

LITTLE DIP CONSERVATION PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN

South East

SOUTH AUSTRALIA



NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING



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**This plan of management has been prepared and
adopted in pursuance of Section 38 of the
*National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1972-81.***

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DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING**

FOREWORD

This document is the Management Plan for Little Dip Conservation Park, and has been adopted under provisions of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1972*.

The Park, located in the south east of South Australia, fulfils a number of significant functions including conservation of remnant vegetation and a chain of small lakes which combine to provide habitat for several endangered and vulnerable bird species, and the increasing use of the Park for recreation purposes.

The Plan outlines proposals to effectively balance recreational use of the Park with conservation of its important natural features.

The draft of this document was placed on public exhibition in 1990. Five public submissions were received regarding the draft, and these were taken into consideration in the preparation of this document. Advice has also been received from the Reserves Advisory Committee, and some changes to the draft have been made.

(Susan M. Lenehan)
MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

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1 MANAGEMENT CONTEXT

1.1 The Planning Process

This document is the Management Plan for Little Dip Conservation Park. Section 38 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1972* states that a management plan is required for each reserve (or park), and should 'set forth proposals' to manage and improve the reserve and the methods to accomplish the objectives of the Act in relation to the reserve.

Upon completion of a draft plan an announcement is made in the *Government Gazette* and the plan is placed on public exhibition for at least two months. During this period any interested persons may make submissions which are then referred with the plan to the Reserves Advisory Committee for their comments and suggestions. The Minister, after considering all representations, may then adopt the management plan with or without alterations. Notice of such official adoption is published in the *Government Gazette* and copies of the final plan are made available for sale to the public.

Once a management plan is adopted, its provisions must be carried out and no operations undertaken unless they comply with the plan. However, the Act makes provision for amending plans, and the process is similar to that described above.

1.2 Conservation Parks in South Australia

The classification which a reserve receives on being dedicated under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1972* is a general statement of the purpose for which that area of land was acquired. Conservation parks are lands that should be protected or preserved to conserve wildlife, natural or historic features which they contain.

Reserves dedicated under the Act are part of a regional pattern of land use. Other land uses such as agriculture, forestry and mining are distinguished by community acceptance of environmental modification. The management of SANPWS reserves aims at minimizing disturbance to natural and cultural resources, while providing for public use and enjoyment, and is a significant component of regional land use.

1.3 Regional Context

The character of the south east has changed profoundly since white settlement, to the extent that in most places it would not be recognizable to the early settlers. The first pastoral leases were taken up near Mt Gambier in 1839, and from that time, the land has been increasingly modified for cropping and grazing. Native woodlands, forests and heaths have been replaced by sown pastures, parklands of scattered native trees, and introduced pine trees.

In 1974 Specht et al. examined the conservation status of plant communities in South Australia and found that most native plants had become restricted to a few remnants of native vegetation, especially in the settled districts of the State. They concluded that the majority of native plant species would soon be restricted to areas specifically set aside for their protection.

The nearby township of Robe has been a traditional summer holiday destination for many years. However, in recent years visitors have become more mobile in remote areas, with the increasing popularity of off-road vehicles. During this period there has also been an increased appreciation of the rugged beauty of the South East coastline and the serenity of bushland in the region.

Little Dip Conservation Park is located five kilometres south of Robe, and covers an area of 1977 ha, consisting of Section 191, 510, 545, 547 and 558 Hundred of Waterhouse, County of Robe (Figure 1).

1.4 Objectives of Management

Little Dip Conservation Park fulfils a number of significant functions. Principally it conserves remnant vegetation and a chain of small lakes. The area is significant to endangered and vulnerable bird species. Of increasing importance is the Park's use for recreation purposes. This Plan outlines proposals to effectively manage the Park and balance the demands of visitor use and conservation.

