



## Strategic directions for horse riding in NSW national parks

*Photographs (clockwise from main photo):*

Horse riding in Kosciuszko National Park (S. Vivers);  
in Murrumbidgee Valley National Park (B. Hlavica/OEH);  
in Blue Mountains National Park (K. Tucker / Werriberri Trail Rides);  
in Murrumbidgee Valley National Park (B. Hlavica/OEH).

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Office of Environment and Heritage NSW

59 Goulburn Street, Sydney NSW 2000

PO Box A290, Sydney South NSW 1232

Phone: (02) 9995 5000 (switchboard)

Phone: 131 555 (environment information and publications requests)

Phone: 1300 361 967 (national parks, climate change and energy efficiency information, and publications requests)

Fax: (02) 9995 5999

TTY users: phone 133 677 then ask for 131 555

Speak and Listen users: phone 1300 555 727 then ask for 131 555

Email: [info@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:info@environment.nsw.gov.au)

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# Foreword

New South Wales has a magnificent reserve system, established for the conservation of natural and cultural values, and to foster public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of these values.

The NSW reserve system contains 864 national parks covering over 7 million hectares, or approximately 8.8% of the State. The NSW Government is committed to providing a diversity of opportunities for the community to experience and enjoy our national parks, so we can all appreciate the importance of protecting them for present and future generations.

Horse riding is a popular recreational activity that has strong cultural associations for many Australians. Many national parks are on land where horse riding occurred for over a century and a half. There are currently over 110 national parks across New South Wales where people can enjoy horse riding. The NSW Government is committed to increasing the level of access to allow horse riders the opportunity to experience a wider range of national parks.

I am very pleased to present *Strategic directions for horse riding in NSW national parks*. The development of this strategy has been informed by over 200 public submissions received on the draft strategy. This strategy will guide the provision of improved horse riding opportunities in NSW national parks over the coming years.

The strategy balances recreational opportunities which can lead to a greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of our wonderful national parks with ensuring the unique values of our parks remain protected. Risks to park values will be managed through careful planning and best practice adaptive management. Impacts to areas of high environmental sensitivity will be avoided.

The initiatives proposed in this strategy are consistent with the NSW Government's commitments in *NSW 2021* to work with the community to protect our local environment and to provide more opportunities to enjoy parks and natural bushland.

**Robyn Parker**

**Minister for the Environment**

# 1. Introduction

The NSW Government is committed to providing a diverse range of sustainable visitor and recreational experiences to ensure a broad spectrum of the community can enjoy NSW national parks and reserves ('national parks'). Horse riding in national parks provides an opportunity for horse riders to experience and appreciate the state's wonderful natural environments. Horse riding also has significant heritage value for many horse riders and horse riding on historical trails in national parks provides for the maintenance of these cultural traditions.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) within the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) has developed the *Strategic directions for horse riding in NSW national parks* (the strategy) to guide the provision of improved horse riding opportunities. The strategy provides a framework to improve horse riding opportunities over the short, medium and longer term.

The strategy outlines a process for providing horse riding opportunities in eight identified priority regions of NSW. It provides for work plans to be developed in each of the priority regions, in consultation with local horse riding representatives, to outline the priority horse riding opportunities to be provided in the region over the following two to three years.

The strategy also proposes the establishment of a pilot program, to trial horse riding in five wilderness locations to be determined by the NPWS, for two years, subject to amendments to the relevant parks' plans of management (PoM). The proposed pilots would be underpinned by a strategic adaptive management framework to be designed by NPWS.

The strategy acknowledges that while there are social benefits of increasing horse riding in national parks, there are also potential environmental and social impacts. It explains ways in which OEH intends to manage risks of horse riding and minimise impacts on park values, including by ensuring horse riding opportunities are provided in appropriate locations, primarily on established management trails.

The strategy reiterates the NSW Government's ongoing commitments to facilitating horse riding on the Bicentennial National Trail. It includes a commitment to improve the communication of existing and future horse riding opportunities and identifies new policy requirements to guide the implementation of these initiatives.

## 2. Goals

The overarching goals guiding the development and delivery of this strategy are to:

- improve opportunities for sustainable recreational horse riding in NSW national parks
- provide opportunities in appropriate locations to ensure the specific natural and cultural values of the national park are protected and the safety of all park visitors is maintained
- deliver an enhanced community awareness of existing and improved recreational horse riding opportunities in national parks
- build support in the horse riding community for national parks and collaborate on practical park management actions, including encouraging participation in volunteering.

