

23 February 2018



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NSW Regional Forest Agreements
Environment Protection Authority
PO Box A290
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Via email to <forestry.policy@epa.nsw.gov.au>

Dear Sir / Madam

IMPLEMENTATION & RENEWAL OF NSW REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENTS

The Hunter Branch of the National Parks Association of NSW (NPA) appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the NSW Regional Forest Agreements (RFA) Second and Third Five-Yearly Review.

Established in 1957, NPA is a community-based organisation dedicated to the protection and conservation of nature. Our activities are particularly focused towards advancing:

- long-term protection of biodiversity and its supporting ecological processes
- an expanded network of protected natural areas
- better systems of environmental law, policy, and planning
- evidence-based natural resource management
- a closer connection between people and nature.

Background

This submission reviews the implementation and proposed extension of RFAs with specific reference to the Lower North East RFA subregion.

NPA Hunter Branch is greatly concerned that the review of RFAs is essentially retrospective, focusing on the extent of RFA compliance to date. The focus should instead shift to an analysis of likely future consequences of extending RFAs, and whether this would support or hinder appropriate future land use and forest management.

Given these concerns, we are astounded that both the Australian and NSW Governments have already publicly committed to extending the RFAs prior to closure of the public submission period [<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/forestry/regional-framework>]. This makes a mockery of the public consultation process, and ignores the significant changes in circumstances since RFAs came into operation in the mid 1990s.

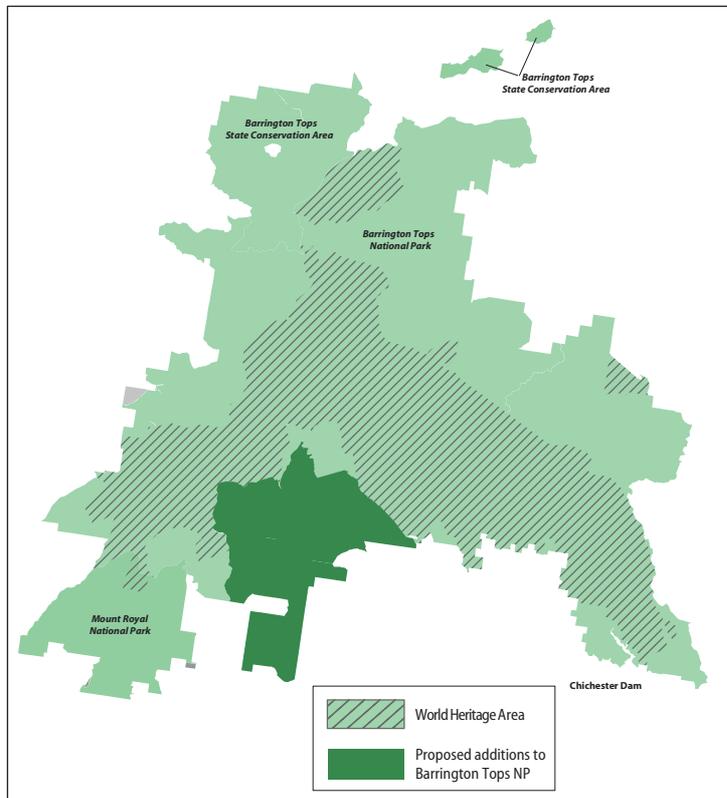
Specifically, we propose that any future RFAs should make specific provision for the transfer of additional areas of national park or other conservation reserves where high conservation values are identified by ecological studies undertaken since the original surveys and assessments carried out in the 1990s. This is essential, otherwise continuation of existing RFAs would act to block proposals that are justified by contemporary circumstances and knowledge. RFAs must also respond to recent social and economic changes, including high demand for nature-based tourism.

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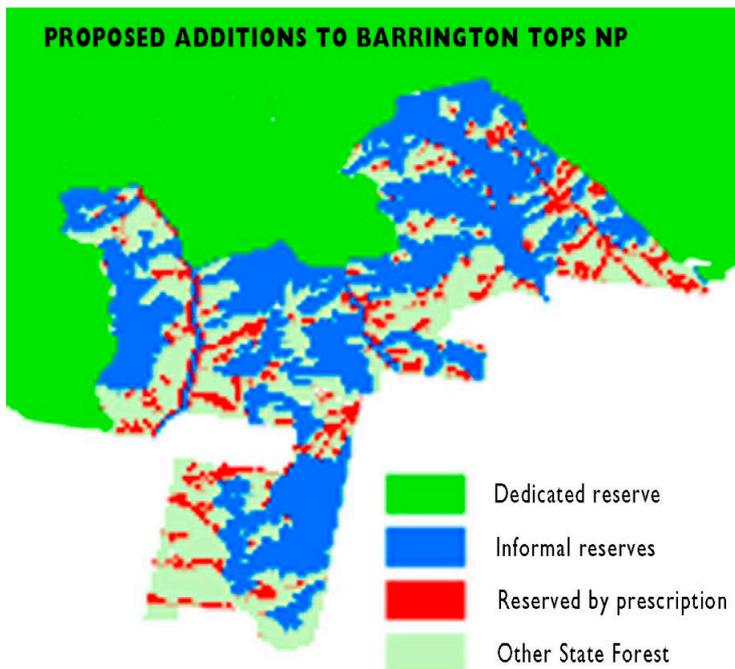


Case study: proposed extensions to Barrington Tops National Park

A specific case study of relevance relates to a proposal currently under consideration by the NSW Government to extend Barrington Tops National Park (see attached). The proposal relates to land currently included in Chichester and Masseys Creek State Forests in the Upper Paterson and Allyn valleys. The effect of the North East NSW RFA, were it to be continued, would be to prevent the proposal, despite compelling justification for its implementation on a variety of ecological, social and economic criteria.



Case study location in relation to Barrington Tops National Park



NE NSW Regional Forest Agreement designations.

Recent species listings

Since commencement of the NE NSW RFA, two species that occur within the proposal have been listed as threatened species under the (Commonwealth) EPBC Act. These are the Koala, and the Greater Glider. It is also believed that the endangered Hastings River Mouse occurs within the area, something that was not considered in the original RFA. The conservation requirements for these species were not assessed under the previous RFA process. Consequently, we submit that forestry activities should not be exempt from requiring assessment under the EPBC Act. Significant benefits associated with conserving these and other species in an expanded Barrington Tops National Park should not be prevented by continuation of the present North East RFA.

Socio-economic benefits

An evaluation contained within the proposal shows that the economic and social benefits of conservation and tourism far exceed any net benefits to the community from retaining forestry operations. Most of the proposal cannot be logged (because it is protected by informal reserves, by prescription, or is too steep), leaving a small available logging resource that is uneconomic to manage. High road maintenance and other management costs and virtually no forestry employment potential indicate the need for an immediate transition from State Forest to national park tenure, with an emphasis on catering for nature-based tourism. Again, circumstances have changed significantly since the investigations undertaken since the 1990s, warranting a complete re-assessment of the relative merits of retaining forestry

Conclusions

In summary, we make the following recommendations:

1. RFAs should not be extended without a comprehensive assessment of conservation requirements for additional threatened species listed under Commonwealth and State legislation since the initial commencement of RFAs. Secure tenure is essential for long-term protection of these species.
2. RFAs should not be extended unless they specifically facilitate tenure change from State Forest to national park or other conservation reserves, based on contemporary assessment of conservation, tourism and other socio-economic values. This is important where the economic and social benefits of conservation and tourism far exceed that attainable by retaining native forestry, which increasingly is characterised by high management costs, marginal returns, and few employment opportunities.
4. RFAs should not be extended unless they support transitioning of informal reserves to formal reserves, preferably as national park or nature reserve.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. We would appreciate being kept informed of the outcomes of the review process. For further enquiries, please contact Ian Donovan at <hunter@npansw.org.au>

Yours faithfully



Ian Donovan

**President, Hunter Branch
National Parks Association of NSW**

Proposed additions to

Barrington Tops National Park

Upper Allyn & Paterson Rivers

Prepared by National Parks Association of NSW, Hunter Branch

Prepared June 2016 by
National Parks Association of NSW
Hunter Branch

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60 years
in the Hunter
1956-2016



This proposal is supported by the Gresford
Community Group

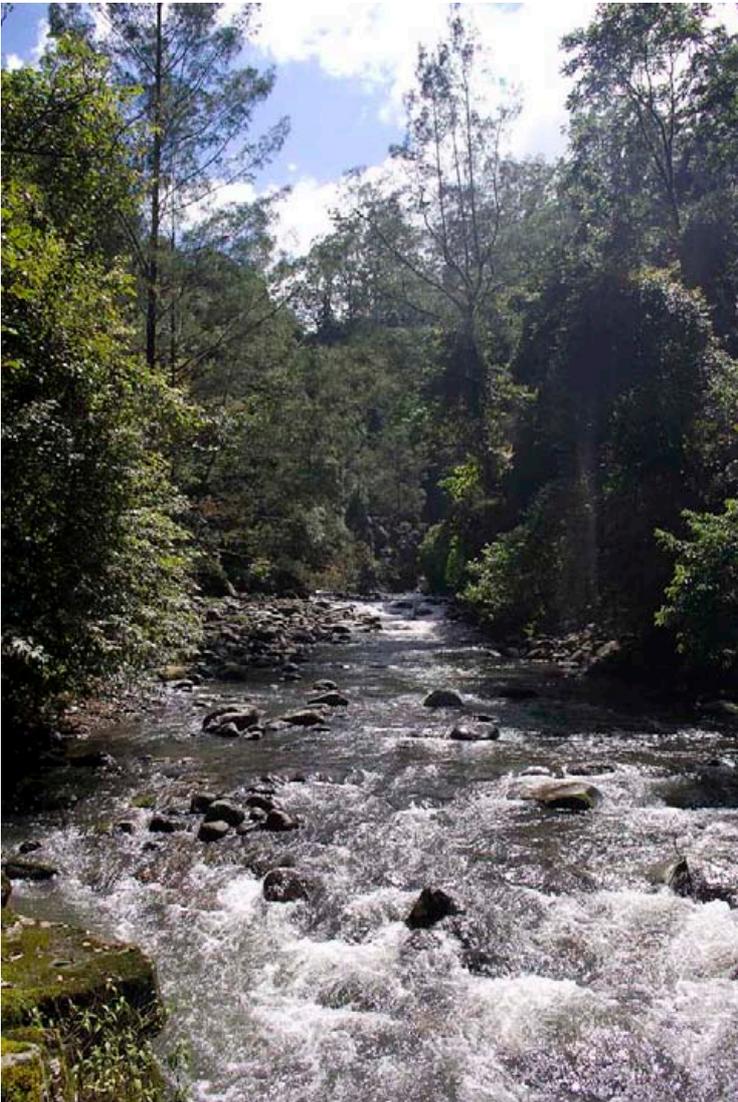
Cover: Rocky bed of the Paterson River. *Photo:*
Ian Donovan.