The *National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1972* describes the general objectives of managing conservation parks in South Australia as:

- to preserve and manage wildlife;
- to preserve sites, objects and structures of historic or scientific interest;
- to preserve features of geographical, natural or scenic interest;
- to destroy dangerous weeds and eradicate or control noxious weeds and exotic plants;
- to control vermin and exotic animals;
- to control and eradicate disease of animals and vegetation;
- to prevent and suppress bushfires and other hazards;
- to encourage public use and enjoyment of reserves, and education in, and a proper understanding and recognition of, their purpose and significance; and
- generally to promote public interest.

Additional specific objectives which apply to Little Dip Conservation Park are:

- to protect endangered, vulnerable and rare species;
- to provide a range of visitor facilities in appropriate locations to enhance visitor use and enjoyment; and
- to contribute to regional and state tourism while protecting the natural values of the Park.

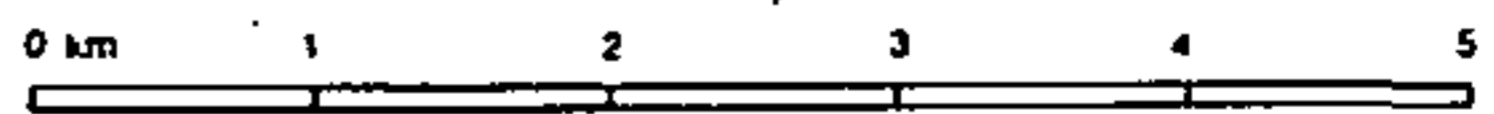
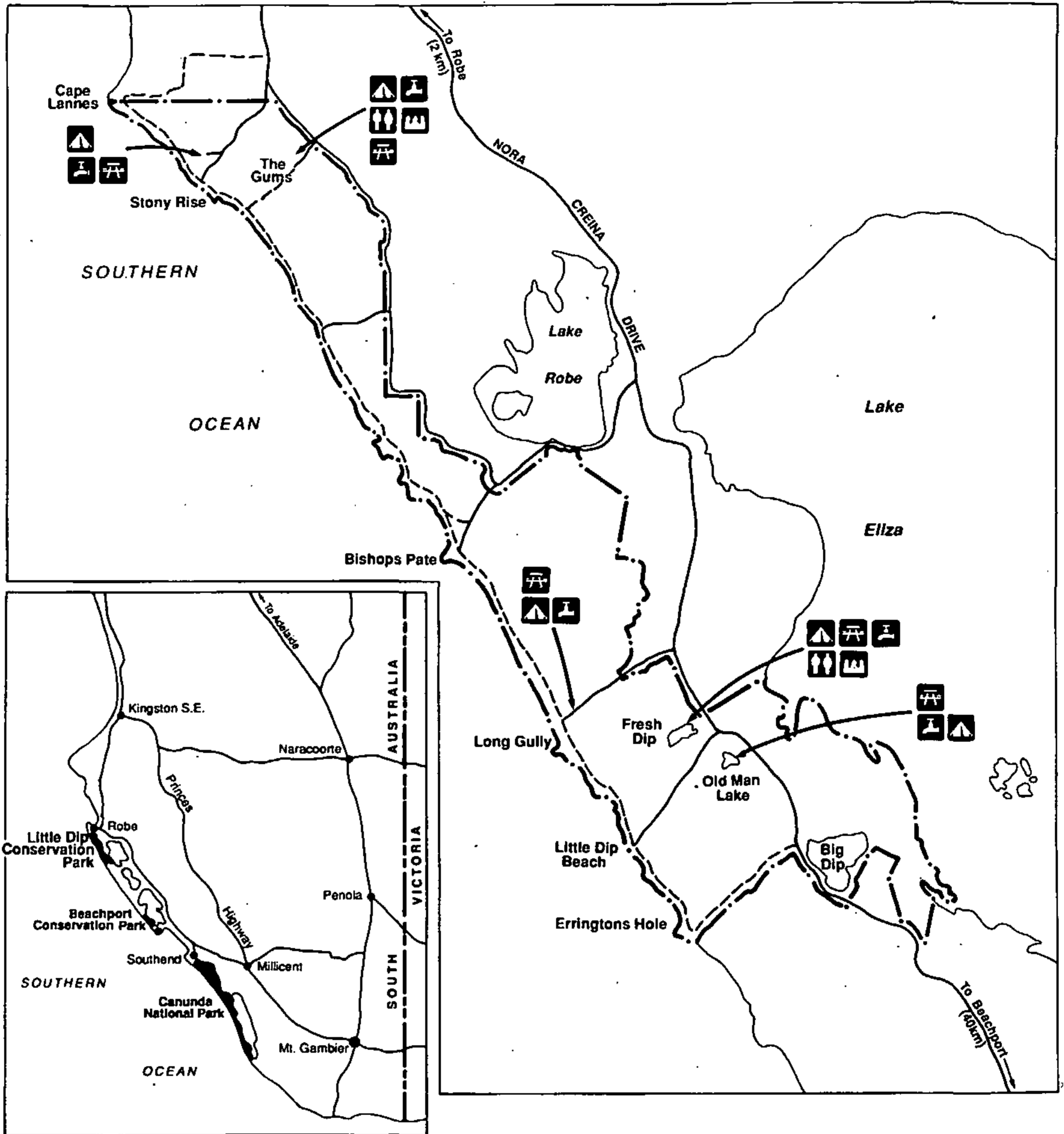


