



# Verges Creek Nature Reserve

## Statement of management intent



## Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service acknowledges that Verges Creek Nature Reserve ('the park') is part of the traditional Country of the Thunggutti/Dunghutti Nation.

## Introduction

This statement of management intent outlines the main values, issues and key management directions for Verges Creek Nature Reserve. This statement, together with relevant National Parks and Wildlife Service policies, will guide the management of the park until a plan of management has been prepared.

## Management principles

Under Section 30E of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*, nature reserves are reserved to identify, protect and conserve areas containing outstanding, unique or representative ecosystems, species, communities or natural phenomena. Verges Creek Nature Reserve will be managed in accordance with the principles of section 30J of the Act, which includes:

- conservation of biodiversity, the maintenance of ecosystem function, the protection of geological and geomorphological features and natural phenomena
- conservation of places, objects, features and landscapes of cultural value
- promotion of public appreciation, enjoyment and understanding of the nature reserve's natural and cultural values
- provision for appropriate research and monitoring.

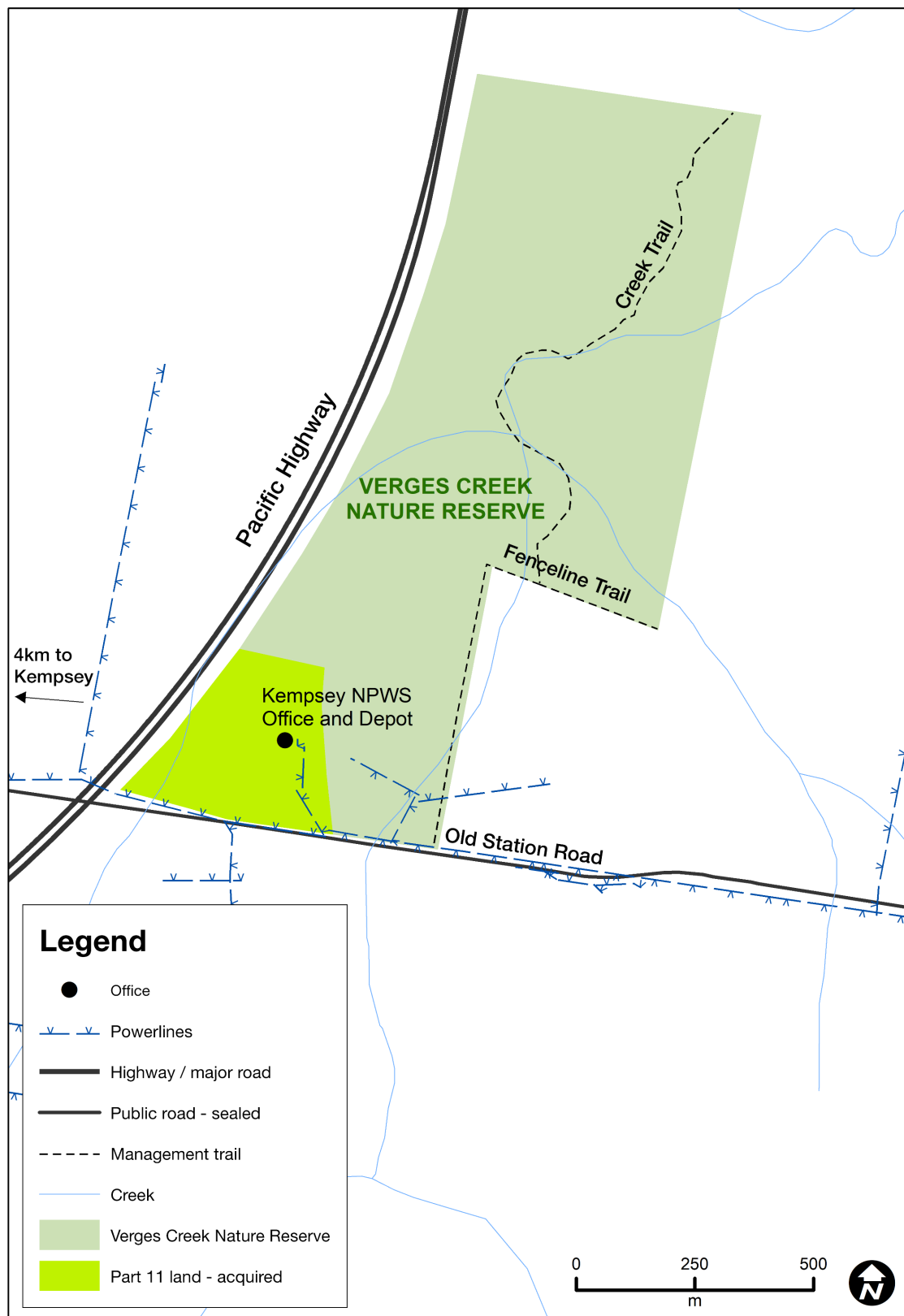
## Context

Verges Creek Nature Reserve (74.45 ha) was established following the acquisition of land from NSW Roads and Maritime Services in March 2015, as a biodiversity offset for the Kempsey to Eungai section of the Pacific Highway upgrade. The property was initially considered and assessed by Roads and Maritime Services and National Parks and Wildlife Service as contributing to the highway upgrade offset requirements and suitable for addition to the national park estate.

