

Isla Gorge National Park Management Statement 2013

Park size:	7,850ha
Bioregion:	Brigalow Belt South
QPWS region:	South West
Local government estate/area:	Banana Shire
State electorate:	Callide



Isla Gorge. Photo: NPRSR.

Legislative framework

a	<i>Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003</i>
a	<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cwlth)</i>
a	<i>Native Title Act 1993 (Cwlth)</i>
a	<i>Nature Conservation Act 1992</i>

Plans and agreements

a	Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement
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Thematic strategies

a	Level 2 fire management strategy
a	Level 2 pest management strategy

Vision

A maze of gorges, sandstone outcrops and striking rock formations, this park will continue to present the outstanding scenic values and protect the many significant species of the Southern Brigalow Belt Bioregion. Isla Gorge National Park will assist in conserving the water quality of the Dawson River catchment by protecting Gorge Creek, a tributary that flows through the park.

The major management vision for this park will be to manage and maintain/enhance its natural and cultural values. Maintain the visitor experience and setting at current levels and to improve understanding of the natural and cultural values of the park.

Conservation purpose

Isla Gorge National Park was originally gazetted on 13 January 1964 to help conserve representative samples of ecosystems and species that once occurred in this now extensively modified regional landscape. Its rugged, spectacular coloured sandstone gorges and unusual eroded rock formations also provide great scenic amenity.

A remnant section of hand-paved road is protected in the Flagstaff section of the park, and showcases some of the earliest public constructed paved road still intact in the Central Highlands.

Protecting and presenting the park's values

Landscape

The park falls within the Central Queensland Sandstone Belt with much of the visible terrain comprising precipice sandstone and tertiary basalt remnant caps. The Dawson Valley soils, which derive from eroding basalt uplands, are some of the richest soils in the region.

Isla Gorge National Park comprises a complex maze of rugged, spectacular coloured sandstone gorges and unusual eroded rock formations. Rather than having a main gorge like many other national parks in the Central Highlands, the park has a complex maze of gorges and isolated monoliths. This makes an impressive panorama of picturesque cliffs, weathered formations and cave overhangs. The geology and characteristically steep slopes in the park render the area highly susceptible to erosion.

The park is situated in the local catchment of Gorge Creek, an ephemeral watercourse, which starts on Karinya Station and runs through the park into Red Range Station. Although some pasture weeds occur along the creek and feral pig activity is evident, the creek is in very good condition and shows no obvious signs of erosion or pollution.

The majority of surrounding land is used for agricultural purposes including cattle grazing, a feedlot and some cropping. Cliffs form most of the park boundary, however cattle occasionally stray into the park via creek lines or when fence lines are damaged. A number of State forests are in close proximity to the park, providing a range of complementary conservation values.

The Leichhardt Highway runs adjacent to the eastern boundary of Isla Gorge National Park. This road fragments the wildlife corridor that runs from Precipice National Park to Isla Gorge National Park.

Regional ecosystems

Ten regional ecosystems are conserved on the park. Three are endangered, two are of concern and five are not of concern (Table 1).

The endangered regional ecosystems are generally in good condition on the park, except for some buffel grass intrusion on the northern boundary.

Native plants and animals

Ten recorded vulnerable, endangered or near threatened species occur on the park (Table 2).

The park provides a refuge for native flora and fauna in a significantly altered surrounding landscape. Vegetation communities on the park are very diverse with open eucalypt forests, brigalow and softwood scrubs, spinifex and patches of dry rainforest with distinctive bottle trees.

The sandstone woodland species—the vulnerable *Eucalyptus beaniana*, *E. rubiginosa* and *Acacia islana*, and the near threatened Plunkett mallee *E. curtisii* and *Wahlenbergia islensis*—are all hardy species but have restricted ranges in similar topography.

A limited number of fauna surveys have been completed for the park. The squatter pigeon *Geophaps scripta* occurs in the Flagstaff area where it appears to have a stable population. The common *Anomalopus brevicollis* Capricorn worm-skink is generally abundant, but highly habitat specific. Good, healthy specimens have been observed. The frilled lizard *Chlamydosaurus kingii* is near the southern limit of its distribution in the Southern Brigalow Belt. The area is widely recognised for its diversity of butterflies.