Figure.1

**LITTLE DIP CONSERVATION PARK
Location and Park Features**

2 PARK DESCRIPTION

Little Dip Conservation Park comprises two distinct landscapes: a coastal strip containing sand dunes, cliffs, shore platforms, reefs and islets; and a low-lying series of small lakes and associated salt-tolerant vegetation.

The coastal strip is approximately 11 km long, ranging in width from 750 m to two kilometres. This area contains remnants of the Robe Range which was formed when the sea level was about 11 m below present mean sea level, and the shoreline lay to the west of its present position. The coastal dune range then extended from Cape Jaffa in the north to Cape Banks in the south (Sprigg 1952).

The present coastline, which lies at the eroded edge of the Robe Range, was formed as a result of changing sea levels. A major sea level rise occurred until about 6000 years ago, at which time the sea level rise slowed considerably. Large areas of land surface were submerged and the seaward edge of the Robe Range was exposed to wave action. The dune rock has eroded, forming extensive cliffs, shore platforms, reefs and islets. As the newly-submerged sea floor adjusted to the wave environment, a massive onshore sand supply became available and resulted in extensive beach/dune development along the coast. Many of the dunes have been stabilised by coastal vegetation ranging from spiny rolling grass (*Spartifex hirsutus*) and two horned sea rocket (*Cakile maritima*) on the foredunes, to flag rush (*Lepidasperma gladiatum*) and native currant (*Leucopogon parviflorus*) in the swales. Coastal mallee (*Eucalyptus diversifolia*) and dryland tea-tree (*Melaleuca lanceolata*) are present in the more stable soils, particularly around the small lakes.

At the time of the last major sea level rise, the Robe Range was breached by the sea at Guichen and Rivoli Bays. The interdune corridor between the Woakwine and Robe Ranges was flooded by the sea. Clay and shell beds were deposited on the floor of this new lagoon.

As the sand was deposited to form dunes, the inlets from Guichen and Rivoli Bays were 'plugged' and the lagoon dried up. Vestiges of the former coastal lagoons remain as Lakes Robe, Eliza, Big Dip, St Clair and George. Although these lakes have small freshwater soaks, the water and salinity levels are largely related to runoff after rainfall. The lakes in Little Dip Conservation Park range in size from 0.3 ha to 5.0 ha, and their salinity ranges from 5.5 to 36.2 mg/L Total Dissolved Salts.

Vegetation around the lakes is predominantly salt tolerant and includes samphire (*Sarcocornia* sp.) and South Australian swamp paper-bark (*M. halmaturorum*).

3 MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Policies for the management of the Park, summarised below, have been developed within the constraints of:

- the *National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1972* and Regulations;
- State Government policy;
- South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service policies; and
- community attitudes and expectations at State, regional and local level.