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Paterson River, below Mt Allyn

Photo: Ian Donovan

Summary

Extensions are proposed to the iconic Barrington Tops National Park in the Hunter Valley. The proposal involves approximately 9,500 ha of existing State Forests in the Upper Allyn and Paterson River valleys. It contains a variety of forested landscapes with high biodiversity, scenic and recreational values. Accessible via Gresford or Dungog, the proposal is located about 1½ hours north of Newcastle and 3 hours north of Sydney.

As well as improving protection of this important area, the proposal will rationalise land management responsibilities and enhance tourism and recreation opportunities.

The proposal has been prepared by the National Parks Association of NSW (Hunter Branch) with the support and endorsement of the Gresford Community Group. The Association has consulted with representatives of the Dungog District Chamber of Commerce, Allyn Paterson Valleys Tourism Group and Dungog Shire Council in preparing the submission.

The proposal commemorates the 60th anniversary of the formation in 1956 of the then Hunter-Manning National Parks Association, a driving objective of which was the establishment of the Barrington Tops National Park that we now take for granted.

Upper Allyn valley,
from below Mt Allyn.

Photo: Ian Donovan





Moist regrowth forests of the Allyn River valley.

Photo: Martin Fallding



View from Upper Carrabolla towards Mt Allyn and the proposed Paterson Valley additions.

Photo: Martin Fallding

1. Background

The Allyn and Paterson Rivers flow south from Barrington Tops to join the Hunter River about 75 km south near Maitland. The headwaters of both valleys comprise steep mountain sides, pristine moist forests, spectacular scenery and wild streams. They provide nearby communities with a pure and reliable stream flow, a popular recreational setting, and a variety of other benefits.

Whilst parts of the upper catchments are protected by Barrington Tops National Park, more than half fall under State Forest tenure within Chichester and Masseys Creek State Forests. This area of State Forest is a residue following major extensions to Barrington Tops National Park gazetted in 1984 as part of the NSW Government policy to protect rainforests. Boundaries determined at that time did not take into account matters that would need to be considered today, such as world heritage and wilderness values, threatened species and indigenous heritage values.

With the declining importance of native forestry it is timely to reassess the future of these lands, and their potential to provide environmental, tourism and economic benefits. This submission outlines a proposal to extend the national park boundaries to protect important natural, cultural and scenic values, facilitate more effective recreational and tourism use, and generate greater economic benefits for the surrounding region, particularly to the Gresford and Dungog district.

The proposal has been prepared by the National Parks Association of NSW (Hunter Branch) with the support of Gresford Community Group. Consultation was also made with a range of local community and business groups, who generally support the proposal.

This proposal updates an earlier proposal by the National Parks Association of NSW and submitted to the NSW Government in 2010.

View of the Upper Paterson valley from Mt Cabre Bald. Visible in the background are Mt Paterson (left) and the Barrington Plateau.

Photo: Martin Fallding



2. Overview & rationale

Location

The proposal relates to the State Forest lands of the Upper Allyn and Paterson valleys, located about 50 km north of Gresford in the Dungog local government area. The study area is generally between Mt Allyn in the north, James Road in the South, the Barrington Guest House site in the east, and Mt Cabre Bald in the west (see **Map 1**). It is completely surrounded by Barrington Tops National Park on its northern, eastern and western margins.

The total area comprises approximately 9,500 ha, and includes pristine segments of the Allyn and Paterson rivers, the summit of Mount Allyn (1140 m), the eastern slopes of Mt Cabre Bald, and several popular recreation attractions such as the Allyn River Forest Park and Ladies Well Forest Park.

Objectives

The proposal seeks to advance four basic objectives:

1. Protect important natural and cultural values in perpetuity within the national park estate.
2. Consolidate the existing boundaries of Barrington Tops National Park.
3. Facilitate improved management of the Upper Allyn and Paterson valleys by bringing the entire area under a single management authority with appropriate planning and resourcing.
4. Promote appropriate outdoor recreation and commercial opportunities that support and are compatible with protection of the area's important natural values.

Current land tenure

Existing land tenure within the study area is shown in **Map 2**. The proposal comprises State Forest lands administered by the Forestry Corporation of NSW. It does not include freehold or Crown leasehold land.

Affected State Forests are the western sector of Chichester State Forest No. 292 (about 6,200 ha), and the entire area of Masseys Creek State Forest No. 886 (about 3,300 ha). Chichester State Forest was first established on 19 January 1917. Overlaying part of both State Forests is Mt Allyn Flora Reserve No. 173 (about 2,480 ha), which was dedicated by Schedule 3 of the *Forestry and National Park Estate Act 1998*, effective from 26 February 1999. Flora reserves are subject to section 16 of the *Forestry Act 2012*. According to the *ESFM Plan Lower North East NSW* (Forests NSW, 2005), a draft working plan exists for the Mt Allyn Flora Reserve.

Forest management zones

The study area is subject to the following forest management zones (FMZ) under the *Lower North East Region Forest Agreement* (NSW Government, 1999):

- **FMZ 1 - Special Protection** applies to the Mt Allyn Flora Reserve. This zone protects places having very high natural or cultural values. Logging operations are prohibited.
- **FMZ 2 - Special Management** and **FMZ 3a - Harvesting Exclusion** apply to a significant proportion of the proposal, such as steep gullies. These zones also exclude logging.
- **FMZ 4 - General Management** applies to the remainder of the proposal. This zone is intended for timber production and conservation of broad area habitat and environmental values. However, timber resources are in many cases difficult to access due to very steep land (such as in the Upper Paterson valley). Whilst such compartments are theoretically available for future logging, the actual prospects for logging approvals are minimal due to very high environmental impacts, high roading costs and marginal cost-benefit ratio.

Current land management issues

In reality, there is only minor potential for future logging within the study area, due to existing logging restrictions, the limited extent of the remaining resource, high roading costs, and the Statewide transition to plantation forestry. Apart from some limited activities, native forest harvesting has all but ceased within the study area for over 15 years.

With little in the way of royalties to offset the high cost of road maintenance and recreational management, the Upper Allyn and Paterson Rivers has become an economic liability for the Forestry Corporation. This is evident in the current pattern of minimal upkeep of roads, bridges and recreational facilities.

However, the area remains a popular recreational destination for picnics and camping, being only 1½ hours from Newcastle. Lack of maintenance and poor recreational management is contributing to a number of serious interrelated problems, including untrafficable roads, environmental degradation and poor presentation of picnic and camping areas, anti-social behaviour, negative visitor experiences and reduced visitation to nearby towns such as Gresford. These issues are documented in greater detail in Appendices 2 and 3. A long term solution is needed to address current problems, and to ensure an economically and environmentally sustainable future for the area's recreation and tourism attractions.



Unattractive, degraded and compacted campsites and picnic areas, Allyn River Forest Park

Staged transfer to Barrington Tops National Park

Transfer from State forest to national park tenure is proposed as a practical way forward whilst improving long-term protection for natural and cultural values. This will open up additional recreational opportunities and economic benefits due to improved status and profile. It is proposed that the study area be transferred to the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service for addition to Barrington Tops National Park in two stages, as shown in **Map 3**.

- **Stage 1 – Paterson River Sector** (approx. 3,500 ha). Parts of this sector were subject to selective logging and roading about 20 - 30 years ago. However, as a whole, it remains in a substantially natural condition, and contains important biodiversity, wilderness and world heritage values. The sector receives little visitation, and does not include any of the existing forest road network suitable for vehicle access by the public. Future management would focus on protecting natural values and providing undeveloped recreational opportunities.

- **Stage 2 – Allyn River and Masseys Creek Sector** (approx. 6,000 ha). This sector comprises the remainder of the study area. It has been the focus of past forestry activities, is traversed by an extensive and well-used (but poorly maintained) forest road network, and contains a number of developed recreational venues. Opportunities exist to upgrade and expand tourism and recreational use in this sector without detriment to natural and other values.

Funding arrangements

Land transfer under Stage 1 would be relatively straightforward, as there are no significant implications for the future upkeep of publicly accessible roads or other facilities.

However, land transfer under Stage 2 would need to be supported by an appropriate funding package that addresses each of the following:

- local government funding to bring access roads up to a suitable standard
- additional funding to the National Parks and Wildlife Service to support:
 - management planning
 - bringing roads, bridges and tracks up to a suitable standard
 - providing signage and initial investment in upgrading camping and picnic areas
 - at least 3 permanent full time staff positions to effectively manage the area.

Potential management zones

It is envisaged that the proposal would include several distinct management zones, each with a particular focus in terms of protection of natural and cultural values, visitor experiences and provision of facilities. An indication of likely management zones is set out in the following table.

