to the Chief Executive Officer of the Department.
- The **Central Land Council** is an independent statutory body created under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)*, responsible for consulting with and protecting the interests of Traditional Owners of the Park and representing the wishes of local Aboriginal people in relation to Park management.

All joint management decisions will respect Aboriginal law and be consistent with Northern Territory and Commonwealth legislation, the Park Lease, Indigenous Land Use Agreement and Department policy and guidelines.

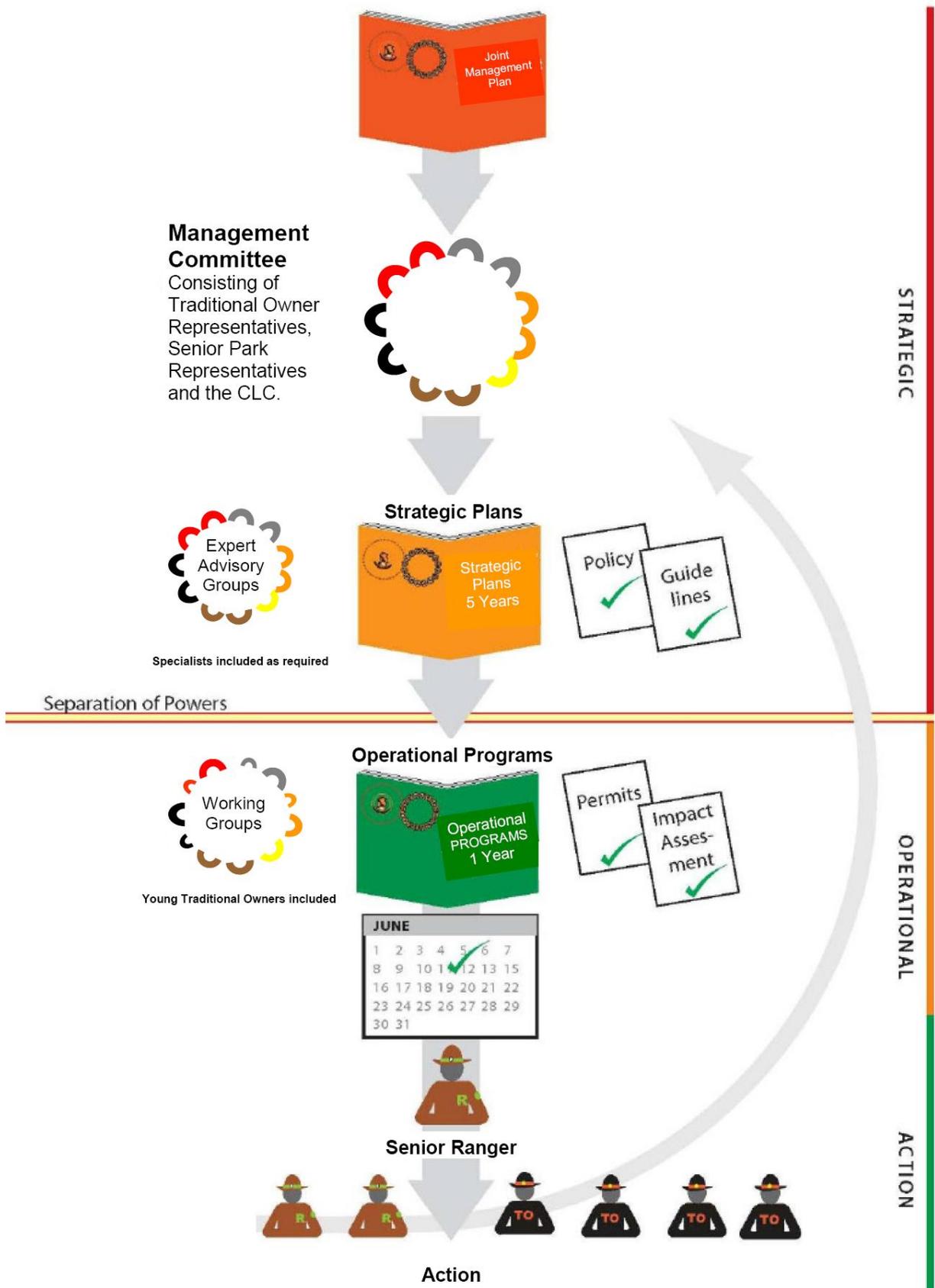
## Effective Governance

The Traditional Owners and Parks and Wildlife Service know that the partnership will need to keep growing and improving through commitment and new skills in governance. Monitoring the partnership and progress against the aims in this Plan is important to build effective joint management and a strong partnership.

**Table 1: Roles and Responsibilities**

Joint Management Committee	Park Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercise executive authority and be accountable for the management of the Park.</li> <li>• Consult with community, industry and Government stakeholders.</li> <li>• Provide strategic management direction and advice to Park operations.</li> <li>• Set policy and procedure and consider annual budgets.</li> <li>• Set development direction and criteria to evaluate proposals.</li> <li>• Consider other proposals not specified in this plan.</li> <li>• Monitor and review management performance.</li> <li>• Review and approve management strategies and operational programs for the Park.</li> <li>• Monitor and approve local policy/guidelines and decision-making criteria for permits, contracts, licences and development proposals.</li> <li>• Establish advisory or working groups to address specific tasks.</li> <li>• Consider:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- major changes to infrastructure, access, business operations, commercial activities, mining;</li> <li>- subleasing or licensing land portions for specific purposes, including public infrastructure; and</li> <li>- proposals for living areas and extensions to the area of the Park.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountable for day-to-day management of the Park.</li> <li>• Responsible for implementing operational programs, policy and procedure as approved by the management committee.</li> <li>• Maximise on-ground participation of Traditional Owners in management of the Park.</li> <li>• Report progress to the management committee.</li> <li>• Monitor management effectiveness and adjust management according to new information, improved procedures, new technology and new threats or issues.</li> <li>• Implement approved operational programs according to management strategies.</li> <li>• Undertake day-to-day management operations such as patrols, maintenance, compliance, community relations, and search and rescue.</li> <li>• Issue permits, contracts and licences according to approved policy/guidelines and decision-making criteria.</li> <li>• Issue minor new works contracts, such as those for maintaining, replacing, repairing or improving existing infrastructure.</li> <li>• Employ staff, build capacity and employ Traditional Owners for Park operations wherever possible.</li> </ul>

Figure 1: Park Management and Operations – Roles and Responsibilities



### **Planning and Decision Making Aims:**

- An effective, equitable partnership that makes good management decisions.
- Partners and community that are satisfied with the processes and outcomes of joint management.

### **Management Directions:**

**2.1 Joint Management Committee** – The Committee will be established as the governing body for the Park. The Committee will meet at least once each year. Membership will consist of at least two senior Parks officers, Traditional Owner representatives and a Central Land Council staff member. Traditional Owners will decide their representatives.

**2.2 Making decisions** – Decisions will be made by consensus. The joint management partners will share decision-making equitably and responsibly according to the framework outlined in **Table 1** and **Figure 1**. Decisions potentially impacting the whole Park require the input of the Joint Management Committee and may require consultation with the full Traditional Owner group.

**2.3 Expert advisory groups and working groups** – Working groups of Traditional Owners, Parks staff, Central Land Council officers and specialists may be formed to support the Committee or address specific tasks including heritage conservation and interpretation.

**2.4 Dispute resolution** – The joint management partners will aim to resolve disputes through open discussion and consensus at the Joint Management Committee level. However, should a dispute arise between the joint management partners which cannot be resolved, the partners will follow the dispute resolution process outlined in the Finke Gorge National Park Lease.

**2.5 Supporting and building effective governance** – The joint management partners and the Central Land Council recognise that joint management will be a process of continuous learning and growth. Support and training will be provided to the partners in communication, partnership, planning and governance. The partners will be pro-active in engaging the local community and key stakeholders. The capacity of the joint management partners will be enhanced by:

- **Governance training** – Governance training will be provided to the joint management partners to give them the tools and skills to work effectively in the partnership.
- **Professional development** – Professional standards and staff competencies will be supported by ongoing training in all aspects of park management with special emphasis on cross-cultural training provided by Traditional Owners.
- **Information exchange** – Park operations and the Joint Management Committee will be responsible for passing on information to Traditional Owners, the local community and key stakeholders. The Central Land Council will provide support if required.
- **Community-based Junior Ranger Program** – The partners will engage the local community through a jointly planned and delivered community education program. The Junior Ranger Program will engage Traditional Owners to build joint management capacity and support from an early age.
- **Performance monitoring** – The joint management partners will annually measure performance using indicators relating to: the effectiveness of the joint management partnership (including decision-making processes); the implementation of annually agreed priorities; and achievement towards longer-term aims stated in this Plan.

## 2.2 Business Operations

On-ground work in parks and reserves across the District is directed by a hierarchy of strategies and operational programs that are developed to achieve the aims included in this and related Plans. The Joint Management Committee is responsible for developing long-term strategies and overseeing annual programs implemented by Rangers, Traditional Owners, contractors and volunteers. The Committee's role will be to match priorities and new information with available staff and budgets to best achieve the vision and aims of this Plan.



Traditional Owners will benefit from joint management through jobs, training and business opportunities.

### Aboriginal Training, Employment and Enterprise Development

It is important that joint management helps support sustainable livelihoods for Traditional Owners' families, particularly those that live near the Park. Traditional Owners look forward to new opportunities in working on country and applying their knowledge and skills to better look after the Park. Traditional Owners also recognise support is available if they are willing to take up new opportunities created through joint management.

Throughout the joint planning process, the Traditional Owners emphasised the importance of accredited training and employment for their families and acknowledged their responsibility to support young people. Traditional Owners say *"We all got to work together, look after country, create jobs for people. We got to work on our land. Work for our young people, other Traditional Owners' kids, grandchildren."* Helping local Indigenous people develop the skills needed to work as rangers is important for achieving the shared vision of a park staffed by rangers with practical, long-term cultural commitment to looking after the area.

Flexible employment offered by the Parks and Wildlife Service has provided work experience, skills exchange and accredited training to some Traditional Owners and local Aboriginal people and has led to the development of a community ranger group at Hermannsburg. Known as the Tjuwanpa Rangers, their numbers and experience have enabled them to successfully complete contracted work on nearby parks and Aboriginal land.

The Finke Gorge National Park Lease provides that the Northern Territory Government must give preference to the participation of the traditional Aboriginal owners of the Park in any commercial activities conducted under the Lease, subject to any law in force in the Northern Territory. Interested Traditional Owners will be supported by the Parks and Wildlife Service to gain skills, accreditation and business development support.

It is important to acknowledge that the broader employment aspirations of Traditional Owners and their families cannot be met by joint management alone. Consequently, employment and training plans developed by the partners will need to be developed within a local and regional context and involve other groups and organisations. Traditional Owners identified a range of employment opportunities during planning meetings including: park & community rangers, tour guides, apprenticeships and family businesses.

## **Management, Resources and Operations for Joint Management**

Practically all funding to manage Finke Gorge National Park and develop services and facilities is provided by the Northern Territory Government, allocated as a share of funds to manage this Park and all other parks and reserves across the Northern Territory Parks Estate. In a similar way, works funded through the minor and capital works programs are subject to whole of Government and Departmental priorities. Greater co-operation and linkages between government departments and agencies is required to support joint management implementation and achieve positive socio-economic and environmental outcomes.

A Management Effectiveness Framework has been developed by the Parks and Wildlife Service to prioritise each park's contribution to the Northern Territory Parks Estate and resource allocation. Finke Gorge National Park is one of the most valuable parks for biodiversity conservation and regional tourism.

The remoteness of the Park requires a level of self-sufficiency. Management facilities consist of a modest office, a well equipped workshop and three staff houses are located on the Park. Ongoing training is important to maintain and develop competent and professional Park staff. Training in cross-cultural communication and governance are high priorities.

Volunteers and Sydney University have provided invaluable contribution to park management programs on the Park over several years. Future activities should include opportunities for cross-cultural learning and working together.

The joint management partners have an obligation to protect the natural and cultural values of the Park and a duty of care to park visitors. Effective use of limited resources hinges on integrated operational planning. Annual fire, weed and feral animal control plans are based on protecting park values, risk minimisation and long-term strategies of five years or more. Co-ordination and integration of plans into a prioritised, annual Operational Plan is essential to maximise resource use and effectiveness.

## **Research, Survey and Monitoring**

Information about the Park's values, environmental trends and the effectiveness of management actions assists decision making for park management. Data on visitor numbers, demographics, behaviour and satisfaction levels is also useful to guide visitor management and planning.

Most research, survey and monitoring programs are carried out as internal projects by the Parks and Wildlife Service or its Department. Sydney University has conducted valuable research and monitoring programs over several years in the Park. Traditional Owners have knowledge of the Park that may contribute to research outcomes. It is important that Traditional Owners are consulted about, and invited to participate in, research, survey and monitoring projects and, where possible, employed in this work.

Research by external agencies or individuals is encouraged. A permit is required if handling or interfering with wildlife under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation By-laws*. Local guidelines for research permits are required to ensure protection of park values and Indigenous intellectual and cultural property. It is important that the outcomes of research projects are communicated to the joint management partners.

## **Permits, Commercial Activities and Development Proposals**

Permits issued under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation By-laws* are required for activities that involve special access, use of any part of the Park for commercial purposes or various other uncommon activities. This includes: research, public gatherings, aircraft operation, commercial tourism and commercial photography.

Permit conditions are aimed at ensuring accurate and appropriate promotion of the Park and minimising negative impacts on park values and other park users. It is important that the

permit application and approvals process is clear and efficient. The Joint Management Committee will be responsible for developing practical local guidelines for commercial activities including film and photography. Some permits may require supervision by Parks and Wildlife staff and / or Traditional Owners and may incur a fee.

Tour companies require a Tour Operator Permit under the TPWC By-laws. The Traditional Owners and the Parks and Wildlife Service want information given by tour operators to be accurate and appropriate as tour operators can have a strong influence on visitors' experiences of the Park. The Tour Operator Permit System provides a means for the joint management partners to better liaise with tour operators, and to monitor the activities of tour groups.

A permit is required to operate a business in a Park, such as a tourism concession. A licence or sub-lease may be issued for the occupation or specific use of an area. Under the Park Lease the Northern Territory must give preference to the participation of the traditional Aboriginal owners of the Park in any commercial activities conducted, subject to any relevant laws in the Northern Territory. Some Traditional Owners have expressed interest in revitalising their stake in the local tourism industry.

Development proposals must be consistent with any applicable laws in force, Departmental policies, and will be subject to assessment by the joint management partners to ensure the natural and cultural values of the Park are not impacted. Protection for sacred sites is provided by the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)* and the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act*. Registered heritage sites and prescribed Aboriginal archaeological places and objects are subject to clearances under the *Heritage Conservation Act*. Significant development may be subject to the *Environmental Assessment Act* and/ or the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth)*.

## **Mining**

The area is known for its natural gas reserves and continues to draw interest from exploration companies. A petroleum licence (EP OL3) over the northern part of the Park was renewed in 2003 and is due to expire in 2024. Mining and extractive activities have the potential to adversely impact the scenic, natural and cultural values of the Park. Under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)*, Traditional Owners have the right to control mining on Aboriginal Land.

## **Relations with Community and Neighbours**

Park neighbours, Tourism NT, the wider tourism industry and the community have been consulted in the management of the Park for many years. Joint management arrangements will not change this situation. The Park is a public asset and the partners are jointly accountable to the community. Managing issues and influences beyond the park boundary, cooperating with neighbours and integrating park management activities will enhance visitor experiences and land management programs. Henbury Station is now a private conservation area which presents significant opportunities for cooperative management between the two properties for conservation outcomes.

The Territory Eco-link is a long-term Northern Territory Government initiative to link parks from the tropical savannahs of the Top End to the desert of Central Australia through a network of public and voluntary private conservation arrangements. Finke Gorge National Park lies within the conservation corridor and borders a number of Aboriginal Land Trusts and pastoral lands (see **Figure 2**). This initiative could provide the impetus for cross-tenure land management programs between the Parks and Wildlife Service and neighbours for conservation outcomes and to some extent, visitor access and safety.

The Northern Territory Government is pursuing World Heritage Listing of the West MacDonnell National Park. Finke Gorge National Park may also be included in any future nomination.

**Business Operations Aims:**

- The Aims and Directions in this Plan achieved with resources used effectively on agreed priorities.
- Traditional Owners benefiting economically through Park related employment and business.
- An improved knowledge base and clear processes for strong decision-making.
- A community that is engaged in and supportive of joint management

**Management Directions:**

**2.6 Indigenous training, employment and enterprise development** – A rolling program for training, employment and enterprise development based on Traditional Owners' interests and capacity will be determined and reviewed annually by the partners. Where the Parks and Wildlife Service cannot directly assist, accredited training and business development support will be provided to Traditional Owners through coordination with other relevant Northern Territory Government departments and agencies.

- **Indigenous employment opportunities** – The partners will continue to identify and provide opportunities for flexible and direct employment and training for Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal ranger traineeship program will continue as a means to increase opportunities for local people to become rangers.
- **Contract services** – Traditional Owners and Aboriginal organisations they support will be preferred service providers where capacity to meet contract requirements is demonstrated and subject to any applicable laws in force in the Northern Territory. Other contractors providing training and employment to local Aboriginal people will be strongly encouraged to apply.
- **Tourism** – Traditional Owners will continue to be encouraged to take up commercial tourism opportunities including camp fire talks, campground maintenance, cultural tours or other viable enterprises. Appropriate support will be provided and agencies such as the Central Land Council, Tourism Central Australia and Tourism NT will be requested to assist with developing ideas and identifying service providers to assist with developing business plans, skills and funding sources. The joint management partners will liaise with the tourism industry through established forums and organisations as required.