3.1 Natural Resources

3.1.1 Coastal Landforms

Little Dip Conservation Park conserves a number of significant features including:

- partially-eroded dune rock of the Robe Range;
- fossilized tree roots, which are a geological record of the former vegetation cover of the Range;
- rocky headlands which provide roosting and nesting sites for a number of bird species;
- sandy beaches and extensive dunal systems which are a popular attraction for visitors to the Robe area; and
- stabilised dunes which provide an important habitat for birds and mammals, and provide protection to the small coastal lakes - a popular attraction to visitors. This chain of small lakes at the inland base of the dune system is an uncommon feature and not well conserved in the reserve system.

Policies

- the special natural values of the coastal land system will be protected
- special natural values will be interpreted to enhance visitor appreciation and understanding of the Park's purpose and significance

Actions

- regulate vehicle activity to minimise disturbance to geological features
- monitor vehicle access in the dune system
- monitor and modify as necessary, access to the lake areas
- encourage research on the lake environment
- provide information for visitors to understand the impact of vehicle activity in coastal areas
- permit canoeing and swimming in Fresh Dip only
- monitor the impact of canoeing and swimming on the wetland vegetation to provide for the conservation of wetland habitat

3.1.2 Vegetation

The coastal vegetation is typically composed of primary colonisers with the addition of introduced marram grass. Although large areas of dune have been stabilised with marram grass, areas both within and outside the Park are under threat from mobile dunes.

Documentation of the aquatic vegetation of the lakes area has been carried out, however, a long term study has not been initiated.

Areas adjacent to Lake Eliza, the north eastern boundary, and areas of high visitor use have a progressive infiltration of weed species.

Policy

- the diverse habitats of the Park will be protected with particular emphasis on the vegetation associated with the lakes

Actions

- undertake marram grass plantings in the areas adjacent to Sections 333, 415, and 417 Hundred of Waterhouse, and Fresh Dip Lake
- supplement marram grass plantings with native vegetation by direct seeding with indigenous species
- prepare and implement a pest plant control program
- revegetate degraded areas with appropriate species
- prohibit the collection of fire wood in the Park
- regulate vehicle access to minimise visitor impact on the habitat associated with the lakes

3.1.3 Fauna

The heavily vegetated areas surrounding the lakes provide an ideal habitat for several species which were once wide-spread in the south east wetlands. Of particular note is the swamp antechinus (*Antechinus minimus maritimus*) and swamp rat (*Rattus fuscipes*).

The rare and endangered orange-bellied parrot (*Neophema chrysogaster*) frequents the Park as it migrates along the Victorian and South Australian coast during winter. The parrots feed on two horned sea-rocket (*Cakile maritima*) and roost in coastal wattle (*Acacia longifolia var. sophorae*) adjacent to beaches. Research shows that orange-bellied parrots are easily disturbed and are reluctant to return once disturbance has occurred.

The hooded plover (*Charadrius rubricollis*) feeds and breeds on the beach and foredune area of the Park. As with the orange-bellied parrot, these birds are subject to disturbance by vehicles and dogs, and to predation by foxes and cats.

Of significance is the presence of the rufous bristle bird (*Dasyornis broadbenti*), which is listed as vulnerable.

The lakes are an important refuge during duck hunting season.

Policy

- native fauna within the Park will be protected, with particular emphasis on rare, endangered and vulnerable species

Actions

- regulate vehicle access to minimise disturbance to fauna and habitat
- encourage surveys and research into the ecology of the hooded plover, orange-bellied parrot, and rufous bristle bird
- liaise with Robe District Council to prohibit dogs on beaches adjacent to the Park
- provide information which will enhance visitor appreciation of the importance of the coastal area to fauna
- prepare and implement a pest animal control program

3.2 Fire

The fire history of the Park is not well known, and it is possible that the lack of information actually reflects a paucity of fires in the Little Dip area. The sandy nature of much of the Park provides a natural barrier to the movement of wildfire. However, careless use of fire by visitors increases the risk of wildfire.