Table Indicative management zones

Management zone	Details
Wilderness area	3,000 ha (approx) within the Upper Paterson River Valley, with boundaries aligned with the adjoining Barrington Wilderness area. Would include most of the Stage 1 additions.
Scenic/water catchment protection area	Upper Allyn River Valley, including the Mt Allyn lookout.
Active recreation	Active recreational opportunities to be provided within the Stage 2 additions, including scenic drives, cross country mountain biking and walking tracks. There is potential for iconic walks to provide access to the World Heritage Area.
Basic camping	Basic walk-in and drive-in camping areas focused on existing facilities on the Allyn River. Requires redesign of existing access and facilities to improve amenity and management.
Picnic areas	Upgrade existing Allyn River Forest Park. Additional management is required to reverse negative aspects of current usage patterns, and to improve the quality of visitor experience.
Commercial accommodation and hospitality	Significant opportunities exist for nature-based accommodation and other commercial activities outside national park boundaries, and possibly also within the Ladies Well precinct, such as kiosk/ restaurant and information centre.

3. Natural & cultural values

The proposal directly adjoins and is continuous with Barrington Tops National Park, and features comparable natural and cultural values. The current park boundary is arbitrary, does not reflect underlying values that require protection, and is poorly related to infrastructure and management needs, especially in relation to roads and fire management. Extending and consolidating the park boundary will enable improved long-term protection and management.

A key objective is to remedy the significant gap in the southern boundary of Barrington Tops National Park. This gap has no logical management basis, and crucially leaves the important natural and indigenous values of Mt Cabre Bald and the Upper Paterson River unprotected.

This section briefly summarises important natural and cultural values that will be protected by the proposed national park extension.

World heritage values

The Barrington section of the Gondwana Rainforests World Heritage Area (see **Map 6**) is confined to the existing national park boundaries. However, adjacent areas have equivalent natural values, and are essential in maintaining the integrity of the wider area. Consolidating the national park boundary will improve the protection of the World Heritage Area, reduce the potential for incompatible development on adjoining land, and provide an improved buffer to core areas.

The proposal contains extensive areas of subtropical and cool temperate rainforest and transitional zones that would be expected to meet UNESCO World Heritage criteria, especially in the Stage 1 area. These rainforests are rich in primitive and relict species, reflecting past eras of climatic conditions and evolutionary development.

The proposal would support the NSW Government announcement in October 2008 that it aims to approximately double the area of the State's world heritage listed rainforests. Areas within the proposal meeting applicable criteria should be included in the World Heritage Tentative List for submission to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.

Wilderness values

The proposal immediately adjoins the declared Barrington Wilderness Area (see **Map 7**). Most of the Stage 1 Paterson River Sector (see **Map 3**) would be expected to meet the criteria for wilderness declaration under section 6 of the *Wilderness Act 1987*.

Whilst some selective logging has occurred approximately 20-30 years ago, this area nevertheless remains in a substantially natural condition. The steep bluffs, narrow gorges and moist forests of the Paterson River valley provide high-quality opportunities for solitude and self-reliant recreation. The Stage 1 area would augment the existing 60,000 ha declared Barrington Wilderness Area, strengthening both its integrity and its resilience to external disturbances and climate change.

The current wilderness area boundary reflects existing land tenure rather than the extent of lands meeting wilderness criteria. This was a consequence of (the now repealed) section 39 of the *Forestry and National Park Estate Act 1998*, which excluded Crown timber lands from wilderness nomination, identification and declaration. This provision was intended to provide a stable timber supply and operating environment following the Regional Forest Agreement process, but has effectively precluded wilderness declaration over lands that are not available for timber production (for example, lands within FMZ 1, 2 or 3a). A wilderness assessment should be undertaken following completion of the transfer of lands to the national park estate.

Catchment & wild river values

The Upper Allyn and Paterson catchments are in a highly undisturbed condition, and are recognised for their importance in protecting downstream water supplies. Both catchments provide a reliable source of high quality water for irrigation and potable use.

The upper reaches of both rivers are expected to meet criteria for listing as wild rivers under section 61 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* due to their substantially natural flow and undisturbed biological, hydrological and geomorphological processes. The *Barrington Tops National Park Plan of Management (2010)* has already proposed that wild river listing be sought.

The proposed national park additions will protect an additional 9 km of the Paterson River, and 7 km of the Allyn River. This will also promote more consistent catchment management for matters such as weed control, responsibility for which is currently split between the Forestry Corporation of NSW and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Biodiversity & threatened species

The proposal would provide protection for additional areas of rainforest and many threatened fauna species. The *NSW Wildlife Atlas* records at least 18 listed threatened fauna species and 3 threatened plant species as occurring within the area or nearby. In addition, protection would be given to unique vegetation communities near Mt Cabre Bald (in the Stage 1 area) which are currently unprotected.

TABLE. Threatened species that would be protected by the proposal

Scientific name	Common name	Comments
FAUNA		
<i>Mixophyes balbus</i>	Stuttering Frog	Potentially occurs
<i>Atrichornis rufescens</i>	Rufous Scrub-bird	Record in area or nearby
<i>Calyptorhynchus lathami</i>	Glossy Black-Cockatoo	Record in area or nearby
<i>Ninox strenua</i>	Powerful Owl	Record in area or nearby
<i>Tyto tenebricosa</i>	Sooty Owl	Record in area or nearby
<i>Dasyurus maculatus</i>	Spotted-tailed Quoll	Record in area or nearby
<i>Macropus parma</i>	Parma Wallaby	Record in area or nearby
<i>Thylogale stigmatica</i>	Red-legged Pademelon	Record in area or nearby
<i>Mormopterus norfolkensis</i>	Eastern Freetail-bat	Record in area or nearby
<i>Petaurus australis</i>	Yellow-bellied Glider	Record in area or nearby
<i>Aepyprymnus rufescens</i>	Rufus Bettong	Record in area or nearby
<i>Phascolarctos cinereus</i>	Koala	Record in area or nearby
<i>Pteropus poliocephalus</i>	Grey-headed Flying-fox	Record in area or nearby
<i>Falsistrellus tasmaniensis</i>	Eastern False Pipistrelle	Record in area or nearby
<i>Kerivoula papuensis</i>	Golden-tipped Bat	Record in area or nearby
<i>Miniopterus schreibersii oceanensis</i>	Eastern Bentwing-bat	Record in area or nearby
<i>Myotis macropus</i>	Southern Myotis	Record in area or nearby
<i>Scoteanax rueppellii</i>	Greater Broad-nosed Bat	Record in area or nearby
FLORA		
<i>Marsdenia longiloba</i>	Slender Marsdenia	Potentially occurs
<i>Senna acclinis</i>	Rainforest Cassia	Potentially occurs
<i>Tasmania purpurascens</i>	Broad-leaved Pepperbush	Record in area or nearby

Source: *NSW Wildlife Atlas*.

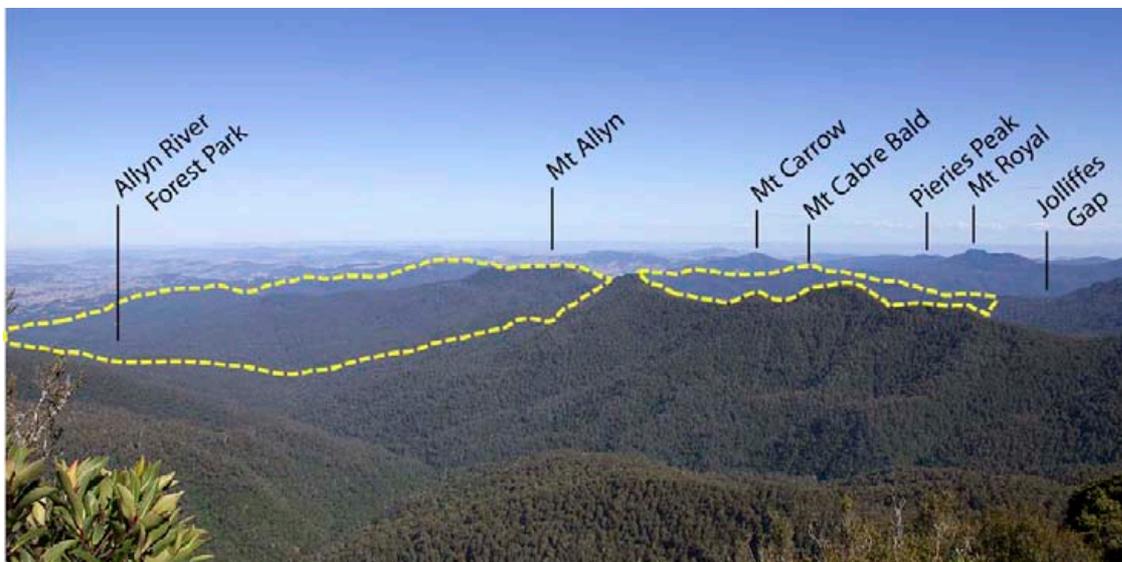
Geodiversity

The southern Barrington Tops area has a complex geology which supports a significant diversity of vegetation communities. Prominent mountains such as Mt Allyn and Mt Cabre Bald are only partially protected within the national park. The proposed extended boundaries will increase the protected geodiversity in this region of significance in Eastern Australia.

Scenic values

The proposal includes the accessible summit of Mt Allyn, from which exceptional scenic vistas can be enjoyed across the entire southern sector of Barrington Tops National Park. There are dramatic views towards the rim of the Barrington plateau, and across a seemingly endless succession of rainforest-clad slopes plunging downwards for up to 900 metres.

The immense inspiration and satisfaction provided by such scenery is reflected in the popularity of visiting lookouts as a recreational activity. One of the most popular activities within Barrington Tops for over a century has been the long ascent to Careys Peak via The Corker, specifically to take in the view. As can be seen in the photo below, the proposed national park additions will greatly increase long-term protection for the scenic values at Careys Peak and other vantage points on the plateau.



Extent of the proposed national park additions, as viewed from Careys Peak. The proposal will improve long-term protection for this iconic viewpoint. *Photo: Ian Donovan.*

Mt Cabre Bald

A key objective of the proposal is to fully protect the special values of Mt Cabre Bald, the eastern slopes of which are currently outside the national park boundary.

The name 'Cabre Bald' (likely to be a variant of NSW Pidgin/ colonial Australian English 'cobra bald', a bald head) would seem to refer to the rounded and distinctively grassy summit. This feature is highlighted by an abrupt transition to adjoining forest communities. Only a limited number of other summits between Wollemi National Park and the Bunya Mountains in Queensland feature a similar ecological structure (see for example, Fensham & Fairfax 1996). Grassy balds also occur on Mt Allyn, Mt Royal and Pieries Peak.

The early explorer and naturalist Ludwig Leichhardt described and sought to explain this phenomenon at Mt Royal as early as 1843. The contributing ecological factors are yet to be fully understood, but are likely to include fire. For example, Aboriginal burning practices may have enabled open grassy vegetation to persist since the end of the last ice age. Over the past decade,

rapid recruitment by the woody species *Lomatia arborescens* (Proteaceae) has become increasingly evident on the summit area, suggesting the need for urgent management intervention.

The summit is also notable for its spectacular ‘forest’ of grasstrees (*Xanthorrhoea* sp.), which are believed to be the tallest in the State. Huge specimens with branching trunks are common, and they are commonly festooned with epiphytes.

Whilst no detailed heritage investigations have been undertaken to date, the character and context of Mt Cabre Bald are strongly suggestive that it has significant indigenous cultural values. The isolated location, open vegetation and commanding views would have made the summit a likely site for initiation ceremonies, termed ‘gibarr’ in the local Gathang language (Lissarrague 2010). This word has been rendered by various European recorders as ‘kabberah’, ‘cabra’ and ‘keeparra’, providing a possible alternative explanation for the mountain’s name.

It is likely that Mt Cabre Bald is associated with mythological stories and dreaming tracks. The alternative name recorded by the NSW Geographical Names Board, ‘Broocoloot Bald’, appears to correspond to the local Gathang word ‘buruwigalit’, meaning ‘whip snake’ (Lissarrague 2010), although the actual species referred to is unclear (green tree snake?). Interestingly, the recorded indigenous names for three other nearby peaks also appear to correspond to local indigenous words for snake species. For example, Pieries Peak, referred to by Leichhardt as ‘Piri’ corresponds to Gathang ‘biri’, meaning ‘brown snake’. This is suggestive that Cabre Bald and nearby summits form an important mythological group linked by related dreamtime events.



The grasstrees on Mt Cabre Bald are likely to have been a keenly sought resource. *Photo:* Thomas Dick (1877-1927); gathering *Xanthorrhoea* stems near Yarras, west of Wauchope.

4. Tourism & recreation benefits

With its varied natural and scenic values within 1½ hours from Newcastle and 3 hours from Sydney, the Upper Allyn River has significant regional and international tourism potential. It is among the most accessible locations to experience spectacular rainforest scenery in south eastern Australia. The Upper Allyn provides a logical gateway to the Barrington Tops section of the Gondwana Rainforests World Heritage Area, although currently this is neither promoted nor widely appreciated.

The area is a well established regional destination, drawing visitors from the Lower Hunter and Sydney regions. However, there is potential to significantly raise the existing profile. Such a strategy would be greatly enhanced if the area had national park status. The village of Gresford is the gateway to what could be the preferred and most accessible inland destination for nature-based tourism in the Hunter Region.

Currently the major focus is for family picnics and camping along the Allyn River, short bushwalks and forest drives (existing facilities are shown on **Map 4**). There is significant potential for providing a variety of additional complementary recreational activities.

- Mountain biking has been identified as a growing activity (Office of Environment and Heritage 2016). Track networks of a range of lengths and difficulties can be provided by utilising existing forestry tracks. These would include cross country mountain biking as well as a number of thrilling downhill ‘single track’ rides. Several tracks are already well used for this purpose. The area is well-suited to be developed as a major mountain bike venue as facilities can be provided without creating the contentious environmental and recreational conflicts encountered at many other locations.
- A multiple day iconic Mt Royal to Gloucester Tops walking track could be established by linking up existing tracks. It would include spectacular outlooks from Mt Cabre Bald, Mt Allyn and Careys Peak.
- Forest drives from Gresford, with a permanently maintained 2WD all-weather road network that includes Allyn River Road, Mt Allyn Road, Masseys Creek Road and Williams Tops Road.
- Improvements to Mt Allyn Lookout to provide exceptional views of Barrington Tops and the World Heritage Area, walking tracks and interpretation facilities.

Proposed facilities are described in further detail in **Appendix 1**, and shown on **Map 5**.

Private tourism operations in or adjacent to the Allyn River camping and picnic precinct are a potential option. This might include a café, accommodation and camping, which could be by a lease or other arrangement within the national park, or on adjoining private land.

A focus on appropriate recreational activities is proposed as a solution to managing current recreational conflicts and associated environmental degradation identified in the Allyn River area. However, a significant impediment to this strategy is the current status of the area as State Forest, which allows access by recreational shooters. For understandable reasons, shooting is perceived by the general public as dangerous, and consequently discourages visitation. This threat to public safety should be removed by transferring the area to national park tenure.



Uninterrupted panorama of the Barrington Plateau, from Mt Allyn. *Photo: Ian Donovan*



The proposal contains significant potential to provide both cross-country and downhill mountain bike facilities without the environmental and recreational conflicts encountered at many other locations.

Photos: Martin Falding.

5. Economic costs & benefits

The long-term land use and management solution identified by this proposal will bring a range of benefits to the NSW Government and the local community.

While exact estimates are unavailable, it is expected that, under Forestry Corporation of NSW management, the study area currently operates at a substantial annual net loss. The reason for this is the ongoing management costs, especially road maintenance and the ongoing upkeep of the picnic and camping areas at the Allyn River and Ladies Well Forest Parks. With little or no forest harvesting taking place, there is minimal timber royalties to offset substantial annual maintenance expenses, and no incentive to invest in upgraded facilities.

No detailed evaluation of the economic impact of the proposal can be made due to the absence of specific data. However, some broad estimates are provided below to give a general guide to the expected value of the benefits to the community and NSW Government.

These estimates do not include environmental benefits (except for water catchment protection), nor recreational benefits other than off-site community benefits. It is likely that additional benefits could be included, and the estimates are lower than actual likely benefits. It demonstrates that the proposal would remove an economic liability from the Forestry Corporation of NSW balance sheet.

With sufficient investment of funds to properly plan, upgrade and transition the Allyn River Forest Park to an up-to-date facility, the current liability could be transformed to provide a more effective return on investment, while also achieving a range of other environmental and social benefits.

No reliable estimates of existing visitor usage are available but an annual figure of over 10,000 persons is likely. At present, visitation is known to be discouraged by a combination of factors, including poor facilities, inadequate roads and infrastructure, and unmanaged antisocial behaviour. It is conceivable that visitation could reach over 100,000 persons annually in the future with appropriate facilities. This is due to the recreational and scenic attributes of the area and relative accessibility to metropolitan areas.

Economic analysis – annual estimate under current State Forest management

Item	Capital loss/gain	Operating expenditure	Revenue	Comment
Timber royalties			<\$5,000	
Road maintenance (25 km)		-\$250,000		Represents minimal annual maintenance. However, annual cost is likely to be less than this
Track maintenance		\$0		Regular maintenance is required
Recreation and facilities management		-\$10,000		Maintenance does not currently meet demand. Substantial upgrading is needed
Bush fire management		\$0		No allocation for necessary management likely
Compliance costs		-\$20,000		Includes NSW Police costs
Infrastructure depreciation	-\$500,000			Infrastructure required for timber harvesting
TOTAL	-\$500,000	-\$280,000	<\$5,000	Annual loss at least \$775,000

Economic analysis – annual estimate under national park management

Item	Capital loss/gain	Operating expenditure*	Revenue	Comment
Commercial leases			\$100,000	If developed and leased (e.g. commercial camping, café and facilities)
Road maintenance (25 km)		-\$50,000		Sound road network planning and infrastructure investment would reduce annual maintenance costs
Management planning	-\$50,000			Appropriate recreational planning is necessary to support sustainable use
Tourism profile value/ image	Undefined but significant			Important for marketing and local economy
Bush fire management		-\$10,000		Most fire management costs can be absorbed in total national park management cost
Compliance costs		-\$5,000		Additional agency oversight will reduce costs
Infrastructure depreciation	-\$200,000			Annual cost of capital, mostly recreational tracks and picnic areas
Carbon credits	\$200,000			Potential significant economic benefit
Water catchment protection	Unspecified but significant			Downstream water benefits are extremely valuable to the region
Recreation and facilities management		-\$50,000		Costs would reduce over time, and can be absorbed in total park management cost
Off-site community benefits			>\$500,000	Additional economic revenue to accommodation operators and services. Would increase over time. Benefits NSW Government through tax
TOTAL	-\$450,000	-\$115,000	>\$600,000	Needs initial capital investment of at least \$7.5m to recoup benefits, but annual expenditures are reduced

Note: Operating expenditure estimates are based on necessary one-off capital investment in road upgrading and public recreation facilities improvement. Investment is expected to be in the range \$2 - 5m for roads and \$2.5m for recreation facilities. These should be funded as part of a transitional transfer package, but some of this capital expenditure could potentially be shared with private operators.