Aboriginal culture

The park is subject to a native title claim for the Wulli Wulli people (QC00/007–QUD6006/00).

Isla Gorge has a long history of Aboriginal use. Sites with stencils, engravings and other material signs of past use are scattered throughout the park and are a reminder that Aboriginal people have a close connection with this place.

Shared-history culture

Isla Gorge National Park was extended in 1990 to include the remains of a hand-paved road at the north-western tip of the park near Flagstaff Hill. The road dates from the early 1860s (1862–1864) and was originally a section of the Rockhampton to Roma Road, used principally for transporting wool from the Roma area to the port at Rockhampton. It is some of the earliest publicly constructed paved road still intact in the Central Highlands, being constructed within 15 years of the first European settlement in the region. As such it is of considerable interest and value in relation to communication networks for the region (and the state), as well as casting light on road construction techniques of this period in a region which was extremely remote from 'civilisation'. A day-use area and interpretive signs have been erected to present this feature.

Past uses include cattle grazing in the Gorge Creek system, a small quarry and possum hunting. These activities have had a very low impact on the overall values of the park.

Tourism and visitor opportunities

Isla Gorge lies below the main visitor route along the Leichhardt Highway and provides significant scenic values from the lookout where expansive views of the heavily dissected gorge may be enjoyed. There are limited walking opportunities in the park as reaching the gorge floor entails a dangerous descent over loose rubble—a venture to be attempted only by well-equipped, experienced bushwalkers. There is a short walk to a natural lookout that overlooks Gorge Creek and Devils Nest.

Isla Gorge National Park has some developed tourist facilities and is a popular place for an inland stopover for short-term visitors with conventional vehicle access. Facilities include a picnic area with a shelter shed, toilets and water tank. There is also a campground on the park with limited facilities including toilets.

The 'Flagstaff Road' at the park's north-west has been promoted in the Taroom and Wandoan tourist guide. The access road has been surfaced and suitable for all vehicles.

Many birds live in the park, providing the opportunity for bird watching and whiptail wallabies *Macropus parryi* and grey kangaroos *Macropus giganteus* can be seen in the valley.

Other visitor attractions provided off-park in the area include:

- Glebe Weir—multiple use area for fishing, water activities, picnicking day-use area and camping
- Chain Lagoons—great for nature observation (teeming with frogs, some birds)
- Wide Water—fishing, birdwatching and camping
- Dawson River Walk—located behind the hotel/caravan park in Taroom.

Education and science

Isla Gorge National Park offers educational opportunities in the areas of landscape, cultural heritage and natural history.

Some research has been conducted on Isla Gorge National Park for butterflies and birds. This work is not exhaustive and only provides an indication of the diversity of the area. Incidental surveys have been undertaken on Isla Gorge National Park by the members of the Queensland Naturalists' Club, keen bird watchers and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) staff.

Partnerships

Neighbour liaison is related primarily to fire and pest management, with the aim to work cooperatively across various tenures.

Other key issues and responses

Pest management

Buffel grass *Cenchrus ciliaris* and green panic *Megathyrsus maximus* var. *pubiglumis* appear to be restricted to the lower creek terraces, mainly along Gorge Creek where suitable soil conditions exist. Mexican poppy *Argemone ochroleuca* subsp. *ochroleuca* and cobbler's pegs *Bidens pilosa* are scattered along sandy creek beds, along the full length of Gorge Creek.

Feral pigs *Sus scrofa* frequent most of the creek lines throughout the park given favourable soil conditions. They root up dysentery bush *Grewia retusifolia* and the creek edges/bed.

Fire management

Isla Gorge National Park is located in a fire prone area. Lightning strikes typically ignite fires on the park and in surrounding rough terrain.

The park has significant stands of softwood scrub and brigalow that are vulnerable to intense fires. However there are large areas of eucalyptus woodland and spinifex that require fire for regeneration and management.

Fire management strategies have been developed primarily to reduce fuel for the protection of human life and property, and to meet ecological objectives. These are to:

- maintain the natural species composition of all natural communities within the range of succession stages
- maintain, and if necessary, enhance natural populations of vulnerable, near threatened and/or endangered flora and fauna and remnant plant communities
- give special consideration to fire sensitive communities such as softwood scrubs.