In restricted locations, the use of fire as a management tool may be appropriate.

Policies

- life, property and vulnerable habitats within and adjacent to the Park will be protected from wildfire
- vulnerable habitats will be protected from degradation caused by recreational fire use

Actions

- implement the provisions of the Fire Management and Protection Manual (SANPWS 1988) and the Park fire protection plan
- liaise with neighbouring landholders and local CFS to develop appropriate action plans for fire prevention and suppression
- maintain appropriate boundary access tracks
- prohibit the use of locally collected wood in camp fires, and encourage the use of portable gas fires
- ban the use of solid fuel fires during the fire danger period
- advise shack licensees of methods of improving fire protection

3.3 Cultural Resources

Aboriginal occupation of the south east coastal areas can be traced back about 10 000 years. Archaeological evidence suggests that large numbers of Aborigines lived in this area, probably maintaining a relatively sedentary lifestyle in a highly productive environment. Although there has been no comprehensive archaeological survey of Little Dip Conservation Park, the locations of several sites in and near the Park are known and have been recorded (Luebbers 1978).

Policy

- the cultural values of the Park will be protected

Actions

- record known sites of archaeological and cultural significance
- enhance visitor awareness of the significance of the area to the former Aboriginal inhabitants through appropriate interpretation
- encourage a comprehensive survey of Aboriginal and European cultural resources
- re-align access tracks to avoid damage to known Aboriginal sites of significance

3.4 Visitors

3.4.1 Recreation Opportunities

South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service reserves provide a significant proportion of the opportunities for outdoor recreation in South Australia. In providing this service, a balance must be sought between the demand for recreation and conservation objectives of park management.

Robe receives its peak visitation during the summer holiday period. An extensive range of recreational activities occur in the Park and on the adjacent beach. These include fishing, camping, walking, swimming, surfing and off-road vehicle touring.

The rugged beauty of the coastline, the solitude of the natural bushland and the accessibility of the beach have all created an increased demand for recreational opportunities in Little Dip Conservation Park.

Approximately 50% of off-road vehicles using the Park for recreational driving originate from Victoria, where all vehicles are prohibited from beaches.

Policy

- recreation opportunities consistent with the protection of natural values and which foster a proper understanding of the Park's purpose and significance will be provided

Actions

- promote the natural features of the Park as a principle attraction of the Park, through the preparation and distribution of an information leaflet and through the provision of interpretive programs and facilities
- inform the public of recreational opportunities provided by the Park

3.4.2 Vehicular Access

Much of the Park is accessible only by off-road vehicles (four-wheel-drives and trail bikes). While this limits visitor numbers, it also restricts recreation opportunities for some visitors. An off-road vehicle track traverses the length of the Park, following the coast, with frequent spur tracks to the beach. An access track follows the eastern boundary with several tracks branching off it, passing across the Park and joining the coast track. Drifting sand causes sections of the tracks to become unsafe.

Designated off-road vehicle tracks are identified by coloured marker posts placed along the tracks at frequent intervals.

Policy

- vehicle access to the coast and certain other areas of public interest within the Park will be provided on designated tracks

Actions

- provide one designated off-road vehicle through track along the coast
- indicate the designated through track with orange marker posts at frequent intervals along the track
- monitor vehicle impacts and re-align the through track as necessary
- liaise with the District Council of Robe regarding upgrading of the track on the road reserve along the eastern boundary of the Park
- provide designated tracks suitable for conventional vehicles from the road reserve on the eastern boundary to Bishops Pate, Lake Robe Track, Stony Rise, Little Dip Beach, and Long Gully, each track terminating at the off-road vehicle through track
- provide an off-track parking facility at the intersection of each conventional vehicle track with the off-road vehicle through track
- signpost all tracks to enhance visitor orientation
- construct barriers to protect significant natural or cultural features from vehicle damage where track definition and/or information signs have proven ineffectual

3.4.3 Walking Tracks

Demand for active types of recreation opportunities is increasing. Walkers are currently restricted to using the vehicle tracks within the Park; a situation neither safe nor appealing to walkers.