6. Existing Government plans & policies

The proposal to extend Barrington Tops National Park is consistent with relevant Government plans and policies. In particular, the NSW Government supports retaining and growing jobs in regional areas, effectively utilising public infrastructure and protecting the environment. Key documents and policies are:

- *Barrington Tops National Park, Mount Royal National Park, and Barrington Tops State Conservation Area Plan of Management* (NSW Office of Environment and Heritage 2010)
- *Draft Hunter Regional Plan* (Department of Planning and Environment (2015))
- *World Heritage Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves of Australia, Strategic Overview for Management* (Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage 2000).

The proposal is consistent with the NSW Government vision for the Northern Tops Landscape as outlined in the draft *Hunter Regional Plan 2015*, specifically by:

- protecting water catchments and drinking water quality and security
- enhancing regional habitat connectivity for biodiversity
- developing and enhancing both tourism product and infrastructure
- strengthen the role and economic sustainability of existing communities.

7. Conclusion

The rainforests and moist eucalypt forests of the Upper Allyn and Paterson valleys are contiguous with the adjacent World Heritage listed Barrington Tops National Park. They act as a regionally important water catchment area, and contain exceptional biodiversity and scenic values. This area should be added to Barrington Tops National Park.

The proposal will rationalise land management responsibilities under a single agency, and will open up many enhanced recreational, tourism and economic opportunities resulting from the change to national park status. Importantly, the proposal will ensure better protection of world heritage values and more effective management of existing camping and picnic areas.

Significant economic benefits are likely to be generated by transferring the land to national park, primarily as a result of tourism, recreational and community benefits over the long term. Benefits would be maximised by an initial investment in substantial improvements to roads, infrastructure and recreational facilities as part of the Stage 2 transfer proposal.

With the progressive phase out of uneconomic harvesting of native forests, there would be limited negative effects of the proposal. The incorporation of these areas within Barrington Tops National Park should therefore be given high priority.

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Appendix 1: Recreation & tourism opportunities

Possible recreational and tourism options are identified below, and shown on **Map 5**.

Possible option	Description
Ladies Well precinct	Undertake complete re-planning and design of the precinct (including diversion of Allyn River Road) to segregate vehicles from pedestrians, improve amenity and upgrade picnic and camping facilities. Investigate opportunities for an information centre, kiosk/ restaurant, and commercial accommodation. (Existing facilities are shown on Map 4).
Allyn River Forest Park precinct	Undertake complete re-planning and design of the precinct to improve amenity and upgrade picnic and camping facilities. Provide a walk-in camping area separate from car-based camping areas. (Existing facilities are shown on Map 4).
Upper Allyn bush camping area	Establish a walk-in camping area on the Upper Allyn River, approx. 2½ km upstream of the Allyn River Forest Park precinct. This will support the proposed Mt Royal-Gloucester Tops walking track.
The Basin picnic/ camping area	Establish a low-key picnic and camping area.
Paterson River bush camping area	Establish a walk-in camping area on the Paterson River, approx. 3 km upstream of The Basin picnic/ camping area. This will support the proposed Mt Royal-Gloucester Tops walking track.
Riverside track	Establish a foot track along the eastern side of the Allyn River to provide a car-segregated pedestrian route between the Ladies Well and Allyn River Forest Park precincts.
Lumeah track	Re-establish a foot track along the alignment of the former Lumeah Forest Road, generally between Mt Allyn and the Allyn River Forest Park precinct.
Williams Top track	Establish a foot track to link the Ladies Well precinct with the Williams River precinct (near the Barrington Guest House site).
Corker link track	Establish a foot track to link the Upper Allyn River with the Corker Track near Scouts Alley.
Mt Allyn summit track	Establish a foot track along the SE ridge of Mt Allyn.
Bungari track	Re-establish a shared walking and cross country cycle track along the alignment of the former Bungari Forest Road, finishing at the base of Mt Allyn. Provides opportunities for loop walks and mountain bike rides.
Beginners mountain bike loop	Establish a beginners mountain bike loop from the Allyn River picnic area.
Downhill mountain bike tracks from Mt Allyn	Establish three downhill mountain bike tracks, using former forestry tracks. These can be linked to form a series of challenging loop rides via Shellbrook Road.
Mt Royal to Gloucester Tops Walking Track	Multi-day walking track from Mt Royal to Gloucester Tops using existing and upgraded tracks (Mt Royal – Boonabilla Ck – Mt Cabre Bald – Paterson River – Mt Allyn – Lumeah Track – Upper Allyn River – The Corker - Careys Peak - Gloucester Tops).
Lake St Clair to Allyn River mountain bike traverse	Challenging one day mountain bike ride from Lake St Clair to the Allyn River (Lake St Clair – Mt Royal – Carrabolla – Boonabilla Road – Basin Road – Shellbrook Road – Allyn camping area). Requires private landowner permission.

Appendix 2: Submission by Gresford Community Group to NSW Government, 10 Feb 2014

Hunter Community Cabinet Meeting
Maitland Town hall
Maitland NSW
10th February 2014

**Degradation of the Allyn River Forest Park
Chichester State Forest**

Managed and maintained by
Forestry Corporation of NSW

To Ministers:- Hon George Souris MP, Minister for Tourism
Hon Robyn Parker MP, Minister for the Environment

Submission by:- Gresford Community Group
1049 Summer Hill Road,
Vacy NSW 2421

Contact:- Graham Murphy
Mobile – 0416116009
Email – graham@gabes.com.au

The Gresford Community Group acts on behalf of the Gresford Community and the greater Gresford area. Gresford is located in the Dungog Shire Council area.

Our submission to the Hunter Community Cabinet Meeting is part of an ongoing attempt by our group to address visitor safety and site degradation issues at the Allyn River Forest Park in the Chichester State Forest. This area is controlled and managed by the Forestry Corporation NSW.

On 6th January 2014 a letter was sent to the Dungog Chronicle newspaper by Mr. Jamie Derkenne from Killara in Sydney. After visiting the Allyn River Forest Park he was compelled to write and highlight the degradation and rubbish build up throughout the park. His letter is attached. (see appendix i). We fully back Mr Derkenne and believe the time has arrived where major changes to the use of this most unique and beautiful area are urgently needed.

This situation is not new and has been an ongoing problem for many years. The campground certainly do not meet the idyllic area to visit as per the Forestry's own website, (see appendix ii). As a community we are concerned that we are losing the battle against the vandalism, litter, noise and hooliganism that takes place on a regular basis. Police are constantly contacted by campers (see appendix vii) regarding the dangers that exist from people who party, get drunk and then become abusive to anyone who may voice their complaints. It is difficult for campers to contact police as there is no mobile phone coverage and the only Telstra phone provided is constantly damaged and out of order.

We have been in contact with Forest Corporation's representative in Newcastle, their comments to us was, "there have been no complaints regarding behaviour and damage to the environment" This seems to be the general ignorance of the Forestry Corporation. They appear to have no idea what is happening, how the area looks or is maintained. There is little or no Forestry supervision that monitors the actions of the few who create the problems and do the damage to the environment.

The Forest Corp does not supply wood, does not specify or signpost that removal of wood from the bush is not allowed and as a consequence people feel they have the right to chop, cut and destroy any tree they see as potential firewood. On a visit recently I photographed (see photo appendix iii) bollard post wire roped together, ripped from the ground and attempted to be burnt. These posts appear to have been lying in this location for some time. The question is who will eventually pick these up and remove them as well as all of the other rubbish and debris along the roadside and throughout the bushland.

Commercial cleaners remove rubbish from the bins and replace the garbage bags. I was at the park at 4.30pm on Saturday the 8th February and every bin in the two main camping areas was full and the overflow was stacked up on the ground (see photo appendix iv). Many people will leave on Sunday and many more rubbish bags and debris will be left on the ground around the bins. Obviously these garbage bags attract animals and vermin. During the night they rip open the bags and allow this litter to spread through the park and river. The cleaning contractors do not pick up rubbish that is spread throughout the park, do not remove or pick up the large amounts of broken glass and burnt glass that is littered in fireplaces throughout the camping areas. As a result of this the area is quickly becoming a rubbish tip, refer to Mr Derkenne's letter. The cleaning company meets their agreed specifications but there is so much more that is not on their day to day maintenance program.

To be fair to the Forest Corp we found some camping areas, away from the river's edge, clean and well kept (see appendix v) It is interesting to note why some camping grounds are well maintained while the most commonly used ones are not.

The Gresford Community group has outlined a range of procedures and ideas that will assist in the better management and rehabilitation of the Allyn River Forest Campgrounds.

National Parks have a proven record of providing excellent facilities throughout the parks in NSW. Why can't the Forestry Corporation NSW meet the same or similar standard.

- Roster more Forest Corp staff with increased visits to the area ensuring they communicate with campers to identify problem campers. This would be more relevant at peak camping times. School holidays, Easter and Anzac day. Liaise with Police to regulate drive through by motorcycle police who patrol Barrington Tops at regular intervals. Just one example I found of blatant misuse was tents erected around a sign that says NO CAMPING (see appendix vi)
- Provide fire wood or tender for companies or individuals to provide and sell bagged firewood throughout all camping areas. This person or company also has the ability to report problems as they will be in touch with individual campers. This will also minimize the impact on the

environment due to trees and undergrowth currently being destroyed for fires. Provide signs indicating the damage to trees and removal of wood from the forest is not allowed.