Management directions

Desired outcomes	Actions and guidelines
<p>Native plants and animals</p> <p>Sensitive habitats and threatened species are monitored and their requirements are reflected in management programs.</p>	<p>A1. Develop key objectives for species and ecosystems of conservation significance on the park, and support programs that achieve these objectives. Particular focus will be on programs for softwood scrubs, eucalypt forest communities and the parks fauna values.</p>
<p>Cultural heritage</p> <p>The remnant of the hand-paved road in the Flagstaff section is preserved.</p> <p>Aboriginal material culture is preserved, where feasible.</p>	<p>A2. Implement protective management of shared-history and Aboriginal places with particular focus on the hand-paved road in Flagstaff section and rock engravings and ochre stencils, where appropriate.</p>
<p>Tourism and visitor opportunities</p> <p>Limited recreation opportunities are provided for and the area is marketed for remote bushwalking.</p> <p>Aboriginal and contemporary history such as the hand-paved road in Flagstaff section is interpreted where appropriate.</p>	<p>A3. Develop a park visitor management strategy.</p> <p>A4. Develop interpretive signs for the Isla Gorge Lookout area that provides an overview of the parks of the sandstone rim and basic park management messages.</p>
<p>Partnerships</p> <p>Cooperative relations with neighbours and other interested parties are maintained.</p>	<p>A5. Consult with neighbours and other interested parties on key issues including fire, pest and visitor management.</p>
<p>Fire management</p> <p>The park as a refuge for native plants and animals in a predominantly rural landscape is maintained.</p>	<p>A6. Maintain, review and implement a Level 1 fire management strategy with a primary objective of monitoring for threatened plant communities to determine any edge effects from fire.</p>
<p>Pest management</p> <p>Pest control programs are developed and implemented. They reduce impacts on native plants and animals to manageable levels.</p>	<p>A7. Implement and review the pest management strategy for the management area with adjoining landholders and other interested parties.</p>

Tables – Conservation values management

Table 1: Endangered and of concern regional ecosystems

Regional ecosystem	Description	Biodiversity status
11.3.2	<i>Eucalyptus populnea</i> woodland on alluvial plains	Of concern
11.9.1	<i>Acacia harpophylla-Eucalyptus cambageana</i> open-forest to woodland on fine-grained sedimentary rocks	Endangered
11.9.4	Semi-evergreen vine thicket or <i>Acacia harpophylla</i> with a semi-evergreen vine thicket understorey on fine grained sedimentary rocks	Endangered
11.9.5	<i>Acacia harpophylla</i> and/or <i>Casuarina cristata</i> open-forest on fine-grained sedimentary rocks	Endangered
11.10.2	Tall open-forest in sheltered gorges on coarse-grained sedimentary rocks	Of concern

Table 2: Species of conservation significance

Scientific name	Common name	Nature Conservation Act 1992 status	Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 status	Back on Track status
Plants				
<i>Acacia hockingsii</i>	-	Vulnerable	-	Low
<i>Acacia islana</i>	-	Vulnerable	-	Low
<i>Calytrix islensis</i>	-	Vulnerable	-	Low
<i>Eucalyptus beaniana</i>	-	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Low
<i>Eucalyptus curtisii</i>	Plunkett mallee	Near threatened	-	Low
<i>Homoranthus decasetus</i>	-	Near threatened	-	Low
<i>Leucopogon grandiflorus</i>	-	Near threatened	-	Low
<i>Wahlenbergia islensis</i>	-	Near threatened	-	Low
Animals				
<i>Chalinolobus picatus</i>	little pied bat	Near threatened	-	Medium
<i>Paradelma orientalis</i>	brigalow scaly-foot	Vulnerable	Vulnerable	Medium
<i>Strophurus taenicauda</i>	golden-tailed gecko	Near threatened	-	Medium

Table 3: Species listed in international agreements

Scientific name	Common name	Bonn	CAMBA	JAMBA	ROKAMBA
<i>Coracina tenuirostris</i>	cicadabird	-	-	ü	-
<i>Merops ornatus</i>	rainbow bee-eater	-	-	ü	-

Bonn – Bonn Convention

CAMBA – China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

JAMBA – Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

ROKAMBA – Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement