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AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT TO PARLIAMENT MANAGEMENT OF HISTORIC HERITAGE IN NATIONAL PARKS AND RESERVES

SPREADING MONEY TOO THIN PUTS HISTORIC HERITAGE AT RISK

The National Parks and Wildlife Service is spreading its resources too thinly, running the risk that the heritage significance of important assets will eventually be lost.

“The NPWS has lots of historic heritage under its care. It needs to target its top sites, the ones we can't afford to lose,” said the Auditor-General, Mr Peter Achterstraat.

The NPWS has had some notable achievements in historic heritage, including the restoration of the Audley Dance Hall in the Royal National Park, the conservation of walking tracks in the Blue Mountains, and maintenance arrangements for the Green Cape Lightstation on the south coast.

But it cannot achieve this for all of its historic heritage. NPWS' inventory of historic heritage contains more than 11,000 items. Only 12 per cent of the 223 parks that need to manage historic heritage adopt a comprehensive planned approach, while 51 per cent adopt a reactive approach or undertake little or no management.

NPWS needs to establish Statewide priorities for historic heritage management and allocate resources on the basis of these priorities.

“NPWS needs to make the difficult decisions about what sites to spend its money on,” said Mr Achterstraat, “and continue to look for creative ways to preserve historic heritage.”

Sympathetic reuse of historic heritage should be pursued where possible. Heritage buildings can be modified to allow new uses while retaining their cultural significance.

“If we don't use our heritage places, we are at risk of losing them,” said Mr Achterstraat.

NPWS also needs to increase its engagement with the private sector and the community.

“Cafés and accommodation, low-impact sponsorship and volunteering should all be on the agenda,” said Mr Achterstraat.

The Auditor-General summed it up:

“Fewer, better, smarter is the way for NPWS to preserve historic heritage for future generations. Focus on fewer sites, maintain them well, and adopt clever and creative solutions.”

Further information

Emily Watson, Governance Manager, on 9275 7408 or 0425 329 363; email: emily.watson@audit.nsw.gov.au.

Types of historic heritage in national parks and reserves

The table below from the NPWS asset management system provides an indication of the types of historic heritage under the agency's care and control. The data is, however, not complete. This is discussed in the audit report.

Type	Number
Amenities	195
Barracks	4
Beacon	1
Cabin	181
Camping area	4
Channel marker	1
Church	5
Cottage	75
Courthouse	5
Entrance feature/gate	2
Fort	5
Gravesite	15
Hall	5
Historic ruin	692
Homestead	27
Hostel	6
Hotel	6
Hut	53
Lighthouse	2

Type	Number
Livestock structure	12
Local Road	1
Military emplacement	178
Mine	1
Monument/plaque	197
Onground lookout	7
Quarantine station	32
Shed	206
Shelter	1
Shop	8
Swimming pool	1
Ticket box	1
Vehicle bridge	23
Vehicle trail	7
Viewing platform	2
Visitor centre	5
Walking track/route	45
Woolshed	2
Woolshed quarters	8

Source: NPWS, January 2013.