- Increase the size and number of garbage bins. Due to the excess rubbish placed beside the already filled bins, it is obvious that the current provision is inadequate. This will also minimize the amount of rubbish deposited throughout the park by wind and animals. This is an example of a lack of supervision by Forestry staff, why has this situation, with such a major effect on the environment, not been rectified before now?
- Close off and rotate overused camping grounds and allow for rejuvenation. Most camping areas near the river are full of unused fireplaces, broken glass, no grass and all areas are dirt base with no potential to ever recover during constant use. The camping areas need to have time to regenerate.
- Enlist local groups, scouts, Shooters party and community groups to assist with an annual cleanup along the side of the road and along the river. This could turn out to be a major event for the many people who have a great love for this area and environment. This needs to be promoted and supported by Forest Corp
- Rectify the Forest Corporation's website to identify the area as it really is and not as listed currently. The website is misleading and paints an incorrect picture of the park in its current condition.
- Monitor speeds along the forest road. Many campers in peak times, put rocks and boulders on the road to slow the traffic down and to minimize the dust created by speeding cars. This is an extremely dangerous practice and potentially could lead to a serious accident and injury. Closer monitoring and Ranger visits and communicating with campers will help minimize this situation.
- Tender to lease the camping area to a private enterprise. This has been attempted on a previous occasion and failed to attract any interest. The economy and environmental climate has changed dramatically in the past few years and it may be time to put out a new Expression of Interest. This will leave this Forest park in the hands of a committed party ensuring the safe, environmental and efficient operation of the park. It will attract families back and increase the potential for more day visitors to enjoy a beautiful part of our region. The increased numbers can be better managed by an efficient private organization.
- Tourism will be increased to the park, which will have a flow on effect to all of the townships and businesses that operate along the main roadways leading into the park. East Gresford is a prime example where many people stop to supply with food, ice, petrol and other consumables before heading into the park. Businesses in this area will benefit greatly and East Gresford also has a potential to attract people to stay in the immediate area and utilize local camping and caravan sites.
- Charge a camping fee. Income from campers will ensure additional staffing costs are covered to maintain the park. Campers do not pay any fees for camping in Forest Corp's parks. There should be a set fee for all campers. It makes sense that the user pays. Forest Corporations budget is paid by NSW residents and only a small amount of people utilize the camping grounds and forest facilities. This means that all NSW residents pay for the privilege for the few who benefit from the forest parks.
- In 2011 the Gresford Community group contacted the State Forest and Police to highlight the misuse and unacceptable behaviour. Please see Gresford Community Group minutes, Police and Dungog Shire Mayor's response to our request for intervention. (See appendix vii)

We, as a community group, look forward to hearing back from our two local representatives regarding this very important issue.

Graham Murphy

On behalf of

The Gresford Community Group.

Appendix 3: Letter, Gresford Community Group to Michael Johnsen MP, Member for Upper Hunter, 30 Jun 2015

30th June 2015

Mr Michael Johnsen MP
20 Bridge Street
Muswellbrook NSW 2333

Graham Murphy Gresford Community Group
1049 Summerhill Road, Vacy 2421
Mob: 0416116009
email: graham@gabes.com.au

RE:- **DEGRADATION OF ALLYN RIVER FOREST PARK** Chichester State Forest

Dear Michael,

Our combined community groups are pleased that you are able to meet with us today regarding our growing concerns over the lack of management by the Forest Corporation of the Allyn River Forest Park.

Our community representatives meeting with you today is –
Graham Murphy Assist President Gresford Community Group
Jane Chandler President Paterson Allyn Garden Group / Landcare
Penny Kater Secretary Gresford Landcare
Noel Brown Gresford Community Group
Brian Doherty Editor Gresford News Publication

Recently we sent you a series of documents regarding our submission to the NSW Cabinet meeting in Maitland on the 10th February 2014. The report was handed to three Ministers and as a result it was passed on to the State Forest Corporation who responded with a basic letter to our concerns, with none of our requests being addressed. As a consequence the Forestry camping areas and natural habitat continues to be degraded.

Our meeting with you today is to provide background to the concerns of the local community and to ask for your support to ensure the park is managed for the safety of both visitors and the environment.

We need your assistance to address the following,

- **Upgraded management and supervision of the park.** This can be improved by Increasing Ranger numbers who would visit camping areas on a daily basis and have closer communication with campers and visitors. He could identify and programmed maintenance to the park and walking trails. The presence of a ranger would also help reduce the degradation of the park due to vandalism by campers and visitors, motorbikes and four wheeled drive vehicles.
- **Environmental conservation of the park.** This region is part of our river catchment area and it is important that the clean flowing water be protected as it is a much needed resource for our growing community. In the last 15 years the State Forest closed off all small camping areas beside the river as it was concerned by the environmental impact by campers, since then the Forest Corporation has done very little to protect or mitigate environmental damage by campers and visitors to this area.

- **National Parks.** NSW National Parks are very proactive in managing the environment and ensuring camping areas are constantly maintained and supervised. We feel that if the Forest Corporation cannot properly protect our environment then serious consideration should be given to handing this area over to the NSW National Parks for its future protection.

The Forestry Corporation annual Chairman and CEO report for 2013-14 talks about “environment and social goals and obligations into the future” he proudly promotes that they now have \$15 million dollars funding for Community Service Obligation. We are seeking your assistance to ensure that we receive some of these much needed funds to help our local Forest Corporation Branch, the local citizens and visitors who love and appreciate this pristine part of our region.

We are looking forward to you liaising on our behalf and also look forward to your assistance and response in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Murphy

On behalf of the Gresford Community Groups

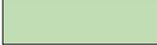
Proposed additions to

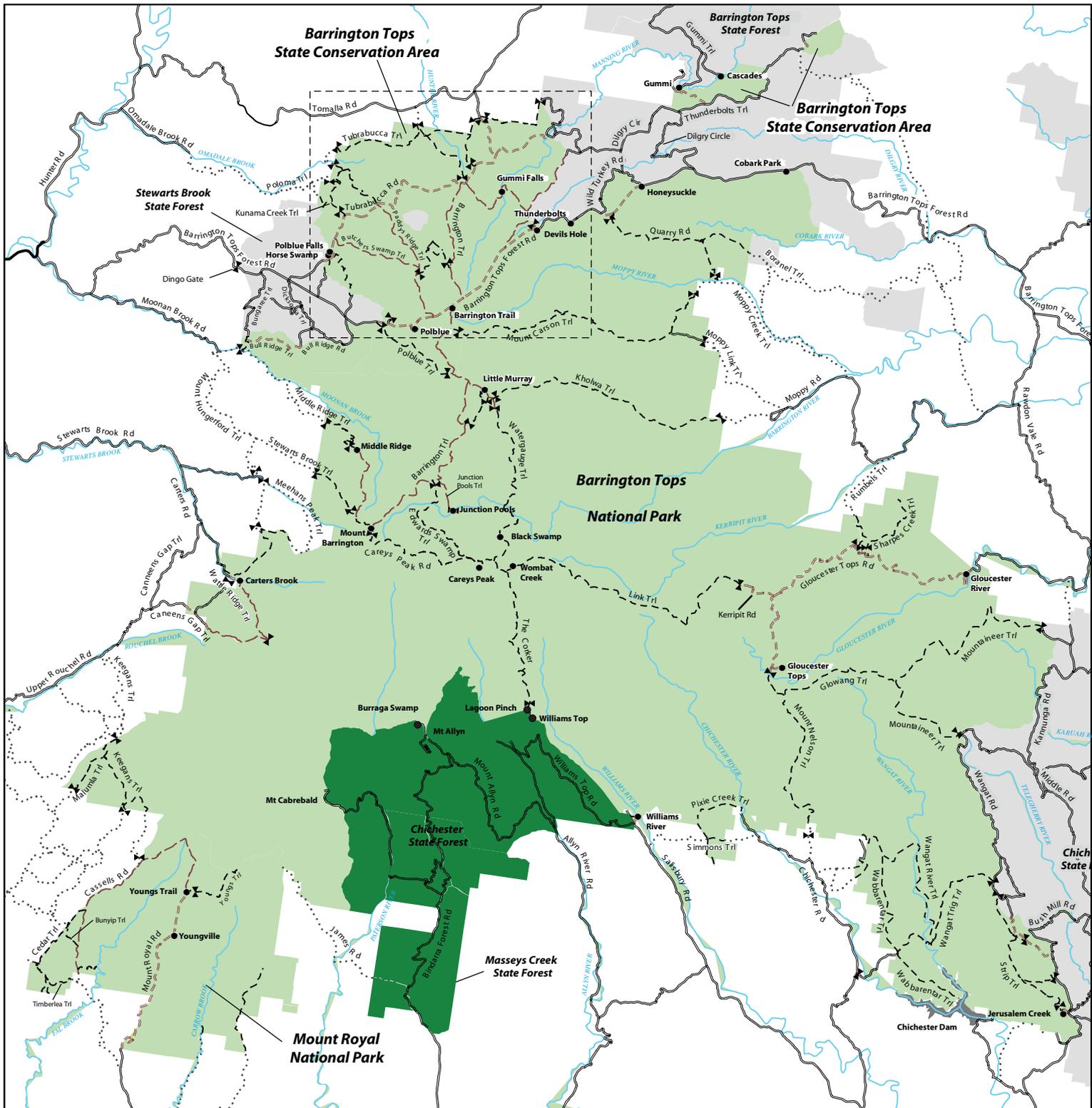
Barrington Tops National Park Upper Allyn & Paterson Rivers