**2.7 Operational Plans** – Prioritised Operational Plans will be developed annually based on protection of the Park's key values and assessment of risks or threats to them. The joint management partners will have an equal role in the annual planning and review of management programs and operational plans for the Park. Operational planning will pay particular attention to:

- Vision, principles, core values, aims and directions of this Plan.
- Regional priorities, available resources and external funding options.
- Paid Traditional Owner participation in on-ground programs.
- Listening and responding to concerns raised by the partners, neighbours and the public.
- Integrating management programs.
- Encouraging and supporting local business.

**2.8 Financing** – Parks and Wildlife will finance and resource the Park's ongoing management including administrative functions, staff, infrastructure and services. Partnerships with private industry in provision of infrastructure and visitor services will be encouraged and considered by the partners. External funding may be sought for specific projects.

**2.9 Living areas, subleases and expansion of the Park** – Proposals for living areas, subleases or expansion of the Park will be considered initially by the joint management partners through the Joint Management Committee. Wider consultation and full consideration of the issues will take place as appropriate. Decisions will be endorsed by the Joint Management Committee. Living Areas and subleases will be subject to environmental impact assessment, Departmental policies and locally developed guidelines.

**2.10 Permits – Delegated Parks and Wildlife staff** will have the authority on behalf of the Joint Management Committee to endorse standard permit applications that involve an approved activity, require no special access, are low impact and in keeping with Traditional Owners wishes. The **Joint Management Committee** will develop local policies and guidelines for assessing special access or activity permits.

- The Committee may be convened to consider applications if an activity or permit application involves special access or activities. Traditional Owners from the affected area must be consulted.
- Any proposal involving significant disturbance of previously undeveloped areas of the Park may be referred to the Environment and Heritage Division of the Department to aid decision-making or set development guidelines.
- Activities or proposals that are culturally sensitive, large or complex, or part of a major commercial project will require the Committee to fully consider all details before passing the application to the **full Traditional Owner group** for consideration.
- **Commercial activities and development proposals** – Commercial activities and development proposals will be subject to the approval of the partners, relevant legislation, Departmental policy and will not compromise the values of the Park as described in this Plan. Preference will be given to commercial activities which benefit Traditional Owners and subject to any relevant laws in force in the Northern Territory.

### **2.11 Research, survey and monitoring**

- **Scientific research, survey and monitoring** – Programs will be described in Operational Plans and be subject to annual review by the joint management partners. Guidelines developed by the partners will maximise participation by Traditional Owners and employment in research, survey and monitoring projects and incorporation of Indigenous knowledge where appropriate.
- **External research** – Researchers will require a permit that is consistent with TPWC By-laws, Park policies and guidelines including ICIP. Wildlife researchers require permits to interfere with, take or keep wildlife. Parks and Wildlife staff and Traditional Owners should be consulted in developing research proposals.
- **Visitor monitoring** – Visitor monitoring projects will be determined by the partners. Visitors will be counted with traffic counters or other reliable means. Qualitative surveys will be conducted at least every third year. Visitor comments sheets will continue to be collected and recorded. Data will be used by the joint management partners for planning and decision-making.

- **Park Reporting** – Every five years, the partners will review the implementation of this Plan and prepare a State of the Park Report, reporting on the condition of key values and recommending adaptive changes to management if appropriate.

**2.12 Excavation, mining and exploration** – Soil and gravel will be extracted for soil conservation works in the Park with the approval of the partners. External requests for excavation will require a written application that will be subject to the approval of the joint management partners and pursuant to a permit under the TPWC By-laws. The partners will discuss protecting parts of the Park from mining. Fossicking will not be allowed.

**2.13 Community engagement** – Neighbours and local stakeholders will be encouraged to work with the joint management partners in matters of mutual interest, consulting annually with the partners in conservation and tourism matters, resolving issues and developing opportunities including those that are related to the Park's interests, but lie outside its boundary.

- The established **volunteer** program will continue on the basis that it will not compromise or compete with Traditional Owners' aspirations or opportunities.
- Park staff will continue to regularly liaise with neighbours and community ranger groups to support cooperative management in the use and control of fire, control of stock and feral animals, weed control and soil conservation across tenures.
- The partners will work with the tourism industry and relevant agencies to ensure park images and messages are accurate and appropriate.

**2.14 World Heritage Listing** – The partners will consider the benefits of the Park being included in the World Heritage nomination for the West MacDonnell Ranges.

### 3. Zoning

The Park is managed for multiple purposes and different areas of the Park will be managed differently. The zoning scheme is a general summary of the purpose and focus of management for all areas of the Park, based on the specific values of those areas and their level of visitor access and facility development.

The zoning scheme indicates management intent at the time of this Plan's preparation. It is not intended to be a basis for regulation of access or development and may be changed during the term of this Plan to provide for improved protection of values and / or enhancement of visitor opportunities. Three management zones are identified for Finke Gorge National Park:

- **Visitor Zone** – areas that provide for concentrated tourism experiences, while retaining unspoiled vistas and natural appearance of the Park.
- **Conservation Zone** – areas that provide for nature / culturally-based recreational experiences requiring personal space and solitude, while sustaining natural processes.
- **Special Protection Zone** – marks areas or sites of exceptional conservation and / or cultural significance. Unmarked areas may be equally sensitive but are not shown for reasons of protection. Boundaries are indicative only.

**Zoning Aim:**

- Park values protected whilst providing for public access and enjoyment.

**Management Directions:**

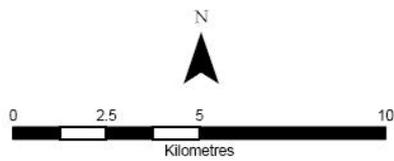
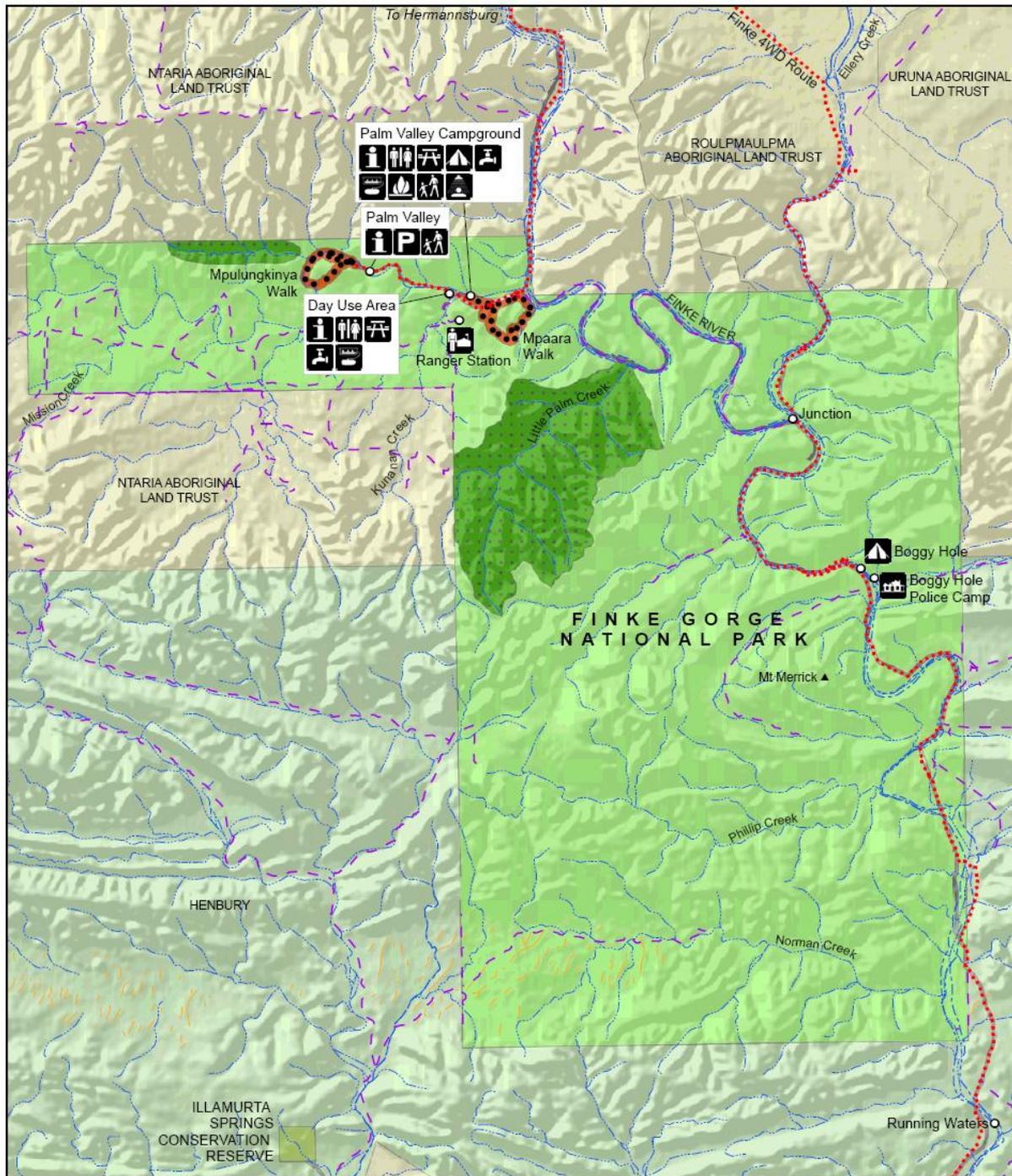
**3.1 Zoning** – Management of the Park will be in accordance with the zoning scheme (**Table 2, Figure 2**).

