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Chief Ranger
Murray Central District
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Dear Chief Ranger

Chiltern – Mt Pilot National Park Draft Management Plan

The Bird Observers Club of Australia (BOCA) submits the following comments on the Draft Management Plan (DMP) for Chiltern – Mt Pilot National Park.

As recognised in the DMP, this National Park has outstanding values for biodiversity. Even though it has been intensively used in the past for mining and timber-cutting it has now recovered to the extent that it supports “The most intact Box-Ironbark fauna assemblage in Victoria including the highest number of birds, mammals and reptiles recorded at any Box-Ironbark site” (DMP page 4).

Chiltern – Mt Pilot National Park is famous for its birdlife and well-known by members of BOCA. The importance of the local birdlife for tourism is exemplified by the high-quality Chiltern Bird Trails publication, sub-titled “Birdwatching Capital of Victoria” and the annual “Flock to Chiltern Bird Convention”. Birds are a very valuable tourism asset around Chiltern.

BOCA supports the general thrust of the management strategies in the DMP and recognises the challenges involved in protecting the conservation values of such a fragmented, easily-accessed, fire-prone area.

However, BOCA is strongly opposed to the proposal to allow prospecting in the northern section of the Chiltern block where it has not been permitted in the past. Although the new Section 32D of the National Parks Act provides that the Minister may designate an area or areas for prospecting, there is no requirement that any specific area within the National Park be designated or any area at all!

There are very sound reasons why no part of the Chiltern block should be opened up to prospecting. Referring to the area proposed in the DMP, the major issues are:

- It has very high value for fauna and flora, with threatened EVCs and species. These values could be affected by trampling of vegetation, uncovering of orchid tubers and disturbance to ground-nesting and ground-feeding birds, including FFG-listed species such as Turquoise Parrot, Speckled Warbler, Chestnut-rumped Heathwren and Diamond Firetail.

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- Having part of the Chiltern block open to prospecting will allow uncertainty regarding the boundaries for this activity, with consequent problems for enforcement.
- Chilean Needle Grass is a serious problem on roadsides close to this section. It may be necessary to close this part of the National Park to public vehicles, at least seasonally, to prevent this highly-invasive weed from establishing. Seeds of Chilean Needle Grass could also be spread away from the roadsides carried on clothing and footwear – a recognised form of spread for this weed.

Another major concern is the future of Chiltern Valley No. 1 and Chiltern Valley No. 2 Dams, both of which are extremely important for wildlife, especially birds. Unfortunately it appears that in recent dry years large volumes of water were extracted for private use with little consideration for wildlife values. The management strategy in Section 7.1 of the DMP for a Section 27 consent with GMW is noted. It is essential that Parks Victoria work with GMW to have water extraction from these dams phased out or, if that is not possible, at least managed with environmental values as the highest priority and the determining factor in timing and volume of any extraction.

Given the sensitivity of most of the National Park to wildfire and the importance of fallen timber and ground litter as wildlife habitat, solid fuel fires should not be permitted in day visitor areas. Fireplaces at these areas should be removed and, as stated in Section 6.5, the environmental impact of solid fuel fires at camping areas should be closely monitored.

A few more comments:

- The SMA Public Safety for Woolshed Falls is not obvious on any of the maps – presumably because of scale. This could be shown in an enlargement box on the relevant map, or is it part of the SMA Cultural Values overlay?
- Section 8 of the DMP, Agency Partnerships, should include working with Trust for Nature to achieve complementary management of private land adjacent or close to the National Park. There are currently a considerable number of covenanted properties there.
- The private inholding on Wallaby Track appears to have been planted with pines. This could be a significant problem in the future as a source of pine seedlings in the National Park.
- Appendix 3 uses the symbol NT for mammals and LR for birds which are recognised as Near Threatened in the Advisory list of Threatened Vertebrate Fauna in Victoria 2003; Lower Risk (LR) is not a category in this list and NT should be used.

I hope that the above comments are useful. If you wish to have clarification or further information please contact BOCA's Conservation Co-ordinator, Don Saunders on 9877 5342 or email conservation@birdobservers.org.au.

Yours sincerely

Richard Hunter
Chief Executive Officer