Policy

- visitors to the Park will be encouraged to walk to sites of particular scenic beauty or interest by the provision of adequate pedestrian tracks

Actions

- establish and maintain both short and medium length walking tracks
- utilise boardwalks in walking tracks which cross sensitive areas
- monitor impacts of walking tracks and modify as required
- provide defined walking tracks from car parking areas to the coast
- provide orientation and information signs at appropriate sites along walking tracks

3.4.4 Facilities

There are few visitor facilities in the Park (Figure 1). Without appropriate services and facilities, increasing visitation will result in degradation of the Park.

Policy

- facilities which encourage public use and enjoyment will be provided in appropriate, popular visitor use areas

Actions

- provide camping and picnic facilities, including water, tables, gas barbecues and toilets at Fresh Dip and The Gums
- provide camping and picnic facilities, including water and tables at Old Man Lake, Long Gully and Stony Rise
- monitor visitor use of and impact on the camping areas at Old Man Lake, Stony Rise and Long Gully and provide gas barbecues and toilets if required
- provide designated bush-camping sites, with no facilities, at appropriate areas within the Park
- prohibit camping in other than designated camping areas
- define the number of sites at each camping area
- delineate camp sites to protect surrounding vegetation
- establish a self-registration camping permit system and collect camping fees
- credit income from camping fees to the General Reserves Trust
- monitor vehicle use of key entry points to the Park

3.5 Management Support

Effective implementation of management programs outlined in this Plan requires:

- an informed community with an understanding of the area's resources, recreation opportunities and management objectives;
- facilities to enable the Service to implement management programs; and
- administrative procedures and support services.

3.5.1 Interpretation and Environmental Education

Interpretation and environmental education assist in protection of natural and cultural features, and are a significant tool in managing public use. There is a growing community expectation for information which enhances a Park visit.

Policy

- interpretive programs to foster public understanding of the coastal environment will be provided

Actions

- provide summer activity programs to interpret the natural and cultural values of the coastal area
- produce brochures to orientate and inform Park visitors
- liaise with local schools and the Education Department to establish an ongoing environmental education program
- encourage volunteer involvement in education and interpretation
- liaise with tourism organisations to promote the summer activity program

3.5.2 Research, Inventory and Monitoring

Research assists in understanding resources and their use, and provides information to aid management decision-making. Priorities for research are outlined throughout the Plan.

Policy

- priority will be given to research and monitoring which provide information to enhance protection of special natural and cultural features of coastal areas

Actions

- collate existing data
- encourage research which will provide for better management of Park values

3.5.3 Management Facilities

Little Dip Conservation Park is a management unit within the SANPWS South East Region. A ranger, responsible for the management of this and other parks in a defined area, works from Robe, supported by other Regional management, administrative and works staff. High visitation to this Park, particularly in summer, places demands on management which cannot be met by existing staff.

Policies

- Regional staff based in Robe will manage the Park, with activity level subject to financial constraints and other Regional management needs
- additional project staff may be employed to supplement staff in the implementation of this Plan

Actions

- within Regional constraints, maintain existing staff levels in the Robe area
- employ additional project staff to implement provisions of this Plan as required, subject to Regional priorities, Government Policy and financial constraints

3.6 Alien Tenures

There are some services to the public that the SANPWS may be unable to provide because of insufficient expertise or resources. Such services may be best catered for through concessionaire arrangements. If concessions are made available, appropriate leasing arrangements will be made. Income generated from the issue of leases or licenses will be deposited in the General Reserves Trust Fund and used to improve visitor services and facilities.

At Little Dip beach there are six shacks which have no significant historic or architectural merit. Shack sites in parks and reserves are considered environmentally unacceptable; such shacks will eventually be removed. The shacks in Little Dip Conservation Park are subject to non-transferable life tenure leases. Further information on the shack site policy is available from the SANPWS.