**3.2 Development** - Regardless of the designated zone all management and development will have regard to maintaining the Park’s natural character and conservation values. Any new development will be subject to the approval of the partners and appropriate environmental, sacred site and cultural heritage clearances and protection measures.

**Table 2: Zoning Scheme**

	<b>Visitor Zone</b>	<b>Conservation Zone</b>	<b>Special Protection Zone</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	Concentrated visitor use whilst minimising negative impacts.	Controlled visitor use for experiencing remote undeveloped areas of the Park.	Protection of natural and cultural values.
<b>Management Focus</b>	Maintenance and presentation of high standard facilities, interpretation and visitor safety.	Land conservation programs; fire, weed and feral animal management. Minimising and monitoring visitor impacts.	Protection of culturally significant sites, threatened species and biodiversity hotspots from impacts of fire, weeds and feral animals.
<b>Visitor Access</b>	Access for four wheel drive vehicles on designated tracks. Marked walking trails for pedestrian access.	Overnight visitor access by permit only or in connection with approved concession.	Visitor access strictly controlled, by permit only.
<b>Visitor Activity</b>	Camping, picnicking, walking, swimming, fishing, photography and nature appreciation.	Self-reliant bush walking, research and commercial tourism (including bush camping) under permit.	Scientific research, survey and monitoring under permit. Interpretation of specific values where appropriate.
<b>Facilities</b>	Campground, parking areas, walking tracks, picnic facilities, shade shelters, interpretive signs, toilets, emergency facilities.	Park management and environmental protection facilities. General provision for nature-based tourism under terms of concession permit.	Facilities necessary to ensure protection of values, ie. fences, vehicle barriers, interpretation.

Figure 2: Zoning Scheme



- | Zoning Scheme   | Cadastral  | Localities   |
|---|--|--|
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:orange; border:1px solid black;"></span> Visitor               | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:yellow; border:1px solid black;"></span> Freehold         | <span style="display:inline-block; width:10px; height:10px; border:1px solid black; border-radius:50%;"></span> Localities |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightgreen; border:1px solid black;"></span> Conservation      | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightyellow; border:1px solid black;"></span> Pastoral    | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; border-top:1px dotted black;"></span> Walking Track            |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:darkgreen; border:1px solid black;"></span> Special Protection | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightgreen; border:1px solid black;"></span> Park/Reserve | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; border-top:1px dashed red;"></span> 4WD Track                  |
|   |  | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; border-top:1px dashed purple;"></span> Management Track        |
|   |  | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; border-top:1px solid blue;"></span> Drainage (250k)            |
|   |  | <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; border-top:1px solid orange;"></span> Sanddunes (250k)         |

## 4. Managing Country

Finke Gorge National Park is valued by the joint management partners and the wider community for its remoteness, unique palms, scenic beauty and rich cultural associations. This Plan encourages the joint management partners, neighbours<sup>ii</sup> and the wider community to work together to conserve Finke Gorge’s significant natural and cultural values

Joint management requires a new way of looking at managing country. Under customary law, Aboriginal people and land are seen as one, and country is defined by sites and Dreamings. Traditional Owners of the Park have an obligation to maintain the cultural integrity of the area.

Caring for country in a joint management context requires cross-cultural understanding and respect to ensure that the Park is looked after properly in a way that involves both partners, combining western science with Indigenous knowledge.

### Principles for Managing Country

- Managing country means managing natural and cultural values together.
- Management activities should protect and enhance Park values.
- Management of cultural knowledge is the responsibility of Traditional Owners.
- The Burra Charter provides sound guidance for conserving cultural and historical values.

### 4.1 Aboriginal and Historical Values

The heritage values of Finke Gorge National Park are a combination of the physical landscape overlain with a rich layer of tangible and intangible cultural attributes. The Park contains a number of sacred sites, a large number of archaeological sites and a few historical sites. When combined, these remind us of at least 30,000 years of human occupation, adaptation and innovation.

The majority of sites are relatively undisturbed and located in remote areas of the Park. Several sites may be significant; however there has been limited assessment of their significance and heritage value, especially their significance to relevant Traditional Owners. It is important that archaeological sites are protected from visitor impacts and historical sites conserved until their heritage value is determined.



*Arrente people have maintained strong cultural connections to their land, despite many hardships.*

<sup>ii</sup> The Park shares 50 percent of its boundary, a range of natural and cultural values and management issues with Henbury Station, a private conservation area.

## A Continued Cultural Connection to Country

Containing some of the largest and most permanent waters in Central Australia, the Finke River has sustained an ancient people during the most prolonged droughts. Known as *Lhere Pirnte* by the Arrernte Traditional Owners, the river and its surrounds comprise a living landscape of cultural, spiritual and historical significance.

The cultural landscape that exists today is testimony to Aboriginal people's resilience and ability to adapt over time. Hermannsburg, pastoralism and religion are key features of the past that have shaped and defined the lives of Traditional Owners today. Arrernte people have maintained strong connections and deep attachment to their country, despite the effects of colonialism and the efforts of many to undermine traditional practices and Aboriginal law.

Under the laws from the Tjengkerre or Dreaming, the Traditional Owners of Finke Gorge National Park are responsible for country and are obliged to maintain and protect it. To ensure country is properly cared for, they continue to pass information onto the next generation by "*showing our ancestors' history there, how to look after it.*" They continue to hold ceremonies and attend meetings for spiritual and secular purposes relating to the area. Restricted ceremonies are occasionally held on important sites within the Park.

Traditional Owners have detailed knowledge of bush foods and medicines including where and when to find them, and how to use them. Hunting and gathering are important activities for maintaining connection to country and passing knowledge on to the next generation. Traditional Owners exercise their right to hunt wildlife and gather bush foods and medicine in accordance with Aboriginal tradition, and as permitted under the *TPWC Act*.

### Pre and Post-contact Sites

Pre and post-contact sites are an important part of the cultural landscape and many are significant to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. They are tangible reminders of the continuity and change Traditional Owners and their country have endured.

- **Aboriginal Occupation Sites** - Numerous occupation sites occur along the Finke River, consistent with it being a major trade and travel route for the central ranges and western desert Aboriginal people. The large permanent waterhole at Boggy Hole (*Litharra*) is particularly significant. Several rock painting and engraving sites are located throughout the Park. Archaeological evidence at the upper Finke River catchment indicates approximately 30,000 years of occupation, with more intensive use of resources occurring in the last 1,000 years.
- **Sacred Sites** - The Park contains many places of spiritual significance and a number of dreaming trails traverse the country, linking the area culturally to places far away. A number of sacred sites have been recorded in the Park and are protected under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act*.
- **Boggy Hole Police Camp** - Established in 1889 by Constable Willshire to "pacify" suspected cattle killers, this site has an infamous association with repression of local Aboriginal people. The stone ruin is on the Register of the National Estate and may, in the future, be listed on the NT Heritage Register for its significant heritage value.
- **Cocky's Camp** - A timber post and rail cattle yard associated with early pastoral activity on what was once Henbury Station. Known as Cocky's Camp, this site in the south-east of the Park is seldom visited, but potentially offers good interpretive material for visitors.
- **Bonds Tours Campground** - Established in 1933, Bonds Tours were the first commercial tours to bring visitors from the Finke River Mission Station (Hermannsburg) to a camp on Palm Creek. Several huts were erected on the site in the early 1950's. All structures were eventually removed in 1976 and the Palm Valley campground now occupies the original site.

### *Cultural Heritage Clearances*

It is important that significant places, rock art and archaeological material in the Park are protected. The *Heritage Conservation Act* gives specific protection to prescribed Aboriginal archaeological places and objects in the Northern Territory. Archaeological places may also be sacred sites and protected by the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act* and the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)*. The partners are required to consult with Northern Territory Heritage Officers and seek cultural heritage clearance for any proposed works at those sites. Sacred site clearances should also be sought for all archaeological sites on the Park.

### *Sacred Site Clearances*

Protection for places that are of cultural significance in the Northern Territory is afforded under overlapping legislation. The *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)* gives legal recognition to areas which that Act terms “sacred sites” and defines as: “a site that is sacred to Aboriginals or is otherwise of significance according to Aboriginal tradition, and includes any land that, under a law of the Northern Territory, is declared to be sacred to Aboriginals or of significance according to Aboriginal tradition”. The Act makes it an offence to enter or remain on land that is a sacred site.

Complementary Northern Territory legislation, the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act (NTASS Act)* also provides protection for all sites that fall within the scope of this definition. This protection is generally provided in the form of an Authority Certificate from the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority in response to land use proposals. It means that the traditional Aboriginal owners have an enforceable right to say who enters their sacred sites, and what cannot happen on their sacred sites. Illegal entry, works on or use of a sacred site is an offence under the *NTASS Act*.

