

# Executive Summary

Eco Logical Australia and Gondwana Consulting were commissioned by the Bidjigal Reserve Trust to prepare this Plan of Management for Bidjigal Reserve. The Plan:

- Identifies and gains a comprehensive understanding of the existing qualities, features and issues of Bidjigal Reserve (in Section 3)
- Provides a masterplan for maintenance and enhancement of the environmental integrity of the Reserve, its flora and fauna, cultural heritage and public recreation opportunities (in Section 4 and 5)

Bidjigal Reserve is a 186 ha bushland reserve located within the Hills Shire and within the boundaries of land traditionally occupied by Aboriginal people of the Darug Language Group. The reserve comprises Crown land and was formerly part of Excelsior Park and Darling Mills State Forest. In 2004, Bidjigal Reserve was created through the settlement of a native title application by representatives of the Darug People and involved the *Forestry (Darling Mills State Forest Revocation) Act 2005*.

The Crown lands within the reserve were dedicated for public purpose under Section 82 of the *Crown Lands Act 1989* (Gazette No. 134, 13 August 2004, page 6559). The dedicated public purposes are:

- Preservation of Aboriginal cultural heritage
- Preservation of flora and fauna
- Public recreation

Care, control and management of the reserve are the responsibility of the Bidjigal Reserve Trust and its Board (the Board). Darug People are represented on the Board. Publicly owned bushland areas adjoining the reserve are managed by The Hills Shire Council (and unless named otherwise are known collectively as Excelsior Reserve) and the Roads and Traffic Authority.

The cultural histories held by Aboriginal people themselves, as well as the archaeological evidence, point to Aboriginal occupation of the Darling Mills Valley for at least the last 10,000 years. The reserve and adjacent bushland are now surrounded by urban development within the suburbs of Castle Hill, Baulkham Hills, Northmead, North Parramatta, Carlingford and West Pennant Hills.

Bidjigal Reserve comprises significant stands of bushland in good condition, providing habitat for threatened species. The reserve is crossed and bordered by the M2 Hills Motorway, and contains fire trails, walking tracks, and easements for major transmission lines and sewer lines. Darling Mills Creek is the principal waterway through the reserve, flowing into the Paramatta River.

The community and government agencies were consulted during preparation of this Plan. An issues paper was prepared once the initial consultation period was complete and comments were considered in the Plan. The Reserve is highly valued by the community for its natural and cultural heritage values, amenity and recreation opportunities.

Threats to these values include, but are not limited to:

- Weed infestation associated with stormwater runoff, garden dumping and past sewer construction, particularly along creek lines. Weeds are a significant threat to the reserve because they can out-compete native plants and degrade habitat. Weeds also decrease the amenity of bushland
- Risk of uncontrolled bushfire or inappropriate regimes for hazard reduction burns and maintenance of the APZs
- Encroachment and impacts from neighbouring properties, including the community nursery and sports fields
- Lack of consolidated, co-ordinated management due to lack of funds and staff; and different land ownership and/or management of adjacent bushland
- Inappropriate use and maintenance of service corridors – powerlines, sewer and water supply infrastructure, including impact of service vehicles
- Sedimentation and erosion, particularly relating to track maintenance and stormwater
- Vandalism and littering
- Feral and uncontrolled domestic animals

The Reserve offers significant opportunities to maintain and improve biodiversity, foster a greater appreciation of cultural heritage and increase involvement in recreational activities. Key actions identified in this Plan aim to protect and improve current conditions, and are as follows:

- Improved coordination of existing resources and programs for catchment management, community education and bushfire management
- Reserve ranger to be engaged and responsible for guiding implementation of this Plan (under the direction of the Board), including liaison with residents, The Hills Shire Council, the Land and Property Management Authority, and other agencies (\$80,000 p.a.)
- Weed control, seed collection and bush regeneration in accordance with the Vegetation Management Plan by UBM (2009) (\$50,000 p.a.)
- Maintenance of the fire trail and tracks to standard suitable for intended use (\$20,000 p.a.)
- Review creek crossing infrastructure to determine priority for replacement and/or maintenance (allow \$50,000 each)
- Prepare and install signage (\$30,000)
- Monitoring (\$10,000 p.a.)

At present, funding for projects within the Reserve is primarily provided through government grants and management is largely coordinated and conducted by community volunteers. A small amount of funding income is generated from guided walks and bank interest. This lack of resources for management has contributed to concerns about the condition of the bushland and appropriate activities within it.

No development (subject to development application) is currently proposed within the Reserve. Future developments in the reserve should be assessed according to statutory requirements and the objectives set out in this plan, with particular attention given to potential for impact on the values of the reserve, its neighbours and visitors. Activities that are compatible with the reserve's bushland character should be allowed only if they do not significantly impact the ecology, heritage or amenity of the reserve or surrounding areas.

This Plan will be valid for five years from date of adoption by the Minister for Lands.