

Horseshoe Lagoon Conservation Park

Management Plan 2000

Extended May 2026



Queensland
Government

Prepared by: **Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation.**

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The Horseshoe Lagoon Conservation Park Management Plan 2000 has been extended in 2026, in line with the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (s120G). Minor amendments have been made. There has been no change to the plan's original management intent and direction.

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Park overview

Park size	Horseshoe Lagoon Conservation Park	76.3ha
Bioregion	Brigalow Belt North	
QPWS region	Central	
Local government area	Burdekin Shire	
State electorate	Burdekin	
Relevant legislation	<i>Nature Conservation Act 1992</i>	
Plans and agreements	China—Australia Migratory Bird Agreement	
	Japan—Australia Migratory Bird Agreement	
	Republic of Korea—Australia Migratory Bird Agreement	

Management directions and purpose

Management directions

Horseshoe Lagoon Conservation Park has an area of 76.3ha and is located 29km west of Ayr and approximately 50km south-east of Townsville. The park will be managed to enable natural species and ecological processes to continue free from undue disturbance. The park's primary value lies in the conservation of wetland habitat for waterfowl.

The park will be managed to protect and maintain wildlife diversity and habitat values, control and where possible eradicate introduced species in the park, maintain the hydrological system of the lagoon, and maintain the park's scenic values.

Visitor management will be based on limited public pedestrian access with opportunities for bird watching for recreational, tourist and educational purposes.

Research will focus on the area's natural resources and their management. Study of the wetland area's ecological and hydrological processes will be encouraged.

Management purposes

The major purposes of management will be to ensure:

- the discrete, rare and threatened wetland ecosystem and its flora and fauna are conserved;
- water extraction from the system is managed to maintain the area's overall hydrological integrity and to ensure that natural hydrological processes are not altered by inappropriate visitor, neighbour, licensee, permittee or management activities;
- research and monitoring of the park's flora, fauna and natural communities is undertaken and encouraged;
- visitor information on the park's unique natural values is available; and
- public access enables quiet enjoyment by visitors.

Basis for management

Horseshoe Lagoon Conservation Park is gazetted under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and must be managed under s 20 of the Act to:

- conserve and present the area's cultural and natural resources and their values.
- provide for the permanent conservation of the area's natural condition to the greatest possible extent; and
- ensure that any commercial use of the area's natural resources, including fishing and grazing, is ecologically sustainable.

Regional and management context

Horseshoe Lagoon Conservation Park features a permanent freshwater lagoon situated in the alluvial soils of the Burdekin delta. It is subject to periodic flushing during the wet season. The lagoon covers the park and it is the only wetland of its type in the Northern Region to have conservation tenure. This permanent lagoon is an important north Queensland refuge for waders and waterfowl, particularly during the dry season.

Horseshoe Lagoon was proclaimed as a Reserve for the Protection of Native Birds in 1902 and was reserved as an environmental park in 1980 under the control of the Burdekin Shire Council as trustee. In 1992, its status was changed to conservation park under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. There is currently no trustee.

Water flows into and out of the park are no longer natural.

Horseshoe Lagoon Conservation Park protects three regional ecosystems, one of which has endangered biodiversity status, Table 1.

Native Title

The Bindal people have lodged a native title claim application over an area that includes the park. The Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1993* provides for the recognition and protection of native title. This plan does

not intend to affect, diminish, or extinguish any native title rights.

Values of Horseshoe Lagoon Conservation Park

Geology and Landform

The 76.3ha park is comprised entirely of a permanent freshwater lagoon situated in Quaternary superficial deposits of sand, silt, gravel, and soil. These deposits form the alluvial and deltaic floodplains of the Haughton River Delta.

Plants

The park's vegetation comprises aquatic species dominated by pink lotus lily *Nelumbo nucifera*, blue water lily *Nymphaea gigantea*, water lily *Nymphaea nouchali*, and bulkuru *Eleocharis dulcis*. Lagoons containing pink lotus lilies are poorly represented in the protected area estate.