## 3. Context

### NSW 2021

The initiatives outlined in this strategy are consistent with the NSW Government's commitment to encourage a diverse range of recreational activities in the reserve system, and will assist in implementing the following goals of *NSW 2021*:

- *Goal 22: Protect our natural environment*  
The NSW Government will work with the community to protect our local environment and provide more opportunities to enjoy parks, waterways and natural bushland.
- *Goal 27: Enhance cultural, creative, sporting and recreation opportunities*  
The NSW Government will encourage increased participation in sporting activities to support healthy lifestyles.

### Legislation

The key legislation that governs the implementation of the strategy is outlined below.

#### *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*

NSW national parks are established and managed in accordance with the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (NPW Act). The objects of this Act are (in summary):

- (a) the conservation of nature;
- (b) the conservation of objects, places and features (including biological diversity) of cultural value within the landscape;
- (c) fostering public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of nature and cultural heritage and their conservation; and
- (d) providing for the management of land reserved under this Act in accordance with the management principles applicable for each type of reservation.

The strategy further supports object (c) of the Act. It encourages horse riders to experience and enjoy national parks and increase their appreciation and understanding of nature and cultural heritage. The strategy will be implemented in a manner compatible with all of the objects of the Act.

The principles of ecologically sustainable development will be applied to the implementation of the strategy. The protection of the natural values of national parks, including the conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity, is a key consideration in determining the appropriate locations for new horse riding opportunities. The strategy requires a precautionary approach, involving careful evaluation to avoid serious or irreversible damage to the environment.

The strategy also gives effect to the public interest in the protection of the values for which land is reserved under this Act and the appropriate management of those lands. All horse riding opportunities provided under the strategy must be consistent with the statutory PoM for the relevant reserve, either currently in force or as amended to facilitate new opportunities in accordance with this strategy.

### *Wilderness Act 1987*

Wilderness areas are identified and declared in accordance with the *Wilderness Act 1987*. The objects of the Act are:

- (a) to provide for the permanent protection of wilderness areas;
- (b) to provide for the proper management of wilderness areas; and
- (c) to promote the education of the public in the appreciation, protection and management of wilderness.

The proposed wilderness pilots will be implemented in a manner consistent with these objects and within the statutory scope of the legislation. A strategic adaptive management framework will be developed to ensure that the proposed wilderness pilots do not adversely impact upon park values.

### *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*

Activities in national parks are subject to the requirements of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*. In accordance with this Act, any proposals for new physical works will be subject to environmental assessment. Environmental assessment may also be required for new horse riding experiences that involve a change in use of an existing trail but no new physical works. This will need to be determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration:

- the scale of the change in use
- likely volume of the increased use
- changes in environmental impacts and
- competing visitor demands.

It is possible that some experiences provided under the strategy may also require referral to the Australian Government Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities in accordance with the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Commonwealth).

### **Other government strategies**

The initiatives outlined in this strategy build upon the following NSW and Australian Government strategies:

- *Living Parks – A sustainable visitation strategy* (2005) aims to enhance the experience of park visitors and improve community awareness of the natural and cultural heritage values of the reserve system. It promotes sustainable and culturally appropriate visitor use of NSW national parks.
- The *NSW Tourism Strategy* (2008) aims to promote visitation to national parks and to protect the State's biodiversity and cultural heritage values through appropriate use of national parks.
- Australia's National Landscapes program is a joint initiative between Tourism Australia and Parks Australia, supported by the states and territories, which promotes visitation and tourism to iconic protected areas across the country. Specific tourism strategies have been developed for a number of the national landscapes including the Australian Alps national landscape.

## **Memorandum of Understanding**

In 2006, the Liberal National Coalition signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with peak horse riding stakeholders which seeks to provide more horse riding opportunities in national parks, including in wilderness areas and nature reserves. The MoU supports the use of an adaptive environmental assessment and management process to manage the potential impacts of horse riding on park values.

A Horse Riding Consultative Group has met since mid-2011, comprising key horse riding stakeholders and National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) staff. The non-statutory group was established to provide a forum to discuss opportunities and issues relating to horse riding in national parks and associated policies and procedures, including the implementation of the 2006 MoU. The consultative group will have an ongoing role in providing state-level advice on the implementation of this strategy.

This strategy establishes a framework for and a basis to implement the NSW Government's commitment to horse riding in national parks.

## 4. Development of the strategy

### Status of horse riding in national parks

Horse riding is already recognised as a legitimate activity in NSW national parks. Current policy provides for horse riding to be permitted in national parks, regional parks, state conservation areas and nature reserves (in this last category on designated roads only), on a case-by-case basis. Previous NSW Government policy has prohibited horse riding in wilderness areas.

