



The Bendigo & District Environment Council
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Bendigo - Heart of the Box - Ironbark Forest.

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The Bendigo and District Environment Council (BDEC) response to the Central West Investigation Draft Proposals:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Draft Central West Investigation Proposals. BDEC supports VEAC's proposed new and expanded National Parks, Conservation Parks, expanded Nature Reserves and the traditional owners' aspirations for country.

Response to draft.

It is disappointing that the Draft recommendation suggests that approximately half the Wellsford Forest area (western section) would become part of the Greater Bendigo Regional Park. Experience has shown it will afford a poor level of ecological protection.

At least within the proposed Nature Reserve (eastern section of the Wellsford) recreation activities are only allowed if they are compatible with protection of special values. Although there does appear to be a difference between the wording accompanying the "general recommendations for nature reserves" page 69 and the "summary allowed activities" page 122. The former states compatible with protection of special values the later is just allowed. We would hope that the final recommendation for the nature reserve states, "*compatible with protection of special values*".

Bendigo is a City with a population of over one hundred thousand that will over the next fifty to seventy years grow to be two hundred Thousand. Even at one hundred thousand the population pressures on the surrounding Regional Park are becoming extreme. A recent example shows the difficulty associated with protecting the ecological values within Regional Parks. The Bendigo Mountain Bike Club created a minimum of one hundred kilometres of unauthorised tracks in the Greater Bendigo Regional Park to the south of Bendigo. This is an area with five nationally (EPBC) listed species, three of which have been and will be affected by what they have done. For example, the bikers have ploughed through sweet bursaria areas, known Eltham Copper Butterfly habitat. This has as yet to be resolved.

It appears that the under resourced land managers find the damaging pressures difficult to control, especially as the management prescriptions for Regional Parks' are vague, loose and orientated towards recreation for the many.

The Greater Bendigo national Park management Plan 2017 states at 6.7, *“bicycles can be ridden on most roads and some tracks throughout the park. Bicycles and mountain bike riding is not permitted on some tracks because of their narrow width, potential conflict with walkers and other park users, and the potential environmental impacts. Off-road cycling can degrade the natural and cultural values of the parks, and damage vegetation and soil resulting in fragmentation of habitat and erosion, and therefore as an unacceptable activity in the park.”*

Because there is explicit directions Parks has been able to exert reasonable control over biking activity in the greater Bendigo National Park.

It is unusual and worrying that the Draft recommends allows what appears to be permanent firewood production in the proposed addition to the Greater Bendigo Regional Park, when there isn't a shortage. There is of course a shortage of free firewood but that does not translate into a shortage over all. Firewood production within the proposed Regional Park is unnecessary. Serious consideration must be given to the ubiquitous Dodder-Laurel that has destroyed much of the regeneration within the Wellsford Forest over the last one hundred and twenty years. Coppice from firewood production is extremely vulnerable to this parasite. (See previous submission). The problem of firewood production and Dodder-Laurel should be recognised within the final recommendations as the parasite is a long term threat to the areas ecological health. Firewood production within the Box-Ironbark forests can never be sustainable either in an ecological or production sense. (See the ECC Box-Ironbark Forests and Woodlands Investigation Final Report 2001).

The lack of ecological protection given within Regional Parks is confirmed in the draft proposals page 121, *“Victoria’s regional parks are managed mainly for informal recreation for large numbers of people in natural or semi-natural surroundings “and “they are not protected areas according to international standards.”*

The draft recommendations on how the natural values that exist within the Wellsford Forest will be protected from the large numbers of people using the area for informal recreation are clearly inadequate.

This is the last time that we as a society will have the chance to protect the natural values that still exist within the proposed Wellsford Forest Regional Park and Nature Reserve. This area is a remnant, as are most of the Box- Iron forests, existing within a heavily cleared landscape, where species that once existed across the whole area are hanging on.

They will not hang on forever.

We therefore hope that VEAC’s final recommendations concerning the Wellsford Forest proposed Regional Park and Nature Reserve explicitly protects its special values from the effects of Bendigo’s present and future large population, as the draft recommendations do not.

The area would have better protection being a National Park but, if this is too difficult, an increase in the area of the Nature Reserve should be seriously considered.

Stuart Fraser.