Strong joint management will ensure that sacred sites are protected in accordance with Traditional Owners’ wishes. Under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)* the Central Land Council has a specific function to “assist Aboriginals in the taking of measures likely to assist in the protection of sacred sites” and under its established procedures will carry out this role in facilitating joint management.

### *Indigenous Intellectual and Cultural Property*

Indigenous Intellectual and Cultural Property (ICIP) refers to the cultural heritage of Aboriginal people, as defined by Aboriginal people. The definition of ICIP is necessarily broad and inclusive. For Aboriginal owners, ICIP includes objects, places, practices, knowledge and ideas that have a wide range of social, spiritual, historic and other values which are intrinsic to their identities and relationships, including relationships with country. The Parks and Wildlife Service, together with the Central Land Council, supports Traditional Owners in their expressed desire to protect, promote and develop their ICIP.

#### **Cultural Values Aims:**

- Traditional Owners satisfied with protection of cultural sites and intellectual property.
- Historic sites properly documented, assessed and conserved as appropriate.

#### **Management Directions:**

**4.1 Aboriginal cultural business** – Parks and Wildlife will respect Traditional Owners’ advice relating to cultural matters and customary obligations. Ample notice will be given to the public regarding temporary closures for cultural purposes where possible.

**4.2 Hunting and gathering** – Rights in relation to hunting and gathering from the Park for traditional purposes will extend to Traditional Owners and Aboriginals who have

traditionally used the area in accordance with Aboriginal tradition. A hunting and gathering policy will be developed by the Joint Management Committee and approved by all Traditional Owners.

**4.3 Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP)** – Traditional Owners will retain ownership and control of their cultural and intellectual property consistent with policy agreed between the Central Land Council and the Parks and Wildlife Service.

**4.4 “Back to Country” program** – The partners will spend time on country together, facilitating transmission of cultural knowledge and skills between Traditional Owner families, to the younger generation and to the rangers, as appropriate. As required, the program will be supported by the Central Land Council.

**4.5 Culturally sensitive areas** – Parks and Wildlife will uphold restrictions and guidelines for sacred sites or culturally sensitive areas of the Park as directed by the Central Land Council consistent with Traditional Owners’ wishes.

**4.6 Sacred site clearances** – The Central Land Council will have sacred site clearance responsibility for all proposed work on the Park. However the joint management partners may agree from time to time require a person who proposes to carry out work on the Park to apply for an Authority Certificate under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act*, issued by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

**4.7 Cultural heritage clearances** – Expert assessment will be sought to ensure compliance with the *Heritage Conservation Act* for works to prescribed Aboriginal archaeological places and objects in the Park, historical sites and any significant development requiring soil disturbance. Sacred site clearances through the Central Land Council will also be sought for works to any archaeological sites on the Park.

**4.8 Managing Aboriginal and historical values** – The joint management partners will develop a cultural heritage management program and guidelines for the Park with input from the Central Land Council. The partners and the Central Land Council will work together to identify supporting resources if required. The cultural heritage program will provide for:

- **Archaeological and historic site assessment.** Sites will be properly documented and assessed for their significance and heritage value, including significance to relevant Traditional Owners where appropriate. The Burra Charter principles and process will guide this assessment.
  - Existing cultural heritage information will be consolidated and Traditional Owners consulted as to its appropriate storage and future use.
  - Research, including recording oral histories and Indigenous knowledge, will be encouraged where resulting knowledge is expected to contribute to site assessment. Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property will be protected as per **4.3**.
  - Potential nomination of the Boggy Hole Police Station ruins to the NT Heritage Register will be discussed by the Joint Management Committee and affected Traditional Owners consulted.
- **Aboriginal and historic site conservation.** Sites will be maintained until they can be properly assessed for their significance and heritage value.
  - A conservation management plan for the Boggy Hole Police Station site will be developed and implemented by the partners. Works will be subject to Territory wide prioritisation and funding.
  - Sites of cultural significance will be identified within special fire protection areas in the Fire Management Strategy and protected as part of the annual Fire Management Plan.

- Sites exhibiting evidence of past occupation and continuing traditions may be made accessible and interpreted for the public, subject to obtaining the permission of affected Traditional Owners and provided the sites are adequately protected.

## 4.2 Natural and Ecological Values

Finke Gorge National Park is known for its outstanding representation of Central Australian flora, remarkable geology and reliable waters that provide refuge for many threatened, endemic and disjunct species. Maintaining this biological diversity requires a good understanding of species requirements, ecosystem dynamics and threatening processes. Aboriginal people hold knowledge that can contribute significantly to this understanding and the effectiveness of management programs.



*Threatened species will benefit from the integration of Aboriginal knowledge and western techniques.*

### Botanical Diversity

Finke Gorge National Park is a valuable contributor to biodiversity conservation within the internationally significant MacDonnell Ranges Bioregion. Many of the 684 plant species recorded across the Park occur in the “biodiversity hotspots,” associated with the springs of Palm Valley, the lower slopes of the Amphitheatre and the Little Palm Creek catchment. These areas of high conservation value are variously threatened and are identified within the Special Protection Zone (see **Figure 2**).

The Palm Valley springs, seepages and rockholes (including Kunanan Creek), contain many rare, relict and endemic species including the unique and nationally threatened Red Cabbage Palm and MacDonnell Ranges Cycad. Of the plant species recorded from Central Australia, one quarter have been collected from Palm Valley alone, making it a site of national botanical significance. It is important to protect the sensitive spring areas and palm seedlings from uncontrolled visitor access, feral herbivores, localised aquifer draw-down and potential soil-borne pathogens.

Little Palm Creek contains the most significant stands of Red Cabbage Palm outside Palm Valley. It is also an important area for fire sensitive species such as Caustic Bush, Hill Mulga, Holey Trunk Mulga, Native Pine and the threatened Palm Valley Myrtle. The integrity of the catchment relies on its protection from unplanned fires, introduced grasses, large feral animals and public access.

The steep, calcrete slopes of the lower Amphitheatre area support many slow growing, fire sensitive species including the nationally threatened Minnie Daisy. Healthy areas should be monitored and protected from Buffel Grass invasion as they are particularly vulnerable to increased fuel loads and fire-induced erosion.

## Reliable Wetlands

The gently folded and uplifted sandstones of the James and Krichauff Ranges are naturally porous, providing permanent groundwater discharge to the springs and seepages of the Park and contributing to the waterholes of the Finke River system.

The permanent waters of Boggy Hole and semi-permanent waterholes of the Park are regionally significant and some of the largest and oldest wetlands in Central Australia. They provide suitable habitat and breeding grounds for a number of frogs, fish and waterbirds including the nationally threatened Finke Goby and Australian Painted Snipe. Other notable vagrants include the Australian Pelican, Black Swan, Jabiru and Osprey.

Wetlands are particularly vulnerable to impacts associated with feral herbivores and pollutants (effluent, insecticides, sunscreens and detergents). Stock are actively excluded from the Park by strategic fencing. Low-impact bush camping is allowed along the Finke River Four Wheel Drive Route. Further research is required to measure the health of these high-value aquatic ecosystems and their management requirements. Traditional Owners are particularly keen to see camping impacts reduced at these culturally significant sites, requesting rangers to “*make sure it’s clean, no pollution.*”

Sections of the Finke River and Ellery Creek have been affected by extensive flooding, Buffel Grass and Couch Grass infestation. Many mature River Red Gums with nesting hollows were lost during the 1988 floods, highlighting the importance of protecting the remaining trees and riparian vegetation from campfire outbreaks, weed spread and accelerated soil erosion. Community and visitor education and the reduction of unofficial tracks along these “access corridors” are aimed at protecting remnant vegetation.

## Concentration of Threatened Species

Finke Gorge National Park contains many species of conservation significance including six nationally threatened species and 11 species threatened at the Territory level (see **Appendix 1**). Of the 684 plant species recorded in the Park, four species are threatened, 23 species are classified as near-threatened, 16 species as endemic and 10 species as relict and disjunct.

The iconic Red Cabbage Palm of Palm Valley occurs solely in Central Australia, with almost the entire population occurring within Finke Gorge National Park. Palm seedlings are vulnerable to crowding by introduced grasses and trampling by large feral animals and humans. Mature palms may be threatened by fire-induced soil erosion if fuel levels are high. A recent palm census indicates the palm population to be stable or increasing following the exclusion of large feral animals from the Park and visitors from Little Palm Creek. Visitor education and improved track definition through Palm Valley would enhance existing conservation efforts.

The MacDonnell Ranges Cycad occurs amongst the rocky gorges of Palm Valley, with an impressive display at Cycad Gorge. Landscape-scale fire management is aimed at reducing the frequency and intensity of fire across its known range. Low-key monitoring indicates that illegal seed collection, considered a threat in parts of the MacDonnell bioregion, is not an immediate concern in this Park.

Minnie Daisy and Palm Valley Myrtle are reasonably plentiful in the Park occurring on the lower calcrete slopes of the Amphitheatre area and the steeply dissected rocky sandstone gullies of Palm Valley respectively. Both species are highly susceptible to Buffel Grass invasion, high fuel loads and erosion following high rainfall. These species would benefit from weed control, reduced fuel loads and long-term monitoring.

