

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The revised Plan of Management for The Gully places a renewed focus on managing The Gully from an Aboriginal cultural perspective.

The Plan aims to provide a contemporary approach to Caring for Ngurra (Country) and to set the future direction for managing The Gully, reflecting the aspirations of The Gully's Gundungurra and Darug Traditional Owners, the families of former Gully residents and the broader community.

For the people from The Gully, it is a place that holds deep family and kinship connections embodied through the memories and lives of present Traditional Owners that extend through time to the ancestors and spiritual beings that created this part of Country. The Traditional Owners continue to recognise and revere the profound sacred and spiritual presence within The Gully resonating since the time of creation.

The Plan supports the strengthening and continuation of Aboriginal cultural practice, cultural educational opportunities and meaningful reconciliation and healing from the impacts of colonisation and dispossession. With greater recognition of The Gully as a cultural space, the management of public recreation, tourism, fire and environmental programs is informed by the cultural values of The Gully, and the broader aspirations of the Traditional Owners.

The values of The Gully have been established from speaking with the community and the social and cultural research undertaken on The Gully. The Gully's values will guide how The Gully is protected cared for and managed. The core values of The Gully are:

- a place to belong and connect with family, culture and Country
- continuity of culture through the maintenance of cultural practices
- spiritual wellbeing
- a shared space for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal People
- education and learning opportunities on Aboriginal culture
- health of Country (land, water, plants and animals)
- beauty (sight, sound and smell)
- play and exercise

## Knowing the place

The Gully is one of many upland wetlands in the Blue Mountains that nourished, nurtured and sustained countless generations of Aboriginal Traditional Owners. The Gully was abundant with a myriad of plants, animals and pure water, providing the Traditional Owners with physical and spiritual sustenance. Water is highly significant to life in The Gully, maintaining the health of The Gully community and remains essential to the life of The Gully itself. The swamps and streams feeding the Kedumba River and ultimately into Lake Burragorang, contributing to Sydney's drinking water supply.

The carefully balanced natural economy based on the native plants and animals of The Gully sustained the nutritional, medicinal and material needs of Traditional Owners. The Gully community continued to utilise the natural vegetation in a similar manner to their forebears.



Although highly disrupted by European colonisation, The Gully still maintains a diversity of native plant communities and supports several threatened species.

Fire is one of the principal ways Gundungurra and Darug Traditional Owners managed Country in the Blue Mountains. The exclusion of fire from The Gully for the past 60+ years, coupled with the effects of urban runoff has favoured the establishment of exotic vegetation and environmental weeds which has significantly impacted on the health of The Gully.

Recreation and play has a long history in The Gully and formed an important role in family, cultural and social bonds among those who lived within The Gully, with many recalling with great fondness the range of activities that provided forms of entertainment, exercise or relaxation. The Gully still supports a diverse range of recreational and sporting activities, many of which were undertaken by The Gully community, supporting two district sporting facilities, the Sports and Aquatic Centre and Katoomba Falls ovals.

The Gully contains the popular tourist precinct of Katoomba Falls and provides for diversity of local recreational activities. Historically, the push for tourism development had a devastating impact on The Gully community. The acknowledgement of traditional protocols and applying contemporary protocols when visiting Country is an important step towards recognition of Aboriginal cultural values and practices by the broader community.

## **A declared Aboriginal Place**

Traditional Owners have custodial responsibilities to care for their Country, to ensure that it continues in proper order and provides physical sustenance and spiritual nourishment for current and future generations.

The European settlement in Eastern Australia and the crossing of the Blue Mountains in 1813 had catastrophic impacts on the Aboriginal community. The colonial settlement expanded and colonised Country on the plains to the west, but also the Burratorang Valley, then Jamison and Megalong Valleys. Colonising of Country severely disrupted the seasonal and ceremonial movement of the Traditional Owners throughout their homelands while adversely impacting the availability of resources and traditional economies that sustained their community. Being forced from their traditional lands, many families sought refuge in well-known camping places.



The ensuing colonial government policies intervened in all aspects of Aboriginal People's lives. The Gully became a refuge from this control, particularly the growing forced removal of children. Over subsequent generations these Gully families continued to grow into a supportive community of extended interconnected families and friends often strengthened through the bonds of intermarriage, continuing the age old kinship patterns and associated responsibilities. Gully Aboriginal families were not entirely outside the reaches of government authorities. Over a number of generations, the State Government frequently intervened in their family and cultural lives. The forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families had a devastating impact on the lives of Gully families, including preventing traditional languages being passed to the next generation.

Despite all the adverse measures that impacted the social and cultural existence of The Gully people, this community persisted and continued to bond together to overcome these challenges.

By 1957 The Gully community that had called The Gully home for generations, was devastated when a motor vehicle race track was built through it. This catastrophic and enormously sad event in the lives of The Gully community was brought about by local business identities and the Council deciding, without regard for The Gully people, to create the Catalina Racing Circuit. The Gully residents were forced to leave their much loved homes in a part of Country which met many of their needs. Many of The Gully community who were compelled to relocate found accommodation in Katoomba or surrounding areas, though others left the area and some never returned.

Following its peak in the 1960s, use of the race track gradually decreased until its virtual abandonment by the 1980s, and eventually the natural vegetation of The Gully began to return. In 2001 Gundungurra Elder Aunty Dawn Colless nominated 'The Gully', also known as the Upper Katoomba Falls Creek Valley, for consideration as an Aboriginal Place. A year later, in May 2002, The Gully was declared an Aboriginal Place.

## Legislation and tenure

The development of The Gully Plan of Management responds to NSW state legislation including: the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*; the *Local Government Act 1993*; and the *Crown Lands Management Act 2016* and the *Crown Lands Management Regulation 2018*. The Plan also responds to Federal legislation, *Native Title Act 1993* which intersects with the *Crown Lands Management Act 2016* through a Native Title Manager to ensure that Plan of Management process complies with the *Native Title Act 1993*. The Reserve purpose of the crown lands within the Gully is Public Recreation. The plan has been prepared with reference to Blue Mountains City Council's (Council) strategic planning policies for recreation, tourism, land use and conservation.

## Speaking with the community

Through speaking with the community the values of The Gully held by The Gully community, the Aboriginal and broader community have been defined. Through conversations at NAIDOC Week in 2018, interviews with Gully families and an online survey for site users, the shared values of The Gully's Aboriginal culture and heritage, education, peace and beauty were established. For Gully families The Gully remains central to their family history and their personal identity. For local residents and visitors, The Gully is valued for the opportunity to exercise and the accessibility to engage with Aboriginal culture. Speaking with the community has helped shape the policies and actions for the protection and management of The Gully.

## Caring for Country

The threats to the values of The Gully are identified as: wildfire and the threat to exposing Aboriginal cultural heritage; the removal or disturbance of tangible Aboriginal cultural heritage; the lack of broader community awareness of the ongoing impacts of the second dispossession on Gully Aboriginal families; environmental threats including stormwater runoff, weeds and dog off-leash practices impacting on wildlife; and growth and development of tourism in the Katoomba Falls precinct without regard to the cultural value of The Gully.

The future management of The Gully is focussed around five key themes:

1. cultural identity
2. continuation of culture
3. protecting cultural heritage in Country
4. a living place – education and learning, recreation and tourism
5. restoring and managing country – water, bushland and fire

For each of the five key themes the plan outlines:

- **where we're at** – current issues effecting The Gully
- **where we want to be** – goals and what needs to change
- **how we're going to get there** – outline of the policies and actions needed to achieve the goals

## Policies

Policy statements for the five themes have been prepared to guide how The Gully is managed. The policies support the current management of The Gully in putting emphasis on the Aboriginal cultural values and the importance of The Gully as a place of healing and reconciliation, and where families are supported to share their stories.

The policies seek to support the strengthening of Aboriginal culture, through participation in cultural practice and intergenerational transmissions of knowledge, and the protection of cultural heritage through education, and taking a holistic approach that is integrated with practicing culture on Country.

Education and learning is a core value of The Gully providing great opportunities for the broader community and is led by The Gully Traditional Owners, and Gully families who are supported to share their stories, histories, culture and ongoing connections to The Gully.

Passive recreation is promoted and supported, and the areas of organised sporting at the Katoomba Sports and Aquatic Centre and the Katoomba Falls Oval are maintained and accommodated. Future upgrades to, or redevelopment of, visitor and recreational facilities in The Gully are guided by both the overarching cultural values of The Gully and the relevant city wide strategies and policies for sport and recreation.