The park was reserved under the National Parks and Wildlife Act on 11 November 2020 (see Figure 1). The park is located within the Macleay Hastings subregion of the NSW North Coast bioregion, approximately 5 km east of the township of Kempsey. It is bound by freehold rural land to the north and east, Old Station Road to the south, and the Pacific Highway to the west. The National Parks and Wildlife Service Kempsey office and depot are located on 'Part 11 land' (see Figure 1) which is land that has been acquired but not yet reserved under the National Parks and Wildlife Act.

The park is situated on the Macleay River floodplain and was previously freehold land. Evidence suggests that the land was previously cleared for agricultural purposes and possibly subjected to flood mitigation works in association with previous agricultural use.

The park lies within the local government area of Kempsey Shire, and within the boundaries of Kempsey Local Aboriginal Land Council, and the North Coast Local Land Services region.



**Figure 1** Verges Creek Nature Reserve

# Values

- The park and surrounding lands are significant to the Thunggutti/Dunghutti people.
- At least one Aboriginal site has been recorded nearby, during the assessment for the highway upgrade. Therefore, the park could potentially contain items of Aboriginal cultural significance.
- The park contributes to the reservation status of the Macleay Hastings subregion. About 13.6% of the subregion is National Parks and Wildlife Service reserved or acquired land, which is below the 15% reservation levels recommended by the Commonwealth in 2002.
- The park contains intact or regenerating native vegetation with 4 identified native plant communities:
  - freshwater wetlands
  - broad-leaved paperbark forest
  - swamp oak swamp forest
  - blackbutt–tallowwood wet sclerophyll forest.
- The plant communities in the park form a complex that is considered representative of remnant vegetation on the Macleay River floodplain.
- The park protects 3 threatened ecological communities:
  - Swamp Oak Floodplain Forest of the NSW North Coast, Sydney Basin and South East Corner bioregions
  - Swamp Sclerophyll Forest on Coastal Floodplains of the NSW North Coast, Sydney Basin and South East Corner bioregions
  - Freshwater Wetlands on Coastal Floodplains of the NSW North Coast, Sydney Basin and South East Corner bioregions.
- The park contains potential habitat for at least 7 threatened species of flora listed under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* and/or *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* including:
  - *Maundia triglochinos*
  - biconvex paperbark (*Melaleuca biconvexa*)
  - red-flowered king of the fairies (*Oberonia titania*)
  - southern swamp orchid (*Phaius australis*)
  - hairy jointgrass (*Arthraxon hispidus*)
  - tall knotweed (*Persicaria elatior*)
  - Noah's false chickweed (*Lindernia alsinoides*).
- The following 8 threatened native animals have been recorded in the park:
  - green-thighed frog (*Litoria brevipalmata*)
  - little lorikeet (*Glossopsitta pusilla*)
  - varied sittella (*Daphoenositta chrysoptera*)
  - koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*)
  - yellow-bellied glider (*Petaurus australis*)
  - grey-headed flying-fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*)
  - eastern coastal free-tailed bat (*Micronomus norfolkensis*)
  - little bentwinged-bat (*Miniopterus australis*).
- Several other threatened fauna species that have been recorded locally in the surrounding area could also potentially occur in the park.

- The park is mapped as preferred koala habitat in the *Comprehensive koala plan of management for eastern portion of Kempsey Shire LGA*. Core koala habitat is mapped on nearby land to the south of the park, and it is considered that the park is likely to form a component of the overall habitat that supports the local koala population.
- The park contains important habitat features such as hollow-bearing trees and woody debris on the ground that would support a variety of fauna species, including several threatened species.

