

President's Annual Report – 2013-14

Christopher Watson (August 2014)

Your Committee Team

Thanks to you all, especially our Secretary, John Connelly, for his meticulous minutes. Our treasurer, Doug Finlayson, not only keeps our finances in good shape, but also regularly writes a 'Park Update' with great pictures (these articles have also been printed in the magazines of the ACT National Parks Association and National Trust). The help of Vice President, Brian Rhynehart, and also Vena Murray, was much appreciated. Darryl Seto, our webmaster, ensures information goes far and wide! Darryl is also organising an art exhibition to be staged at the Belconnen Arts Centre in 2015. Our Patron, Dr Bryan Pratt, was ever willing to have a chat and give advice; we now look forward to advice from our new Co-Patron, Meredith Hunter.

We've had deputations a-plenty, namely, ACT Assembly Members, Yvette Berry, Mary Porter, Mick Gentleman, Shane Rattenbury and Alistair Coe; also Federal Members, Andrew Leigh MHR, Senator Zed Seselja and Angus Taylor MHR. There have been continuing contacts and help, from the ACT National Trust, ACT National Parks Association, Ginninderra Catchment Group, Belconnen Community Council and the Conservation Council; also, frequent meetings with

local landowner and developer, David Maxwell, who is the director of Riverview (Projects) Pty Ltd

National Park Investigations

As a result of our urging, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service in 2013 assessed 274 ha in the area centred on Ginninderra Falls and near the Murrumbidgee River – Ginninderra Creek confluence. Their report, received by us in November 2013, acknowledged the area’s “conservation and recreational opportunities”, but unfortunately, said that it was “not a priority for purchase”. Of course, one would not expect the NSW government to give these Gorges a priority since visitors would come almost entirely from the ACT residents and tourists.

Money for purchase will have to come from a number of sources, particularly from the ACT, and hopefully, from NSW and Federal governments. ‘Conservation Covenants’, too, are also a way forward, as well as philanthropy.

Likelihood of Nearby Urbanisation

There is an imminent proposal afoot to rezone rural lands which are adjacent to Murrumbidgee and Ginninderra Gorges, for urban use. If approved, the landowners will, no doubt, benefit from a very significant increase in the value of their properties. The most recent plan put forward by the developer, despite our lobbying, has housing coming very close to Ginninderra and Murrumbidgee Gorges in NSW; at the location of the upper Ginninderra Falls, buildings are less than 100m away!

Our forthcoming submission and hopefully, those from a whole host of our supporters, must seek adequate corridors of at least 300m from these scenic and biologically diverse Gorges.

'National Park Working Group' Sidelined

We have long sought the formation of a 'Cross-border working group' to bring a National Park centred at Ginninderra Falls to fruition. Park and wildlife experts from the ACT and NSW would survey lands bordering both sides of the Murrumbidgee River and Ginninderra Creek, and include the Murrumbidgee Gorge continuing well below the Ginninderra Creek confluence.

Unfortunately, this idea has not found favour with all three jurisdictions, viz, NSW, ACT and Yass Valley Council. Instead, we've had letters asking us to interact with a loosely structured forum entitled the 'West Belconnen Cross Border Steering Committee', chaired by the ACT's Land Development Agency. When we addressed this Committee, there were no Park's representatives present; however, there were a number of developer personnel in attendance. We have now written to the ACT Minister for Regional Development, Katy Gallagher MLA, requesting that this committee be formally structured, and include Park professionals

A letter has now been sent to the 'NSW Cross Border Commissioner' asking that a specific 'National Park Working Group' should be convened. A reply is awaited!

Our Petition (People Power!)

Following a generally lack-lustre response from all our deputations to politicians, we have now belatedly realised the pressing need to seek visible support from Canberra residents at large. Together with the advice of Damon Cusack of the Ginninderra Catchment Group and Robyn Coghlan of the Belconnen Community Council, we have now circulated a petition highlighting the need that the Ginninderra Falls area becomes a public National Park.

We now urge you all to get as many signatures as possible from family and friends. Its format is simple and suitable for schools and colleges, as well as shopfronts; hands up for those who can help!

Future Ideas

We now need to sell the idea to all Canberrans of the responsibility to conserve and cherish these grand Gorges with their unique vegetation, so close to ACT's northern border. Please encourage families to view the Murrumbidgee River and its Gorge, extending from the ACT into NSW, from Shepherds Lookout, not far down from Strathnairn Art Centre on Stockdill Drive, Holt. Why not the vision of walking trails along the Ginninderra Creek wildlife corridor from Lake Ginninderra to Ginninderra Falls, and along the Murrumbidgee River from ACT to Burrinjuck!

Let's take a lesson from the recent campaign by Yarralumla resident's intent on preserving 'liveable' lifestyles because of nearby urban densification. We also need to contemplate our necessary conservation and recreational needs. Sadly, current governments are concentrating on economic growth models, which are putting undue emphasis on evermore housing for an increasing population.