1. Location & context

Note: forestry and management roads may not be trafficable

-  National park estate (existing)
-  Proposed additions



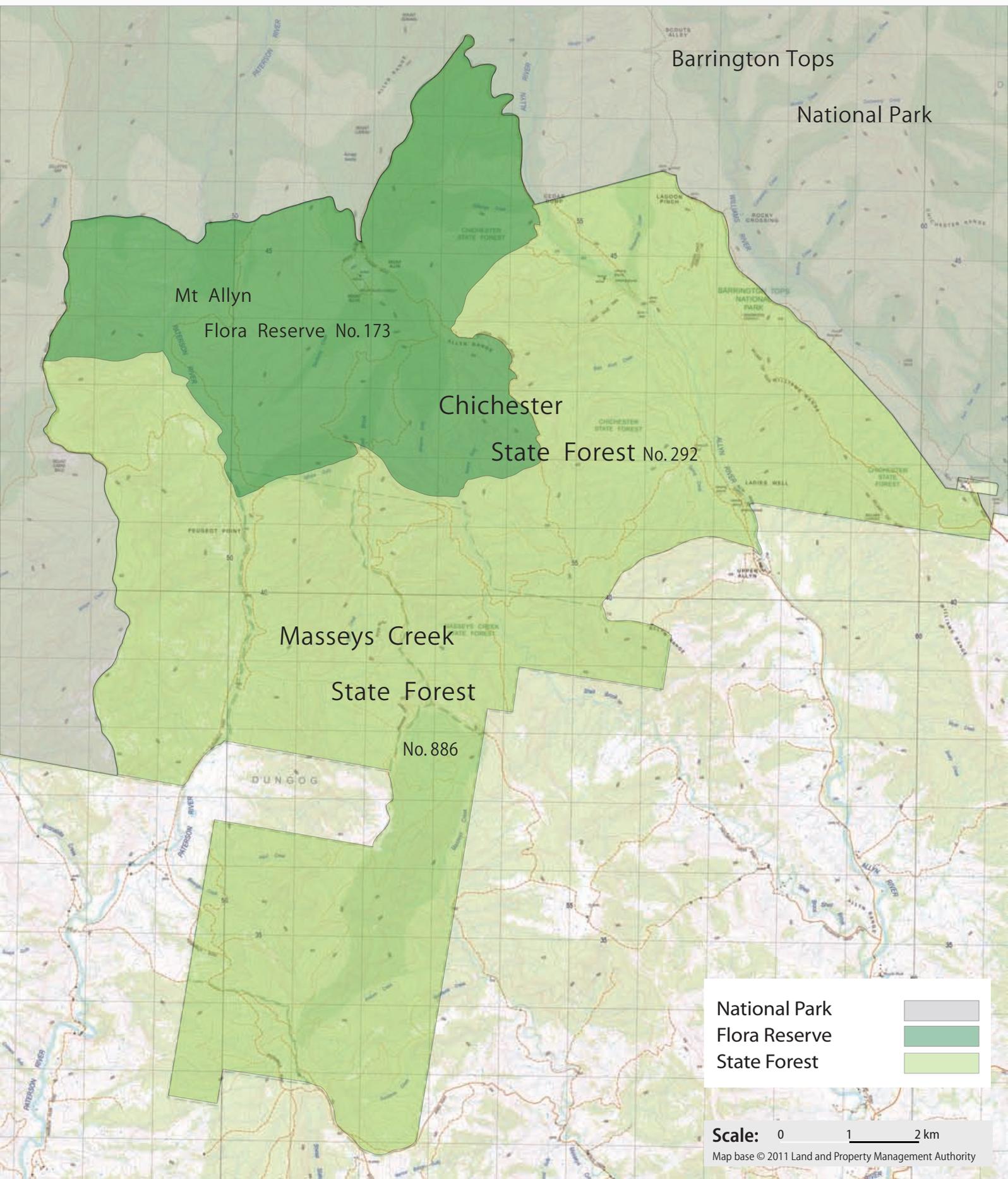
Proposed additions to

Barrington Tops National Park

Upper Allyn & Paterson Rivers



2. Current land tenure



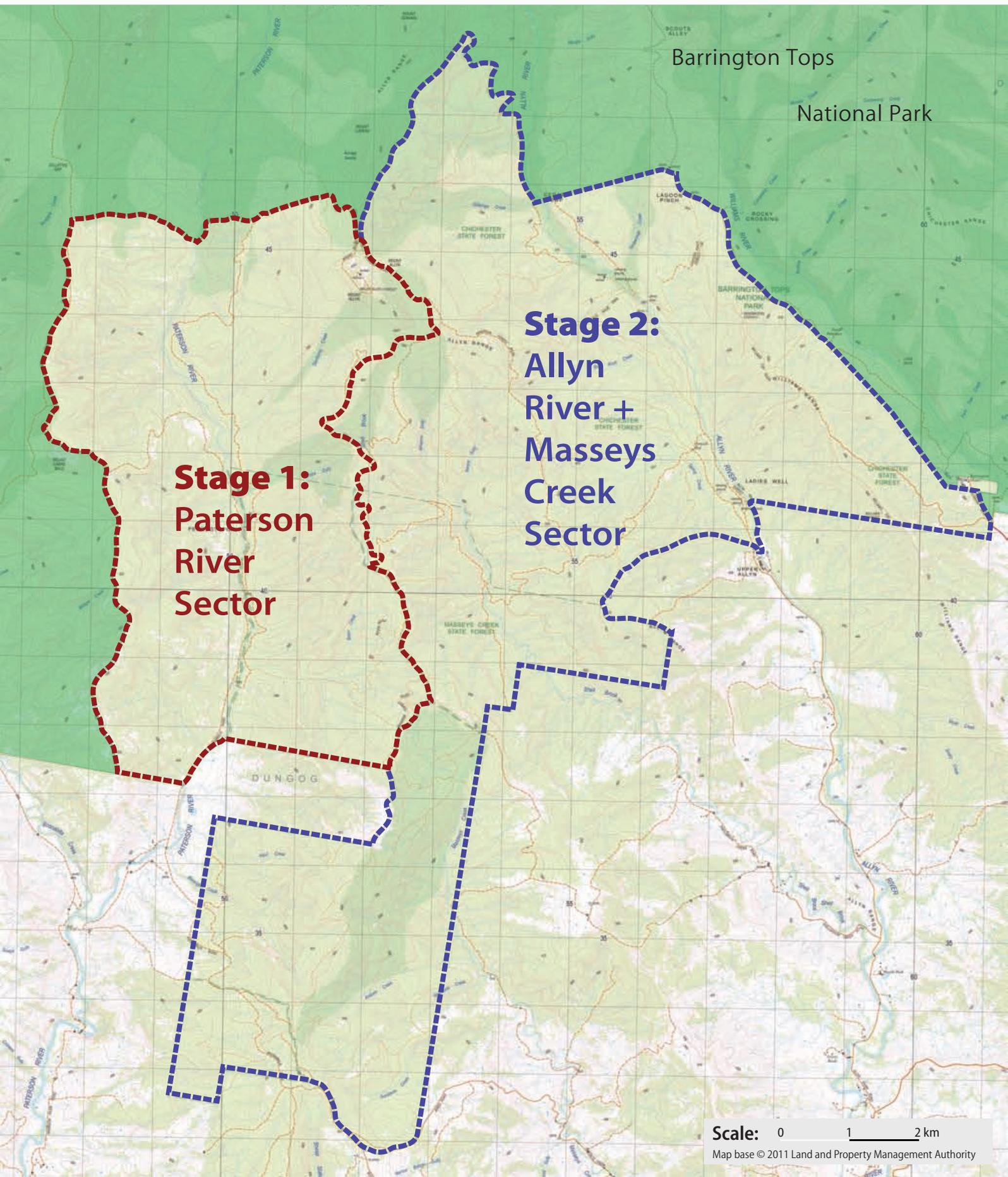
Proposed additions to

Barrington Tops National Park

Upper Allyn & Paterson Rivers



3. Proposed boundaries & staging



Stage 1:
Paterson
River
Sector

Stage 2:
Allyn
River +
Masseys
Creek
Sector

Barrington Tops

National Park

Scale: 0 1 2 km

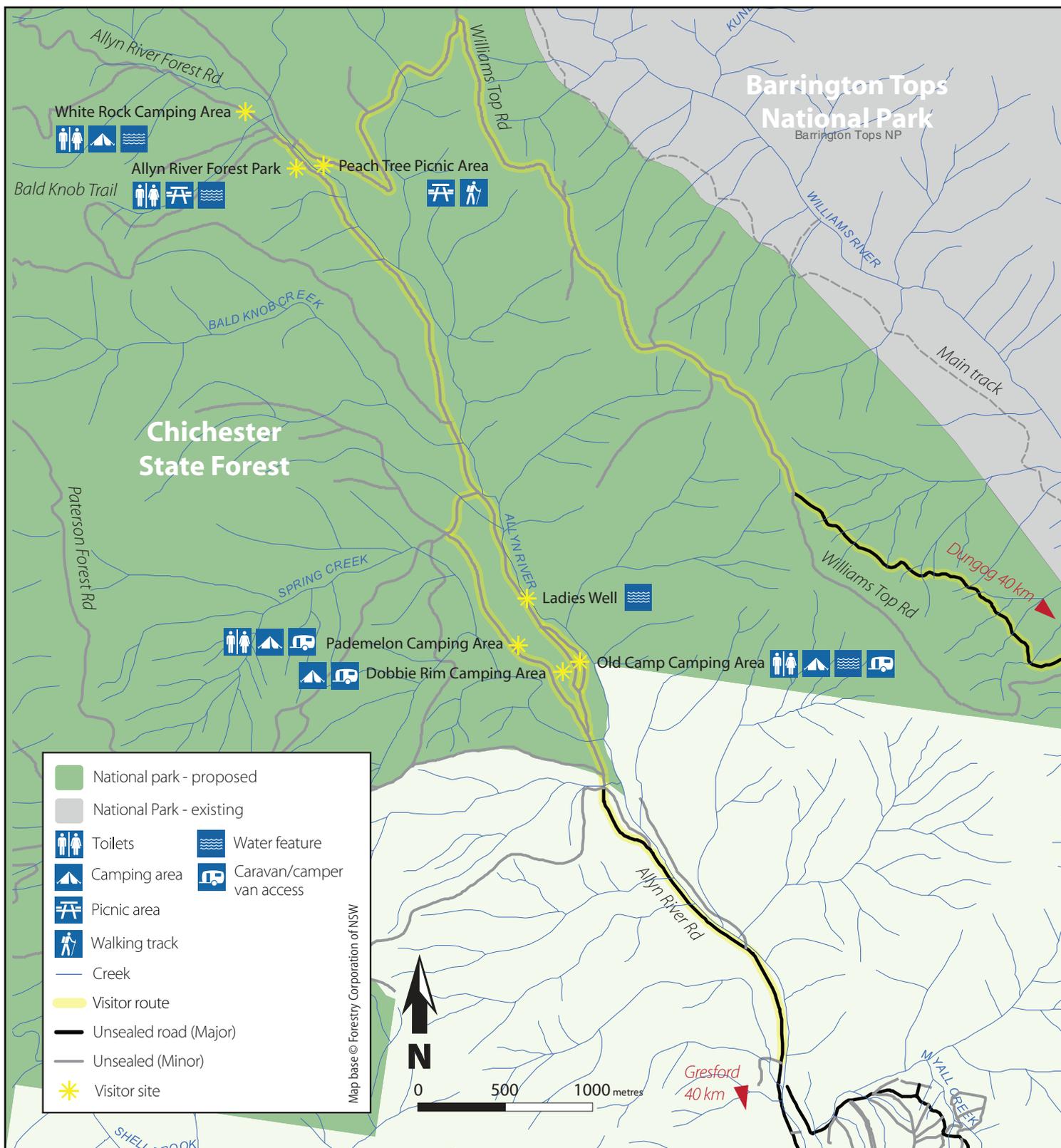
Map base © 2011 Land and Property Management Authority