Policy

- the resources and skills of the SANPWS will be supplemented by lease or licence activities which enhance the implementation of this Plan

Actions

- provide appropriate recreational opportunities through concessions
- consider all concession arrangements within the guidelines that:
 - provision of facilities and services for visitor use and enjoyment must be consistent with the conservation of Park values; and
 - visitor use of facilities and services provided should enhance appropriate use and enjoyment of the Park
- ensure all leases and licenses are consistent with Park management objectives
- ensure shacks are removed and sites rehabilitated on termination of leases

4 PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

This section provides a summary of the key management proposals outlined in the Plan and gives an indication of the priority and duration of each proposal.

| Action | Priority | Duration | Page |
|--|----------|----------|------|
| Natural Resources | | | |
| • regulate vehicle activity | high | ongoing | 5 |
| • encourage research on the lake environment | mod. | ongoing | 5 |
| • provide information | high | short | 5 |
| • permit canoeing and swimming in Fresh Dip only | mod. | ongoing | 5 |
| • undertake marram grass plantings | high | long | 6 |
| • supplement marram grass plantings with indigenous species | high | long | 6 |
| • implement pest plant control program | high | ongoing | 6 |
| • revegetate degraded areas | high | ongoing | 6 |
| • prohibit collection of wood | high | short | 6 |
| • minimise visitor impact on the lakes | high | ongoing | 6 |
| • minimise disturbance to fauna and habitat | high | ongoing | 7 |
| • encourage surveys and research | mod. | ongoing | 7 |
| • liaise with Robe District Council to prohibit dogs on adjacent beaches | low | short | 7 |
| • provide information to enhance visitor appreciation | low | short | 7 |
| • implement pest animal control program | high | ongoing | 7 |
| Fire | | | |
| • implement the fire management plan | high | ongoing | 7 |
| • liaise with landholders and CFS regarding fire management | high | short | 7 |
| • maintain boundary access tracks | high | ongoing | 7 |
| • prohibit use of locally collected wood in camp fires | high | short | 7 |
| • ban use of solid fuel fires during fire danger period | high | ongoing | 7 |
| • advise shack licensees of fire protection methods | mod. | short | 7 |
| Cultural Resources | | | |
| • record sites of archaeological or cultural significance | mod. | long | 8 |
| • enhance visitor awareness of Aboriginal values | high | ongoing | 8 |
| • encourage survey of cultural resources | mod. | ongoing | 8 |

Action **Priority** **Duration** **Page**

Visitors

- promote the natural features of the Park high ongoing 9
- inform the public of recreational opportunities mod. ongoing 9
- provide one designated off-road vehicle track high short 9
- indicate the designated through track high short 9
- monitor and re-align the coastal through-track as necessary high ongoing 9
- liaise with Robe DC regarding road reserve track upgrading high short 9
- provide designated tracks for conventional vehicle high short 9
- provide off-track parking facilities high short 9
- signpost all tracks high short 9
- construct barriers to protect significant features from vehicle damage high short 9
- establish and maintain walking tracks mod. short 10
- utilise boardwalks in sensitive areas high short 10
- provide camping and picnic facilities high short 10
- provide gas barbecues and toilets if required mod. long 10
- provide designated bush camping sites high short 10
- prohibit camping in other than designated camping areas high short 10
- delineate campsites to protect surrounding vegetation high short 10
- establish a self-registration camping permit system high short 10
- monitor vehicle use of the Park mod. ongoing 10

Management Support

- provide summer activity programs high ongoing 11
- produce brochures for Park visitors high short 11
- establish environmental education program high ongoing 11
- promote summer activity program high ongoing 11
- encourage research of Park values mod. ongoing 11
- maintain existing staff levels high ongoing 12
- employ project staff high short 12

Alien Tenures

- provide recreational opportunities through concession arrangements mod. ongoing 12
- consider concession arrangements within guidelines mod. ongoing 12
- ensure shacks are removed and sites are rehabilitated on termination of leases high ongoing 12

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