Animals

No detailed surveys of the park have been conducted to date. The area's birds, particularly waterfowl, are known for their diversity and abundance. The park is of major significance as it provides a secure refuge for birds and has water available in all but the driest of years. There is one bird species of conservation significance, Table 2.

The lagoon is important to the breeding of native fish.

Cultural heritage

No information is available regarding the traditional use of the area by First Nations people. Diverse and abundant birdlife and aquatic vegetation would have provided a rich food source. No places of First Nations people or European significance are known to occur within the park. Mention of a particularly large freshwater lagoon with a great many crocodiles ("alligators") is made in the publication *The Story of James Morrill*. Morrill was a nineteenth century shipwreck survivor who lived with local Aborigines for 17 years.

Scenic and aesthetic

The park's permanent freshwater lagoon is close to major tourist routes and intensive agricultural areas. Its unique freshwater vegetation and abundant birdlife can provide an unforgettable experience for bird enthusiasts.

Scientific and educational

Study of the wetland's ecological and hydrological characteristics and processes is essential for an increased understanding of the fragile freshwater wetland systems.

Recreation and tourism

The area offers an important opportunity for bird watching and related and recreational activities and these are expected to increase as access and bird watching facilities are improved.

Management strategies

Current situation	Desired outcomes	Proposed policies, guidelines and actions
Native plants The area has been largely undisturbed since it was reserved in 1902. Complex freshwater plant communities are being threatened by more aggressive introduced plant species along the lagoon's fringe.	The composition and extent of the vegetation types are maintained subject to natural change. Threatened local ecosystems and species are protected. Habitat values are considered when managing vegetation.	Vegetation mapping, community assessment and monitoring will be commenced. A park herbarium will be developed to assist in plant identification and monitoring. Monitoring plots may be established for communities where visitor or management activities may have significant impact. Refuge habitat communities will be protected from catastrophic fire. The requirements of animals, such as breeding, nesting, and feeding will be considered in conjunction with the management of plant communities.
Native animals Limited fauna survey work has been carried out. Plant communities provide important refuge sites in dry seasons for waders, water fowl and other aquatic reliant species.	Animal health, diversity and general patterns of distribution continue. Improved knowledge of the park's aquatic life is available. Threatened species are protected. Habitat corridors are protected.	A fauna survey will be undertaken to provide a benchmark for future fauna monitoring. The park's fauna, in particular aquatic species, will be monitored. Protection of threatened animals will focus on habitat management. Liaise with neighbours, Landcare groups and government agencies to assist in the protection of critical habitat corridors.
Introduced plants and animals Little is known of the extent of introduced plants and animals. Para grass and hymenachne grass have the potential to overrun the native vegetation on the lagoon's margins if left unchecked. Pest pigs cause problems in similar areas and should be considered. Cattle are grazing most of the lagoon's banks which are outside the park. This is probably beneficial in keeping para grass and hymenachne under control.	Pest plants and pest animals have no significant effects on the natural resources of the park.	Prepare an action plan to detail known pest plant and pest animal threats, map distributions and develop strategic control and monitoring programs. Particular attention will be given to preventing the establishment of the introduced grass <i>Hymenachne</i>.