The Park contains 12 mammal species, 47 reptile species, 112 bird species, eight frog species, eight fish species and numerous invertebrate fauna. Several species are significant due to their conservation status, endemism or distribution range (see **Appendix 1**).

Healthy populations of Slater's Skink have been mapped and monitored in various habitats across the northern part of the Park since 2006. Known warrens in Palm Paddock and Little Palm Creek are actively protected from Buffel Grass invasion, wildfire and human disturbance. Survey, monitoring and conservation efforts will continue.

Black-footed Rock-wallaby are frequently seen in the steep-sided rocky outcrops of the Amphitheatre area and Palm Valley. A simple monitoring program indicates increased numbers since the exclusion of large grazing animals, however they would further benefit from reduced numbers of feral predators (foxes and cats) and competition from rabbits.

Land Snails are commonly found amongst rock rubble and fig leaf litter across the northern part of the Park. Three of the five species recorded are only reserved within Finke Gorge National Park, including the endemic *Basedowena squamulosa*. Areas known to contain Land Snails are checked periodically and may require protection from Buffel Grass and wildfires if there is no natural protection.

The Finke Goby is a highly localised fish confined to the permanent waterholes of the upper Finke River. Threats include degradation of riparian vegetation and illegal net fishing. Their presence was confirmed at Boggy Hole in 2009, initiating a waterhole monitoring project to determine their status and establish baseline data for assessing the health of these important aquatic ecosystems.

The Common Brushtail Possum is restricted to a few isolated locations of riverine habitat in Central Australia. They are thought to exist in Finke Gorge National Park and Rangers opportunistically search their preferred habitat for possum sign, and protect large River Red Gums from wildfire.

Emus are sometimes sighted in the southern Finke River, despite a couple of unsuccessful Emu reintroductions in the north of the Park. Australian Bustards are occasionally observed in Norman Gully. Both species are in decline in the Northern Territory and thought to be under threat from hunting. Agreement with Traditional Owners to hunt within sustainable limits and predator reduction will benefit these birds.

Australian Painted Snipe and other vagrant waterbirds are occasionally observed at shallow, vegetated waterholes within the Park. Stock exclusion and subsequent recovery of wetlands have benefited these species, much to the delight of bird watchers. Disturbance from campers during critical times of the year remains a management concern.

## **Protecting the Park's Ecology**

Over the years extensive flora and fauna surveys have been undertaken by Park rangers, biologists, volunteer groups and Sydney University. Further surveys and incorporation of Indigenous ecological knowledge into park management should increase the number of species recorded, their known distribution and improve understanding of their ecological requirements.

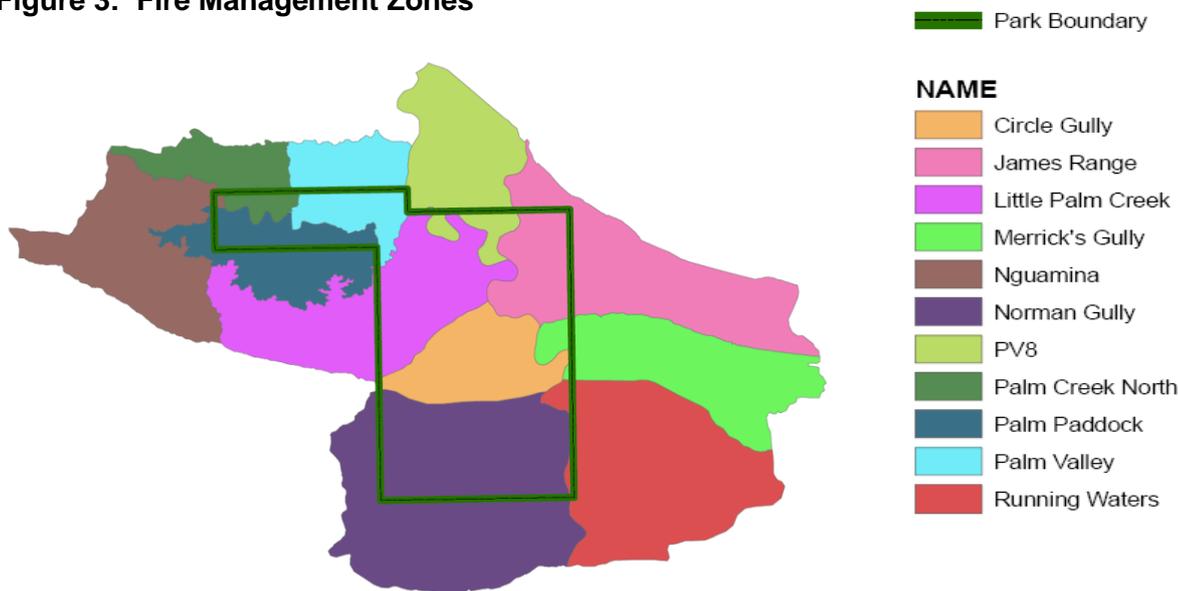
Finke Gorge is a Central Australian park where rangers feel their efforts have made a considerable difference. Visible evidence of successful fire management and feral animal control programs can be attributed to a long history of strategic planning, dedicated park staff and co-operative neighbours. Vigilance and adaptive management are required to ensure threats from wildfires, weeds, feral animals, climate change and human activities continue to be minimised. It is essential that integrated management programs are focussed on maintaining biological diversity and maximising efficient resource use.

### *Fire Management*

Fire is a natural occurrence and has played a major part in shaping the region's vegetation communities. Approximately 300 vegetation units defined throughout the Park in a biophysical mapping project have been simplified into 20 vegetation communities. The Park

has been further divided into ten conservation zones that reflect topographic and ecological boundaries, forming the basis for biodiversity conservation and fire management.

**Figure 3: Fire Management Zones**



A number of long unburnt areas and fire sensitive communities occur in the Park. These are largely associated with rocky ranges, moist gullies and watercourses that provide natural fire breaks (in the absence of introduced grasses). It is important that these areas are protected from increased fuel loads and altered fire regimes that may threaten highly localised species directly, through fire-induced erosion or loss of habitat. Species most at risk include long-lived woody obligate seeders such as callitris and threatened small mammals/reptiles and grass-layer invertebrates (Slater's Skink and Land Snails). Old open mulga woodland may be at risk due to mature trees being sensitive to fire.

An adaptive Fire Management Program for Finke Gorge National Park has been in place since 1997. A five year fire management strategy promotes fire regimes that better reflect the requirements of different vegetation communities. It also provides for the protection of human life and property, research and monitoring and wildfire suppression. It is important for Traditional Owners to be actively engaged in integrating Indigenous ecological knowledge and priorities into fire planning and implementation. Regional fire planning and liaison with adjoining landowners remains a critical part of effective fire management. The partners will liaise with the adjoining Henbury Station regarding fire management and their carbon sequestration conservation project.

*Invasive and Introduced Plant Management*

Thirty four introduced plant species have been recorded in the Park. Most are confined to river banks and flats, spread by floodwaters and vehicles. Buffel Grass and Couch Grass are the highest priority weeds for control as they form dense stands and increase the threat of frequent, intense fires.

Buffel Grass extends well into the range country, whilst Couch Grass is largely confined to waterways and springs, where it threatens the palms at Palm Valley and old River Red Gums. It may also impact the Caldwell's Clubrush, presumed extinct on the Park.

Isolated pockets of Castor-oil Bush and Athel Pine are controlled along the Finke River within the Park. Ongoing commitment to control residual athel pine in the upper reaches of the Finke River within Finke Gorge NP is of significant benefit to the overall success of the program. Early detection and eradication of Spiny Rush at permanent and semi-permanent waterholes is a management priority.

Finke Gorge National Park's weed program focuses on controlling established weed populations in areas of high biodiversity - especially Little Palm Creek - whilst minimising introduction of new weed species. The effectiveness of this program relies in part, on weed control activities, making it necessary to liaise and consult closely with landholders and other stakeholders of all catchments. It is also necessary to educate visitors about reducing the spread of weeds by keeping to the main vehicle tracks.

#### *Feral Animal Management*

A number of vegetation communities within the Park have been affected by the long history of grazing and trampling by stock, including the Red Cabbage Palm. Some Traditional Owners remember the days when "*there used to be only dust when horses and cattle were at Boggy Hole.*" Vegetation change, coupled with periods of prolonged drought and the introduction of predatory cats and foxes, are thought to be responsible for local extinctions of the Lesser Stick-nest Rat and the nationally vulnerable Thick-billed Grass Wren in the Park.

Removal of 4,000 horses from the Park in 1991 has enabled vegetation and local Black-footed Rock Wallaby populations to recover. A program to increase the population of Red Kangaroos into the Park has been moderately successful, assisted greatly by a rabbit control program that has effectively reduced the number of rabbits, and subsequently, foxes in the Park. Camels and potentially donkeys are a management concern, particularly south and west of the Park.

Effective long-term control of horses, camels and rabbits requires a strategic approach and a commitment of resources. Control methods have included strategic fencing, mustering and removal by pet meat operators under concession agreements, poisoning, shooting and trapping. Traditional Owners are reluctant to endorse broad-scale culling. The partners need to work together to achieve effective and acceptable control methods. Maintaining strategic fencing and an effective buffer to the Park is critical and will require ongoing consultation and liaison with adjoining landowners.

#### **Natural Values Aims:**

- No decline in species richness and habitat diversity.
- Indigenous knowledge and skills incorporated into management programs through Traditional Owner participation.

#### **Management Directions:**

**4.9 Indigenous Ecological Knowledge** – Indigenous ecological knowledge will be incorporated into natural resource management through the active involvement of Traditional Owners in planning and implementation activities. Information will be recorded and protected according to ICIP policy and guidelines agreed by the partners (see **4.3**).

**4.10 Biodiversity conservation** – Protection of the Park's biodiversity will be one of the highest management priorities.

- Research, survey and monitoring of threatened species and threatening processes will be prioritised by the joint management partners. Traditional Owners will be involved in conservation activities and researchers will be engaged where possible and appropriate. Species distribution and status will be recorded and entered into the Park Geographic Information System (GIS) and Fauna Atlas database.
- Boggy Hole will be the site of a long term waterhole monitoring program to establish base-line data, assess the status of the Finke Goby and study aquatic ecological processes. Recreational net fishing will continue to be prohibited.

- A palm census will continue at five year intervals and simple, repeatable monitoring programs will be developed and implemented for Slater's Skink, Land Snails and Black-footed Rock-wallabies.

**4.11 Fire management** – Protection of life, infrastructure and biodiversity from the effects of wildfire will be a high priority.

- Vegetation mapping and monitoring will be expanded and enhanced to include threatened and fire sensitive species. Fire history and species ecological responses to fire will be recorded and entered into relevant databases.
- Fire management will focus on fire regimes that maintain botanical diversity across the Park and minimise carbon emissions. Fuel reduction burns in fire-tolerant communities will occur during cooler months, or after rain.
- Fuel loads around park infrastructure and cultural sites susceptible to fire will be reduced. A strategic network of burnt linear and natural breaks will be maintained throughout the Park. Breaks will be maintained across weed infested river banks and flats.
- The joint management partners will liaise with Bushfires NT and consult with adjoining landowners for regional fire planning, wildfire suppression and prior to planned burning. Five year fire strategies and annual fire plans will be approved by an expert group. The partners will liaise with the adjoining Henbury Station regarding their carbon sequestration conservation project.
- Parks staff will inform visitors about campfires, firewood collection and enforce seasonal fire restrictions within the Park.

**4.12 Invasive or introduced plant management** – Invasive or introduced plant survey and control will be prioritised in the high biodiversity areas of Little Palm Creek and the springs of Palm Valley.

- New outbreaks of Buffel Grass and Couch Grass will be controlled. Weed distribution and control efforts will be recorded and entered into park GIS database. Only non-residual, biodegradable herbicides will be used to control weeds and maintain fire breaks along creeklines.
- Annual search and control of Spiny Rush, Caster-oil Bush and Athel Pine will be continued along Ellery Creek and the Finke River. Early detection of Annual Beard-grass will be a priority at Kunanan Creek springs. New weed species will be eliminated as soon as possible following detection.
- Public visitation to Little Palm Creek will be restricted. Driving off designated tracks for research, hunting or gathering will be discouraged throughout the Park.
- A collaborative catchment-management approach to weed control across tenures will be promoted.

**4.13 Feral animal management** – Exclusion of stock and feral herbivores will continue to be a management priority.

- Strategic fencing will be maintained. Camels and other large grazing animals will be removed in accordance with Departmental policy and locally developed guidelines. Park staff will work with neighbours to develop a feral animal control area around the Park. The 10 to 15km buffer zone established on Henbury Station will be maintained as far as practicable.
- Feral animal sightings and control efforts will be recorded and entered into park GIS database. Rabbit populations will be monitored and controlled using methods that enable continued use of old Burrowing Bettong burrows by reptiles.

- Park staff will enforce the Pets in Parks policy.

#### **4.14 Water quality**

- Water quality at major visitor nodes and waterholes will be monitored as required and checked for pathogens. Swimming may be prohibited in waterholes deemed to be under threat and having significant biological value, as per Departmental policy.
- Use of insect repellents and detergents in the Park's waterholes will be actively discouraged and communicated to visitors through park information and Tourism Central Australia.
- Areas of accelerated soil erosion affecting water quality will be identified and addressed.
- Any development will need to protect the local aquifer.

**4.15 Stakeholder liaison** – The partners will liaise with the local community and relevant stakeholders to ensure a co-ordinated approach to weed, fire and feral animal control across tenures and neighbouring properties (see **2.13**). Weed and fire expert groups will continue to contribute to five-year strategies and endorsement of annual plans.

## **5. Managing For Visitors**

Approximately 28,400 visitors each year are drawn to Finke Gorge by its outstanding natural beauty and its remoteness. Centrally located within Australia's Red Centre National Landscape, Finke Gorge National Park offers some of the finest remote four wheel drive and bush camping experiences in Central Australia.

The joint management partners encourage visitors to have a safe, enjoyable and informative experience at Finke Gorge National Park. They would like the following key messages to be communicated to visitors:

- Welcome to this place.
- Please be safe and stay on marked tracks.
- Aboriginal people have been here for a long time.
- This place is very special to us and part of our life.

### **Principles for Managing Visitors**

- Well designed facilities help protect the Park and promote safe, enjoyable visitor experiences.
- Positive experiences produce satisfied visitors and community support for Park.
- Well managed commercial operations provide opportunities, services and facilities that park management cannot provide.
- Monitoring visitor activities and satisfaction helps decision-making and can identify enterprise opportunities for Traditional Owners.

## 5.1 Recreational and Tourism Values

Since Giles' discovery of the palm trees of Finke Gorge in 1872, an increasing number of visitors have travelled to see what he called the "Glen of Palms." Small groups of scientists, artists and individuals were amongst the first visitors to the area, attracted by the beautiful scenery and unique assemblage of plants.

Early tourism in Central Australia was greatly assisted by Hermannsburg's proximity to the palms and the presence of local Aboriginal people who worked as guides and artefact suppliers. The first paying tourists to Palm Valley travelled from Hermannsburg with "Bonds Tours" in 1933. The current Palm Valley campground is located near the site of their permanent camp, established in the early 1950s.

Improved roads and increasing ownership of reliable four wheel drive vehicles has resulted in a slow increase in the number of visitors to Finke Gorge National Park. Marketing and sealing of the Red Centre Way tourist route between Alice Springs and Uluru is expected to increase the number of visitors travelling through the region. It is important to maintain the remote character of the Park and for the low-key, nature based activities to be enhanced by good information including cultural content and interactive Indigenous experiences.

*Remote bush camping will be complemented by opportunities to learn about the area's rich cultural associations.*



### A Remote Four Wheel Drive Experience

Commercial tour operators and independent travellers access the Park via sandy stretches of the Finke River and Ellery Creek from Hermannsburg. High clearance four wheel drive vehicles are required, as road conditions are variable and subject to severe flooding.

The four wheel drive experience at Finke Gorge National Park is highly valued by visitors seeking adventure and solitude. The challenging Finke River Four Wheel Drive Route between Hermannsburg and Illamurta Springs requires careful planning and is for experienced four wheel drivers only. Self-reliant bush camping is allowed adjacent to the Finke River Four Wheel Drive Route, south of the Junction.

Boggy Hole waterhole is a highlight of the route and continues to grow in popularity as a bush campsite. Low rainfall years and busy visitor periods often result in congestion and degradation of the site. The partners are concerned about the integrity of the site and litter left by locals and careless campers.

An opportunity exists to expand the network of four wheel drive tracks in the Park and link these to the Red Centre Way tourist route. Outback four wheel drive touring features prominently in domestic media and is increasing in awareness and popularity. An enhanced experience would be a highly marketable four wheel drive product for both the domestic and international markets.

#### *Safety*

The remoteness of the area highlights the importance of prior planning and visitors being well-equipped to access the Park's four wheel drive tracks safely. Visitors can access pre-visit information through web-based materials and by contacting the Parks and Wildlife Service

regional office. Park specific orientation and awareness is promoted through Park Fact Sheets published by the Parks and Wildlife Service and provided on Park signage.

The main safety concerns in the Park include visitors dehydrating whilst walking or severely bogging their vehicle along the remote Finke River Four Wheel Drive route. This is particularly serious during long, hot summers when Park visitation is low.

Risk reduction measures include visitor education, facility maintenance and implementing management practices that remove or reduce potential harm. Rangers are trained in emergency response and advanced first aid and regularly patrol the main visitor areas to monitor facilities and visitor behaviour. They maintain facilities to the highest practicable standards for visitor safety. Safety information signs are located at visitor information shelters and trail heads on four wheel drive routes. Visitors are encouraged to have radio contact or carry a satellite telephone and an emergency personal locator beacon.

