

ABOUT THE KOSCIUSZKO SCIENCE CONFERENCE

Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act 2018 (NSW)

The NSW Wild Horse Heritage Act was assented to on 15 June 2018. It was an Act to recognise heritage values of sustainable wild horse populations within parts of Kosciuszko National Park and to protect that heritage. It was introduced by NSW Deputy Premier and NSW National Party Leader The Honourable John Barilaro MP. The legislation gave priority to feral horses over native species and the mountain catchments, over-rode the *2006 Kosciuszko National Park Plan of Management* for areas identified as ‘horse areas’, and introduced management by a Community Advisory Panel that precluded the involvement of scientists or professional protected area managers. The Act undermines the integrity of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act and threatens the status of the Park as a National Heritage-listed place. The Act has been described as the single biggest act of environmental regression for Kosciuszko National Park in its 75-year history.

Purpose of the Conference

The ‘Feral Horse Impacts: The Kosciuszko Science Conference’ is a science-based conference that provides an opportunity for scientists to speak up, to have a voice about this contentious issue: the feral horse in a protected area. It provides an opportunity to present scientific evidence of feral horses as a threat to natural heritage values and to respond to the ramifications of the *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act 2018* (NSW). It is an opportunity for researchers to account for the natural National Heritage values that are being impacted by feral horses, and for the wider community to have access to this information through these published peer-reviewed *Conference Abstracts*, and through longer peer-reviewed papers that will be published in the *Journal of Ecological Management and Restoration*.

Aims: The Kosciuszko Science Conference

The Kosciuszko Science Conference aims to:

1. Provide a forum for scientists to present research information on the condition and trend in condition of the catchments and streams, ecosystems and native fauna and flora species of the Australian Alps national parks and specifically Kosciuszko National Park, the Victorian Alpine National Park and Namadgi National Park.¹
2. Identify feral horse impacts (and other vertebrate pest animal threats) to the natural National Heritage values of Kosciuszko National Park and the Victorian Alpine National Park.
3. Provide a forum to discuss the implications of feral horse impacts (and other vertebrate pest animal threats) on scientific and natural National Heritage values.

¹ These phenomena are recognised as natural National Heritage values of the Australian Alps national parks, including Kosciuszko National Park.

4. Provide a forum to discuss the implications of the NSW *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act 2018* on the protection of protected areas and National Heritage Places in Australia.
5. Publish and make available a book of *Conference Abstracts*, to (separately) publish key papers arising from the Conference and to generate a 'Kosciuszko Science Accord' arising from the Conference.

The 'Kosciuszko Science Accord'

The Kosciuszko Science Accord will provide a succinct statement from scientists and organisations concerning feral horses in Kosciuszko National Park and their impacts on natural National Heritage values. It will identify the regressive implications of the 'Wild Horse Heritage Legislation' for protected areas and National Heritage-listed places. The Accord will be prepared as a statement for policy makers and politicians. The Accord will be introduced during the Conference. It will be separate to this book.



Feral horses at Blue Waterholes Campground, Kosciuszko National Park, September 2018.

Source: Di Thompson.

THE AUSTRALIAN ALPS NATIONAL PARKS

Although occupying less than 0.3 percent of the continent, the Australian Alps present to the World a large and irreplaceable sample of Australian natural history (Costin 1989).

The Australian Alps national parks are a small area of Australia with a big influence. They include 11 national parks and reserves and extend over 1.644 million ha across the ACT, NSW and Victoria (Figure 1). These high mountain catchments occupy only 0.3% of Australia, but they contribute an estimated average 9,600 GL of water to the Murray–Darling Basin system worth billions of dollars each year, which helps support millions of people downstream all the way to Adelaide and the Coorong.

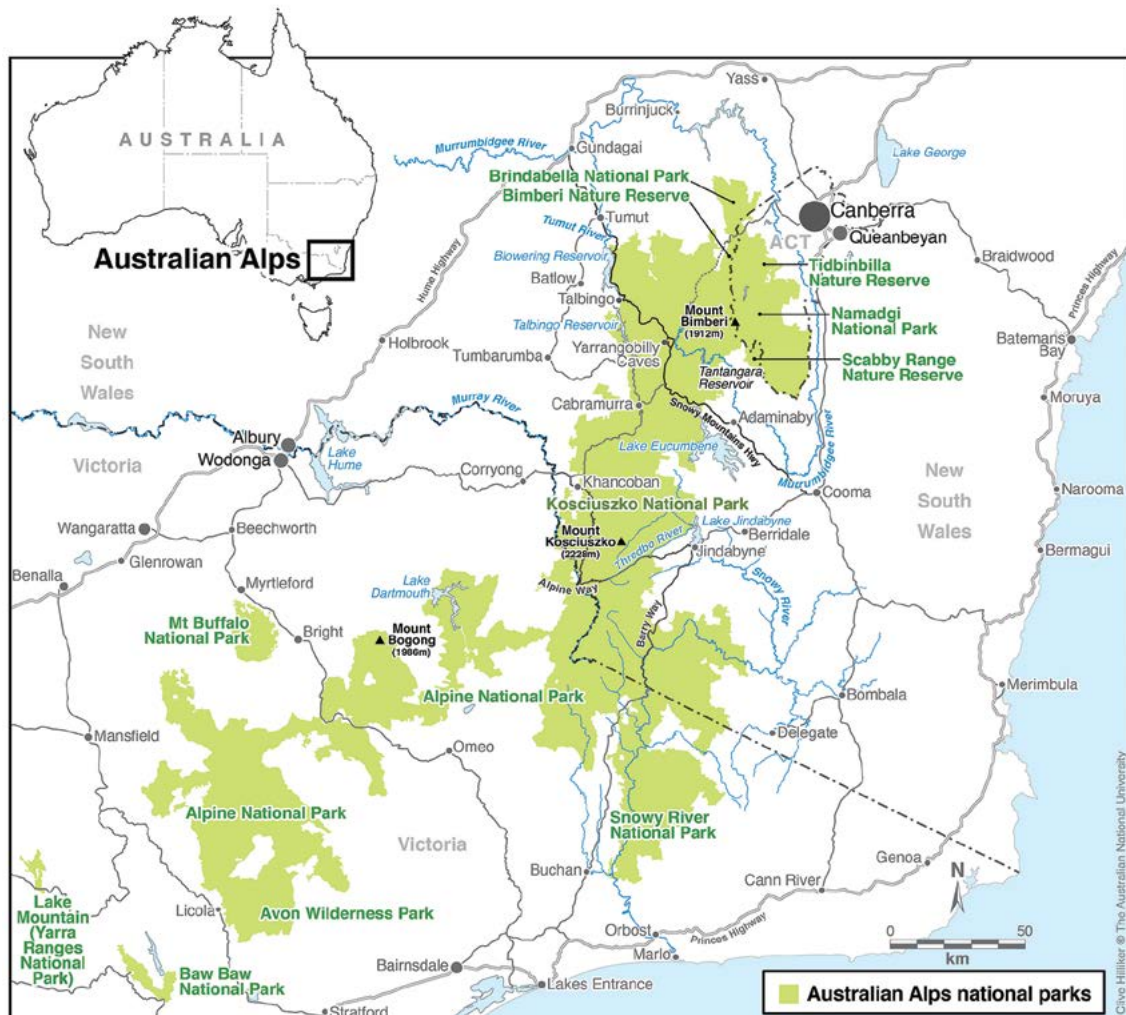


Figure 1. Australian Alps national parks.

Source: Prepared by Clive Hilliker.

Reference

Costin, A. B. (1989) The Alps in a Global Perspective. In R. Good (ed.), *The Scientific Significance of the Australian Alps: The Proceedings of the First Fenner Conference on the Environment*, pp. 7–19. Australian Alps National Parks Liaison Committee and Australian Academy of Science, Canberra.



Feral horse damage to creek, Bill Jones Hut, Northern Kosciuszko, September 2018.
Source: Di Thompson.

2011 DISTRIBUTION OF FERAL HORSE IMPACTS: AUSTRALIAN ALPS NATIONAL PARKS

In 2010, protected area managers from the ACT Parks and Conservation Service, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and Parks Victoria provided expert advice for a study that assessed the condition and trend in condition of the natural mountain catchments. The assessments were based on their detailed personal knowledge of their particular sub-catchments. As part of this work, they identified and mapped areas where damage from pest animals was prominent, in particular feral horses (Figure 2) (Worboys et al. 2011).

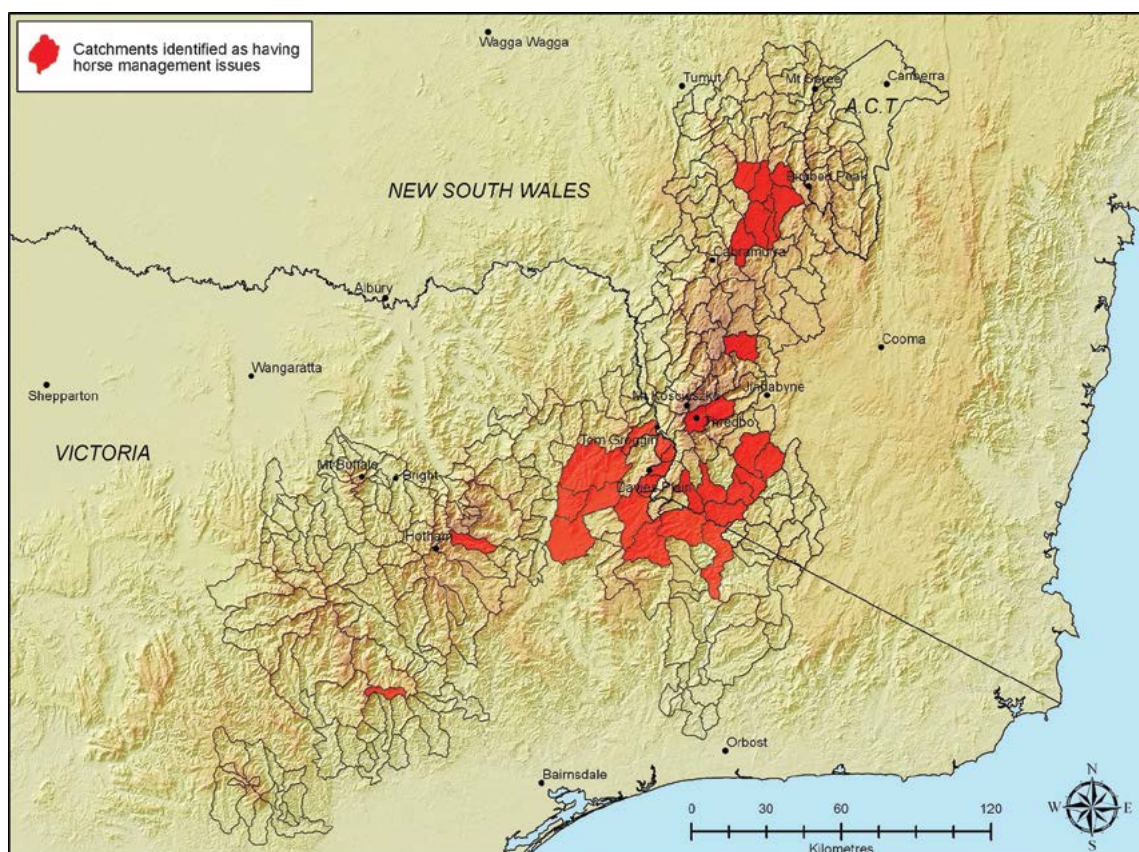


Figure 2. Australian Alps national parks sub-catchments identified by protected area managers in 2010 as having serious feral horse impacts.

Source: Doug Mills in Worboys et al. (2011).

Reference

Worboys, G. L., Good, R. B. and Spate, A. P. (2011) *Caring for Our Australian Alps Catchments*. Technical Report to the Australian Alps Liaison Committee, Canberra.

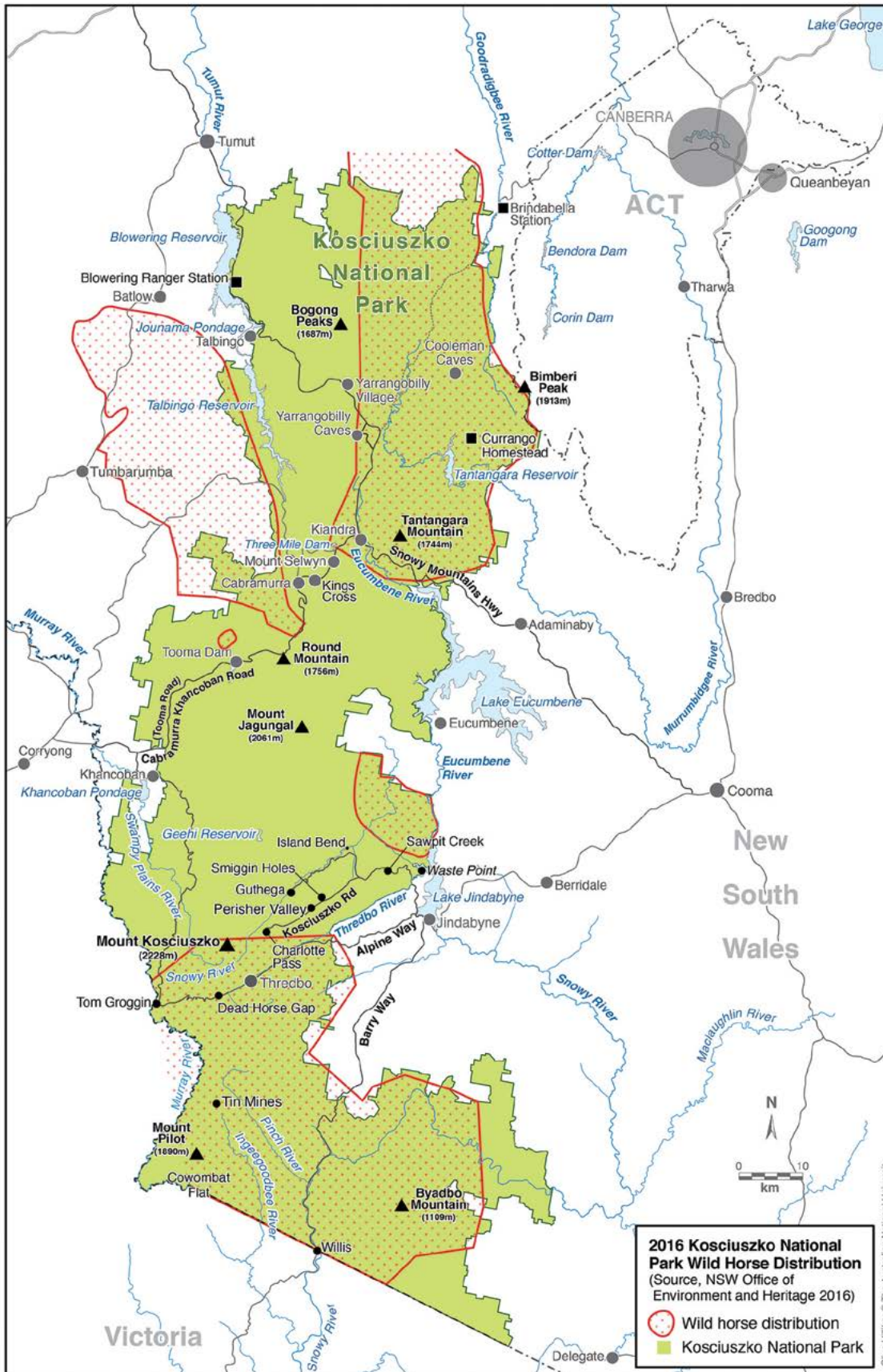


Figure 3. New South Wales Office of Environment and Heritage 2016 wild horse distribution map. Source: Clive Hillicker, map sourced from NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (2016).

2016 FERAL HORSE DISTRIBUTION: KOSCIUSZKO NATIONAL PARK

In 2016, the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage released a draft Wild Horse Management Plan for public comment that had been developed by park management professionals with input from the community, scientists and an Independent Technical Reference Group. It identified the geographic distribution of feral horses in the Park in 2016 (Figure 3). This draft plan was not finalised by the NSW Government.

Management of Feral Horses

Until the provisions of the *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act 2018* are implemented, the *2006 Kosciuszko National Park Plan of Management* (NSW DEC 2006) provides legal guidance for the management of feral horses. This 2006 plan technically requires the distribution and abundance of feral horses to be reduced and populations eradicated wherever feasible. This includes control programs using multiple methods, the exclusion of feral horses from multiple management units and horse free areas, and the implementation of the 2008 *Kosciuszko National Park Horse Management Plan* (NSW NPWS 2008). The 2006 Plan and the 2018 Act are contradictory. Post-June 2018, there has been no action to control feral horses in the Park.

Reference

- NSW DEC (Department of Environment and Conservation) (2006) *2006 Plan of Management, Kosciuszko National Park*. NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, Sydney.
- NSW NPWS (National Parks and Wildlife Service) (2008) *Kosciuszko National Park Horse Management Plan*. Department of Environment and Climate Change, Tumut.
- NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (2016) *Draft Wild Horse Management Plan: Kosciuszko National Park*. <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/research-and-publications/publications-search/draft-wild-horse-management-plan-kosciuszko-national-park> (accessed 9 October 2018).