Current situation	Desired outcomes	Proposed policies, guidelines and actions
Fire management The fire history is not well documented, but it is possible the park may burn in some very dry years.	Fire is used as a management tool if relevant.	A fire action plan will be developed if relevant.
Landscape, soil and catchment protection The park conserves an extensive but discreet wetland area that is subject to seasonal inundation. The area is surrounded by extensive agricultural development and this could provide siltation problems.	Water flows are not significantly modified by non-natural factors. The condition of the wetland, the landscape and the area's natural drainage are maintained subject to natural change.	Vehicle access will be limited to essential management requirements. Any soil disturbance in the area will be rehabilitated.
Native title and cultural heritage The Bindal people have lodged a native title claim application over an area that includes the park. Diverse and abundant birdlife and aquatic vegetation would have provided a rich food source. No places of First Nations people or European significance are known to occur within the park.	First Nations people with traditional links to the area are involved in the management of park cultural heritage issues. Any native title rights are not compromised by management actions.	Consult with relevant First Nations people to establish principles and guidelines for co-operative management or native title, cultural heritage and other issues. Work programs and management activities will consider the requirements of native title legislation to ensure native title rights are not compromised. Seek advice from and provide field support to Regional archaeologist concerning cultural heritage issues.
Recreation and tourism Due to a lack of facilities and access to the water's edge, recreation and tourism are limited. Visitors currently have to cross private property to view waterbirds. There is no safe parking area close to the park's small road frontage.	The feasibility of developing public access is assessed.	Assess access problems and prepare a feasibility plan for the possible future development of a car park and bird hide.
Education and interpretation Current educational use is minimal due to access problems.	Visitors are provided with appropriate information to understand the wetland ecosystems	A park brochure is developed when needed and as resources are available.

Current situation	Desired outcomes	Proposed policies, guidelines and actions
Resource use Water is pumped from the lagoon to irrigate adjacent agricultural land. It is likely that the water is pumped from a part of the lagoon outside the park boundary. All removal of water from a conservation park must be under a permit issued under the <i>Nature Conservation Act 1992</i>. Water, additional to normal flows, is entering the lagoon from adjacent agricultural land and down the channel. Water flows in the area are no longer natural. Irrigation may assist in the regulation of additional inflows from adjacent agricultural land.	All water harvesting is occurring subject to a permit under the <i>Nature Conservation Act 1992</i>, where appropriate. Continued irrigation does not diminish the ability of the wetland to offer a refuge for waders and waterfowl. Water flows into and out of the park are regulated to replicate the natural situation as far as possible.	The effects of continued irrigation will be monitored and correlated to the cyclical changes of the wetland. Changes to the quality of water extracted or fed into the system will be made if necessary.
Liaison with neighbours and other stakeholders There is little liaison between key stakeholders in regard to active management of the wetland area. Liaison with State Water Projects (SWP) of DNR has commenced.	A co-operative management strategy for the wetland areas is developed by QPWS and SWP. Communication is also occurring with neighbours and other stakeholders interested in the park's management.	Communicate with neighbours and other key stakeholders once the management and concept plans are adopted. Negotiations with SWP are held to ensure that flows into and out of the lagoon replicate the likely natural flows as far as possible, and that there is an integrated approach to management of water use in the area.

References: Morrill, J. (1964) *The Story of James Morrill*. Compiled by the Bowen Independent on behalf of the Bowen Historical Society.

Summary

This management plan provides the framework and guidelines on how Horseshoe Lagoon Conservation Park will be managed. It sets out the considerations, outcomes and strategies that are proposed to form the basis on which day-to-day management decisions are made.

This plan content was prepared in October 1999. The plan has been reviewed and extended in May 2026, in accordance with section 120G of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, and will be reviewed no later than 10 years after the current review. For further information on this plan or the planning process, please contact the Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation on 13 QGOV (13 74 68).

This management plan was prepared by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service staff. The principal author was Graeme Bulley. Thanks are due to those groups and individuals who made submissions in response to the draft plan.

Appendix

Conservation values management

Table 1: Endangered and of concern regional ecosystems

Regional ecosystem number	Description	Biodiversity status
11.3.13	Grevillea striata open woodland on coastal alluvial plains	Endangered
11.3.27a	Freshwater wetlands	Of concern

Table 2: Species of conservation significance

Scientific name	Common name	Nature Conservation Act 1992 status	Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cwlth) status
Animals			
<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i> ¹²³	Caspian tern	Special Least Concern	

¹CAMBA – China–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

²JAMBA – Japan–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement

³ROKAMBA – Republic of Korea–Australia Migratory Bird Agreement