Rangers are supported in their management of visitor safety through: an Emergency Response Plan (reviewed annually with relevant stakeholders); police stationed at Hermannsburg and tour operators and school groups working within the conditions of their permits when visiting the Park.

## **The Palm Valley Experience**

The Park provides excellent opportunities for nature-based activities including camping, picnicking, bushwalking, bird watching and sightseeing. The majority of these are focussed around the Palm Valley and Amphitheatre areas of the Park.

A variety of walks enable visitors to explore captivating nature, wonder at spectacular geology and learn about the area's cultural significance. The popular Arankaia walk and longer Mpulungkinya track at Palm Valley allow visitors to discover the unique palms. The majestic Kalarranga lookout and the longer Mpaara track at the Amphitheatre introduce visitors to the fascinating landforms and their significance to Arrernte culture.

The exposed, rocky nature of these walks requires visitors to be aware of their personal fitness and safety. Management aims to protect visitors and fragile palm seedlings through signage, education and improved track definition.

Special access permission is required for some activities including: overnight hiking, functions, landing aircraft, research and commercial activities. An opportunity exists for guided remote walking through the Park from neighbouring Aboriginal Land Trusts and to open sections of the Park to organised walks, subject to interest within the industry. Scenic flights and heli-touring are a potential growth area of regional tourism.

High-risk activities such as rock climbing and abseiling are neither promoted nor permitted.

### *Infrastructure*

The joint management partners want visitors to have a safe and enjoyable experience. Visitor surveys assist in understanding visitor needs and expectations. It is important that infrastructure, facilities and services reflect the character of the Park and visitor expectations.

The Palm Valley campground has recently been upgraded to cater for the ten percent of visitors who stay overnight. Camper-trailers are increasingly popular. A camping fee is applicable for use of facilities that include hot showers, flushing toilets, wood and gas fired barbecues. Firewood must be collected from outside the Park. A separate picnic area is provided for day use. Information shelters containing directional, safety and interpretation information are located at these facilities and at key sites throughout the Park.

A business opportunity exists to manage the campground and the picnic area and for the repair and maintenance of facilities to be contracted out. Traditional Owners have expressed interest in this type of work and in developing the old ranger station into tea rooms and an art centre. An opportunity also exists for high quality, eco-lodge style accommodation to be developed within the Park.

## Enriching Experiences

An increasing number of visitors to Australia's Red Centre are looking for enriching, transformative experiences. The unique Finke Gorge – Palm Valley experience can be enhanced by appropriate tourism development to include interaction with Aboriginal people and opportunities to contribute to responsible tourism.

Traditional Owners living close to the Park provide a foundation for developing the local tourism industry and are reviving their stake in this. They are working with the Central Land Council, Tourism NT, sectors of the tourism industry and other NT government agencies to develop local products and businesses along the Red Centre Way tourist route.

The park volunteer program could be expanded into a niche market for paying holiday-makers. Cross-cultural conservation projects that enable visitors to connect with nature and engage with Aboriginal people could foster tremendous support for joint management.

### *Information and Interpretation*

Providing accurate and appropriate information to visitors is important for fostering appreciation and enjoyment of the Park. Information transfer may be enhanced through the innovative use of communication technologies and the development of interactive activities. Park information programs delivered by rangers should support cultural tourism and cross-cultural activities.

Communication between Tour Operators, the tourism industry and the joint management partners is important to ensure safe and enjoyable experiences for visitors. Tourism NT Desert Guides information nights are aimed at increasing the knowledge base of Central Australian tour guides through contact with protected area managers.

It will continue to be important for the joint management partners to work closely with Tourism NT, the wider tourism industry and other relevant agencies to ensure key stakeholders are informed and have the opportunity to contribute to management and development planning.

### **Managing Visitors Aims:**

- Provision of safe, enjoyable and interactive experiences centred on the Park's natural and cultural values.
- Successful, sustainable local industry associated with the Park.

### **Management Directions:**

**5.1 Scenery** – The Park's natural character and aesthetic values will be protected by ensuring developments are designed and located to be sympathetic to the surrounding landscape.

**5.2 Access** – The Park or areas within it may be temporarily closed to the public for flood, fire, feral animal culls and important Aboriginal ceremonies. Any park closures will be advertised publicly and involve communication with the tourism industry.

- Entry of pets will be consistent with the TPWC By-laws and existing Parks and Wildlife policy (see 4.13).

**5.3 Activities** – The joint management partners will ensure walking tracks, day use areas, campground facilities and interpretive signage are maintained to a high standard.

- Self-reliant bush camping will be promoted along the Finke River Four Wheel Drive Route, south of the Junction. Alternatives to camping at Boggy Hole will be investigated.
- Swimming and line-fishing is allowed at Boggy Hole and major waterholes. Water quality at visitor nodes will be monitored as required.

- Walkers wanting to camp overnight in remote areas of the Park require a permit.
- Guidelines will be developed for aircraft operation in the Park, if required.

**5.4 Existing facilities and future developments** – The Joint Management Committee will annually endorse rolling five year forward works plans and site development plans with stakeholders, guided by the Territory Parks Tourism Plan. Visitor surveys and market information provided by Tourism NT will continue to inform development planning.

- Walking tracks through Palm Valley will be well defined and the public educated about potential impacts of trampling and erosion on palm seedling survival. The partners will work with the tourism industry to develop guided walks in remote areas of the Park.
- Management and maintenance of the Palm Valley campground and picnic area will be outsourced when local capacity is developed.
- The Palm Valley campground may be expanded providing no additional pressure is placed on local aquifers. Alternative camping facilities outside the Park will be promoted to support local businesses.
- A network of four wheel drive tracks linked to the Red Centre Way will be considered by the Joint Management Committee and affected Traditional Owners and will be subject to appropriate clearances and expert soil conservation advice.

**5.5 Community education and interpretation** – The partners will develop an Interpretation Plan for the Park. Both partners will be involved in planning, prioritising and delivering park information and Junior Ranger programs where possible.

- Visitor information will be reviewed for accuracy and appropriateness. Aboriginal people, place names and language will be represented where appropriate, in conjunction with biological and geological information. Information will include use of innovative technology where possible.
- Traditional Owners will ensure that all Aboriginal cultural information shared with visitors is accurate and appropriate.

**5.6 Visitor safety** – The Emergency Response Plan will be reviewed annually. Identified risks will be rectified on a priority basis and rangers will receive appropriate training.

- The Park's facilities and visitor management practices will be subject to ongoing monitoring, maintenance and risk assessment.
- Safety and directional signage will be improved and standardised along the Finke River and Ellery Creek public access corridors. Visitors will be encouraged to have radio contact or carry a satellite telephone or personal locator beacon.
- The partners will maintain good collaboration and co-operation between government and stakeholders. Tour operators will be encouraged to report incidents and safety issues (physical and behavioural) to park management.

**5.7 Tourism** – The joint management partners will support Aboriginal involvement in the delivery of Park visitor programs and in regional tourism associated with the Park.

- The joint management partners will work with Tourism NT, the wider tourism industry and other relevant agencies to ensure the Park is marketed and promoted accurately and appropriately, consistent with the values and character of the Park.
- The Joint Management Committee will nominate Traditional Owners to deliver "introduction to Aboriginal culture" sessions to Finke Gorge rangers.

- The partners will work with the tourism industry, the Central Land Council and local operators to foster Aboriginal employment in tourism and assist the development of local Indigenous tourism enterprises including cross-cultural voluntourism opportunities.

## Appendix 1 Threatened Species List

Common Name	Scientific Name	Conservation Status
Australian Bustard	<i>Ardeotis australis</i>	Vulnerable (NT)
Australian Painted Snipe	<i>Rostratula australis</i>	Vulnerable
Black-footed Rock-wallaby	<i>Petrogale lateralis</i>	Vulnerable
Caldwells Clubrush	<i>Bolboschoenus caldwellii</i>	Endangered (NT)
Common Brush-tailed Possum	<i>Trichosurus vulpecula vulpecula</i>	Endangered (NT)
Emu	<i>Dromaius novaehollandiae</i>	Vulnerable (NT)
Finke Goby	<i>Chlamydogobius japalpa</i>	Vulnerable
Land Snail	<i>Bothriembryon spenceri</i>	Vulnerable (NT)
Land Snail	<i>Basedowena squamulosa</i>	Vulnerable (NT) – endemic to the Park, only reservation of this species
Land Snail	<i>Divellomellon hillieri</i>	Vulnerable (NT) – only reservation of this species
Land Snail	<i>Semotrachia elleryi</i>	Vulnerable (NT)
Land Snail	<i>Semotrachia esau</i>	Vulnerable (NT) – only reservation of this species
MacDonnell Ranges Cycad	<i>Macrozamia macdonnellii</i>	Vulnerable – downgraded in NT
Minnie Daisy	<i>Minuria tridens</i>	Vulnerable
Palm Valley Myrtle	<i>Thyromene hexandra</i>	Vulnerable (NT)
Red Cabbage Palm	<i>Livistona mariae</i> subsp. <i>mariae</i>	Vulnerable – only reservation of this species
Slater's Skink	<i>Lyoppholis slateri</i>	Endangered

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