Proposed additions to

Barrington Tops National Park

Upper Allyn & Paterson Rivers

4. Allyn River picnic & camping areas (existing)

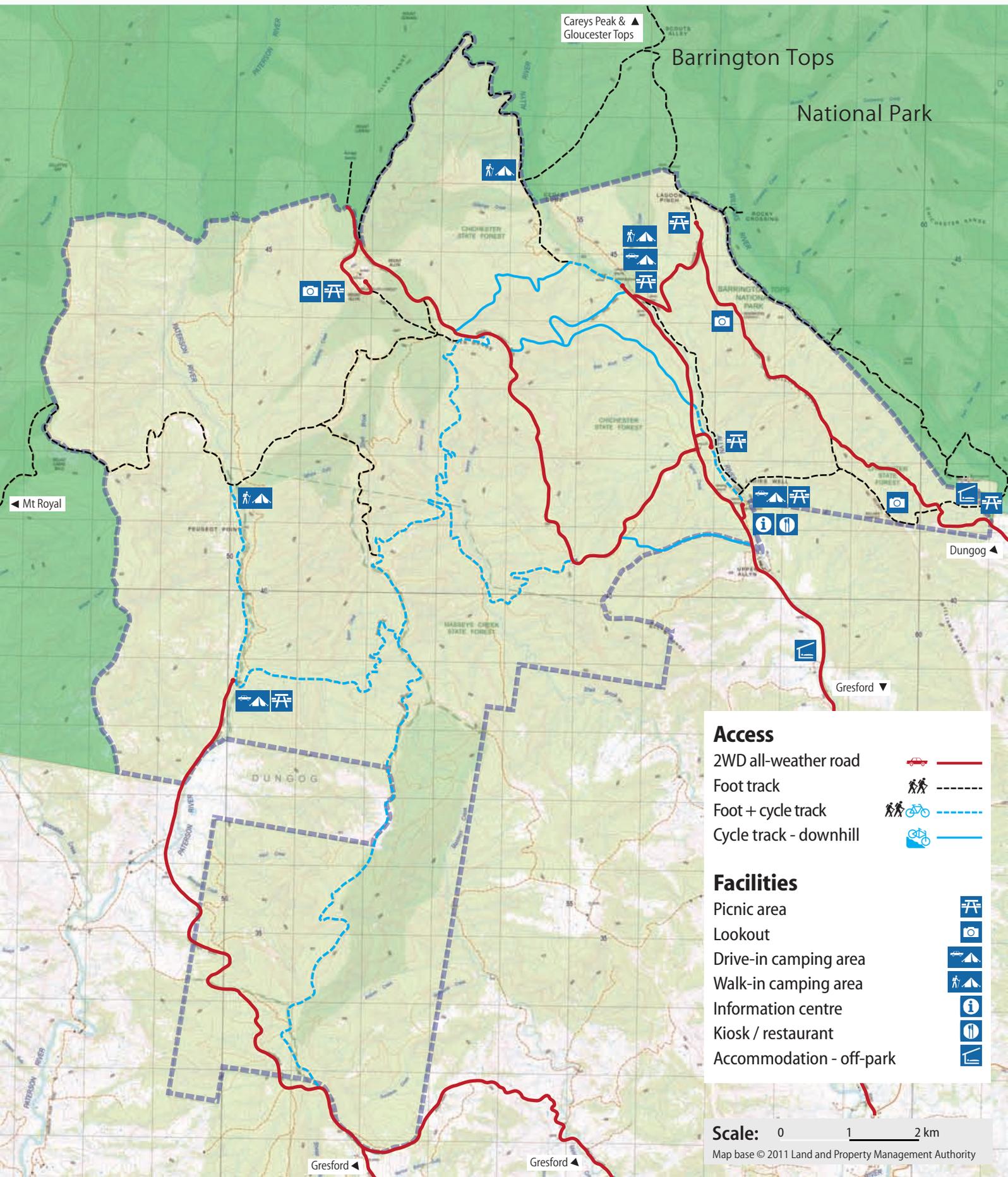


Proposed additions to

Barrington Tops National Park

Upper Allyn & Paterson Rivers

5. Proposed access & facilities

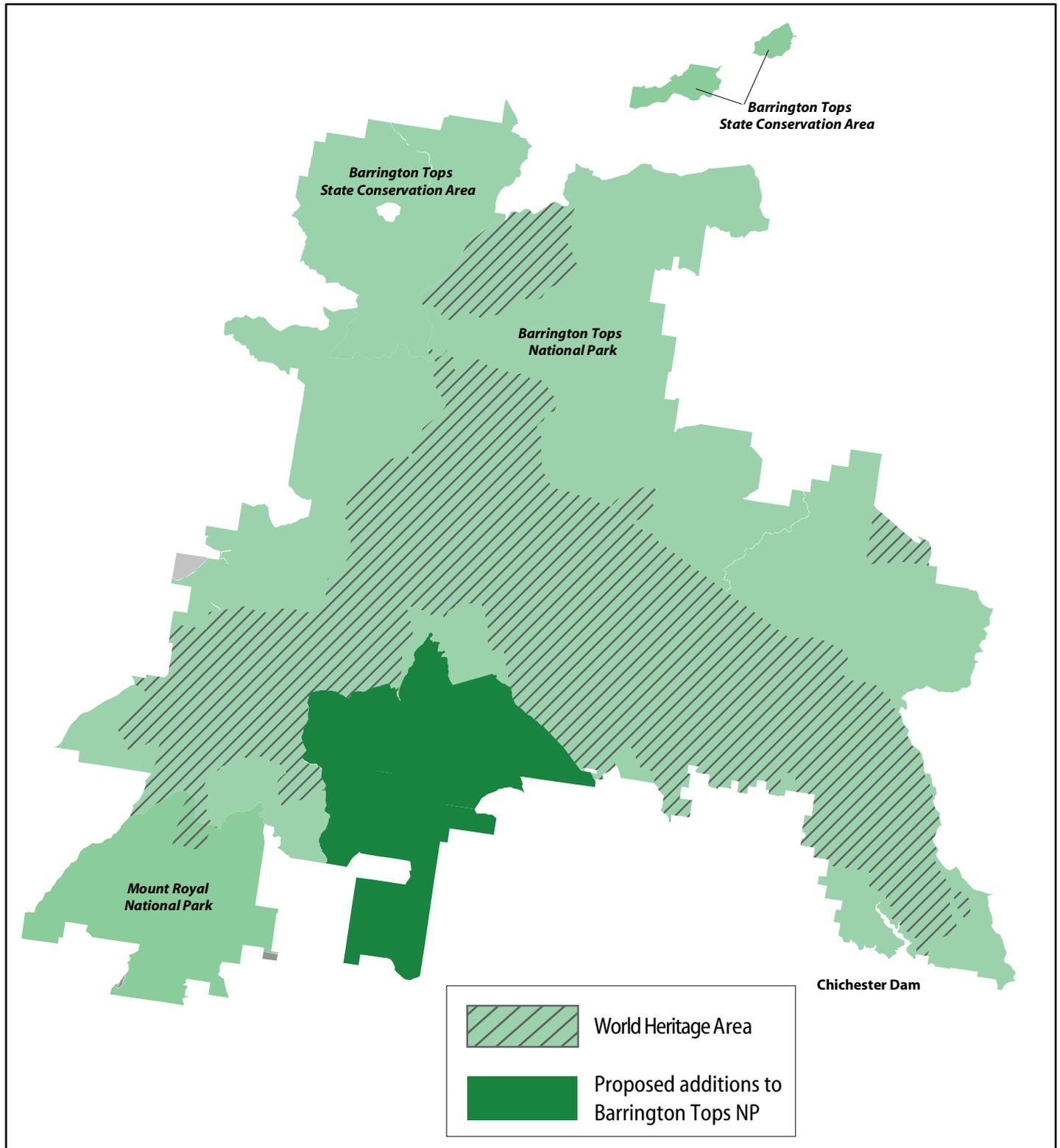


Proposed additions to

Barrington Tops National Park

Upper Allyn & Paterson Rivers

6. Declared World Heritage Area



Proposed additions to

Barrington Tops National Park

Upper Allyn & Paterson Rivers

7. Declared wilderness areas