Tourism in The Gully is led and authorised by the Traditional Owners and The Gully Aboriginal community and is to provide economic benefit to the Aboriginal community.

The policies that guide the management of fire, stormwater and weeds are referenced against existing city wide strategies and policies in place in the Blue Mountain Local Government Area. All work in managing and restoring the natural systems in The Gully is guided by the Aboriginal cultural heritage values of The Gully.

## Actions

The key recommended actions proposed under The Gully Plan of Management are:

### Cultural identity

- Develop opportunities in The Gully as a place of healing intergenerational trauma experienced by Gully people resulting from the past forced removal from The Gully.
- Quiet spaces are protected and excluded from general public access as part of recreational planning and provision of open space within The Gully.

### Continuing culture

- Use traditional language in The Gully as part of cultural workshops and events, signage, site interpretation and other communications on The Gully.
- Continue with culture based events to provide opportunities for sharing the stories of The Gully with the broader community.
- Continue to develop community engagement and learning opportunities through bush foods and traditional use of natural materials through existing volunteer programs and cultural education events.

### Protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage in Country

- Develop and implement cultural site induction process (Cultural Tool Box Talk) for all undertaking work in The Gully (to be provided by an Aboriginal person).
- Prepare a site protection plan to protect sites from damage, vandalism and theft in the event of wildfire and hazard reduction burns.

### A living place

#### Education and learning

- Continue and develop further opportunities that facilitate transmission of cultural, social, historical and spiritual knowledge across generations of The Gully Aboriginal community.
- Develop a new Gully Heritage Centre to support cultural practice, truth telling and reconciliation, while sharing the continuing story of The Gully community.



### Recreation and play

- Provide toilet facilities, as guided by the master plan for the central area to provide for local visitor use and cultural education groups.
- Upgrade and modification of visitor entry and car park at Gates Avenue including shelter/rest area, drinking water and landscaping, as guided by the master plan for the central area.

### Visitors

- Develop signage plan to identify The Gully Aboriginal Place, including key messages to promote an understanding of the cultural importance of The Gully.
- Define locations for camping associated with cultural events within The Gully as part of the master planning process.

## Restoring Country

### Water

- Prepare Healthy Waterways Catchment Plan for the Upper Kedumba River inclusive of The Gully in accordance with the Water Sensitive Blue Mountains Strategic Plan in addressing Traditional Aboriginal use and contemporary cultural values of water.
- Implement swamp, stream and drainage line rehabilitation works as directed by the Bushland Operations Plan and the Healthy Waterways Catchment Plan.
- Establish a catchment group to address whole of catchment issues outside the boundary of The Gully Aboriginal Place.

### Bushland rehabilitation

- Prepare Bushland Operations Plan for The Gully.
- Control of priority weeds across public and private land surrounding The Gully.
- Resource pre and post weed management programs as part of fire mitigation and hazard reduction works.
- Continue to resource and deliver community-based programs (Gargurree Bushcare, Swamp-care, Landcare).



- Enhance interpretation areas and formed paths with planting to increase species diversity including representative examples of Gully flora for cultural interpretation.
- Continue to develop community engagement through bush foods, connection to Country and traditional use through existing volunteer programs.

#### Fire

- Establish opportunities to undertake cultural burning in appropriate areas to provide for cultural education and learning opportunities for the Aboriginal community to achieve hazard reduction and ecological conservation and restoration outcomes;
- Organise and run cultural burn event within The Gully in areas as identified for prescribed burns as shown show in Fire Management Plan.

#### Implementation

The policies and recommended action will be implemented through the existing governance structure for The Gully which is a cooperative management agreement between The Gully Traditional Owners Incorporated (GTOI) and Council operating under The Gully Cooperative Management Committee Terms of Reference.

#### Cost

The cost to implement recommendation of The Plan is estimated at \$4,627,510 and comprised predominantly of project based works (\$4,466,130) which are currently unfunded. An estimate of \$161,380 from recurrent annual budget provides for resourcing of programs such as cultural projects, Bushcare, bush regeneration and water quality monitoring.

#### Review

A review of the recommended actions in the 2004 Plan of Management was under taken, with incomplete actions being incorporated into the revised 2019 plan. The Plan is to be regularly reviewed at intervals aligned with Councils 4-year Delivery Program with the next review being in 2021. A full review of The Plan is proposed to occur within 14 years in 2034.