## Issues

- Unplanned fire incidents pose a significant risk to the park's values. Due to its small size, a bushfire occurring within the park would be difficult to contain before it impacted adjoining vegetated areas. There is a significant risk of ignition from the Pacific Highway, which adjoins the western boundary of the park. Another potential source is freehold land to the south. Cleared land to the north and east of the park mitigates the potential bushfire risk from those directions.
- Habitats within the park are geographically isolated from other protected areas. The main areas of natural habitat occur on freehold land to the east and south. However, these areas are separated from the park by cleared agricultural land to the east, and Old Station Road and cleared land to the south. The Pacific Highway limits wildlife connectivity to the west. A glider crossing across the Pacific Highway links to habitat on the western side of the highway for some arboreal species such as the yellow-bellied glider (*Petaurus australis*) and the squirrel glider (*Petaurus norfolcensis*). There is no remnant native vegetation near the northern boundary of the park.
- There is limited data regarding biodiversity within the park. The flora and fauna records for the park, including those of threatened species, are from limited surveys undertaken in conjunction with the Pacific Highway upgrade. More surveys would be needed to gather more comprehensive biodiversity data. For example, mapped core koala habitat occurs on nearby land to the south of the park, including one section that was dissected by the Pacific Highway when it was upgraded, however little is known about the importance of the habitat within the park to the local koala population (that is, the level of koala use).
- There is a significant assemblage of weeds associated with the park's relatively small size, proximity to cleared land and disturbance history. This will require implementation of control measures and ongoing management.
- The park comprises a relatively small, disjunct patch of remnant/regenerating native vegetation and associated habitat. Due to the isolated position of the park within the landscape, there is an extensive interface with the adjacent cleared rural land. This has resulted in significant edge effects, which involve change in biological and physical conditions at ecosystem boundaries. The edge effects include an increase of light, noise and dust at the edges compared to the inner parts of the patch. This leads to changes in species composition, particularly with respect to the flora assemblage at the margins compared to other parts of the park.
- Feral animals such as the European rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and feral cat (*Felis catus*) are common in this area and present a risk to native species. There is also potential for cattle to enter the park from the adjacent rural land and cause damage to the habitat.
- There is evidence of the plant pathogen phytophthora (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*) in the park.

- Due to its position in the landscape, the park is at risk from acid sulfate soil. Most of the park is mapped as having a high probability of acid sulfate soil. Any actions within the park will need to consider the potential risk of disturbing acid sulfate soil.

## Key management directions

- Implement fire management strategies and bushfire risk management plan treatments consistent with strategic fire management planning and relevant legislation.
- Provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to be involved in park management, including collecting and managing information about cultural sites and values, and protecting and interpreting cultural sites.
- Maintain existing park management trails within the park.
- Undertake thorough due diligence such as environmental impact assessments, including reviews of environmental factors where required, and avoid, minimise and mitigate potential impacts. This is particularly important regarding potential disturbance of acid sulfate soil, Aboriginal cultural heritage and biodiversity.
- Facilitate surveys and assessment of biodiversity and cultural values in the park to inform future management.
- Collaborate with Macleay Landcare, North Coast Local Land Services and adjoining neighbours to improve linkages of vegetation and habitat between the park and other areas of native vegetation and habitat.
- Facilitate rehabilitation of the Part 11 land by encouraging natural regeneration and undertaking weed management and supplemental planting as necessary.
- Implement the weed management strategy for the park.
- Conduct feral animal control and weed control with a view to reducing and maintaining feral animal and weed densities at a level that ensures, to the greatest extent practicable, no significant ecological impact. Work will be undertaken in cooperation with park neighbours where practicable and will complement the North Coast Local Land Services' regional pest animal plan and strategic weed management plan. Priority will be placed on fox, feral cat and rabbit control.
- Investigate the occurrence of phytophthora dieback within the park and undertake appropriate remediation measures.
- Manage movement into and out of known phytophthora areas within the park to prevent the continued spread of the pathogen.
- Prevent cattle entering the park from adjacent property.
- Encourage the community to contribute to the ongoing conservation of the park by promoting and raising public awareness of its special values.
- Prepare a plan of management to set out the ongoing management objectives for the park. The plan of management is a statutory document under the National Parks and Wildlife Act, which will be available for public comment.

# More information

For additional information or enquiries about any aspect of this park or this statement, contact the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Kempsey Office on (02) 6561 6700 or at [npws.hastingsmacleay@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:npws.hastingsmacleay@environment.nsw.gov.au).

The following links also provide more information:

- [NPWS Managing parks prior to a plan of management policy](#)
- [NPWS Fire management strategies](#)
- [National Parks and Wildlife Act \(No 80\) 1974](#)
- [Biodiversity Conservation Act \(No 63\) 2016](#)
- [Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999](#)
- [Comprehensive koala management plan for eastern portion of Kempsey Shire LGA](#)
- [Local Land Services regional pest animal plans](#)
- [Local Land Services regional weed plans](#)

Disclaimer: This is a statement of management intent to guide the management of the park prior to the development of a plan of management. Any statements made in this publication are made in good faith and do not render the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water liable for any loss or damage. Provisions in the final plan of management may vary from those identified in this document as a result of new information and community consultation. The map in this statement is intended to show the park's location and basic features only and is not suitable for use when navigating to or exploring within the park.

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