Like all recreational activities in national parks, the decision about whether and where to allow horse riding in a reserve is guided by the statutory PoM. This ensures that the specific park context – including the particular conservation, cultural and recreational values of the area – is taken into account. It also facilitates community input into park management planning via an open and transparent process.

Horse riding is already permitted on thousands of kilometres of trails across more than 110 national parks. In some parks, access for horse riding is also allowed off-trail (e.g. in sub-alpine areas of Kosciuszko National Park) and supporting facilities are provided, such as designated vehicle-based horse camping areas.

The Bicentennial National Trail is a multi-use trail stretching from Queensland to Victoria that traverses many NSW national parks. The Bicentennial National Trail is defined as 'a 5330 kilometre self-reliant multi-use route through bush, (areas excised from) wilderness and mountain areas. It is suitable for horse riders, walkers and mountain bike riders.'<sup>1</sup> NPWS entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Bicentennial National Trail Committee in 2002 which commits to working cooperatively to facilitate ecologically sustainable access to the trail.

The NSW Government is committed to increasing opportunities for a diverse range of recreational experiences in national parks, including improving opportunities for horse riding.

### Draft strategic directions for horse riding in NSW national parks and reserves

In April 2012, the Minister for the Environment released *Draft strategic directions for horse riding in NSW national parks and reserves* (the draft strategy), to outline the NSW Government's commitment to improved horse riding opportunities. Members of the community were invited to provide feedback on the draft strategy. The draft strategy was publicly exhibited on the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) website for a 10-week consultation period, from 20 April to 30 June 2012.

Meetings were held with the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council, Regional Advisory Committees, the Horse Riding Consultative Group and peak conservation groups to discuss the draft strategy and encourage them to provide input into the development of the final strategy.

Over 200 submissions were received on the draft strategy. Submissions were lodged from a range of stakeholders including individuals, statutory advisory bodies, horse riding organisations and conservation groups.

The development of the final strategy has been informed by detailed analysis of the submissions and the strategy has been modified in response to some of the key issues raised in the submissions. It has also been modified to better reflect the Government's preferred approach to horse riding in wilderness. Important modifications in the final strategy include:

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<sup>1</sup> Bicentennial National Trail website: [www.nationaltrail.com.au](http://www.nationaltrail.com.au) accessed 29/12/2012.

- an acknowledgement of the potential environmental and social risks and uncertainties of facilitating increased horse riding in national parks and additional information on how these will be managed
- an explicit acknowledgement that there are some national parks and/or trails where horse riding is not appropriate based on the specific natural, cultural and social values
- an acknowledgement of the range of social benefits associated with an increase in horse riding in NSW national parks
- a streamlined approach to the provision of horse riding opportunities in the priority regions that replaces the proposed regional working group process with the development of a work plan in each region
- a clearer explanation of the role of the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council and the Regional Advisory Committees in relation to the strategy, as well as a more detailed discussion of the relationship of the strategy to the PoM process
- detail on how improved horse riding opportunities can be provided in areas outside the priority regions, through discussions with the Regional Manager and the PoM process and
- provision for five wilderness pilots in locations determined by NPWS.

## 5. Managing risks and optimising benefits from horse riding in parks

All recreational activities can have adverse impacts on park values if undertaken in inappropriate locations or without suitable management arrangements in place. NPWS has extensive experience in managing recreational activities to ensure the natural, cultural and social values of national parks are protected. Robust processes are in place to assess new activities, identify potential adverse impacts, and ensure best practice and sustainable management approaches are applied.

There is a range of potential impacts that can be associated with unmanaged horse riding in national parks. These include impacts on soil, water, vegetation, structural impacts on trails, and introduction of foreign material into protected areas. There are also potential social impacts including amenity impacts and conflict between recreational users. The type and level of impact depends on the interaction between a range of factors, including the frequency and intensity of horse riding, other recreational uses of the area, climatic conditions and environmental attributes such as soil type, vegetation and the sensitivity of waterways.

There are also significant social benefits associated with horse riding in national parks. Horse riding has heritage value for many horse riders and horse riding on historical trails in national parks provides for the maintenance of these cultural traditions. Participation in individual and group recreational activities such as horse riding can have positive effects on people's health and sense of wellbeing. Horse riding also facilitates access to national parks to some people with mobility issues which might otherwise prevent them from exploring protected areas. Increasing the diversity of the community that experiences and enjoys national parks fosters public appreciation and understanding of natural and cultural heritage and strengthens support for protecting the park system.

To balance the increasing demand to use national parks with the protection of park values, NPWS ensures that recreational activities occur in suitable locations. The strategy provides for horse riding opportunities to be provided in appropriate locations, primarily on established management trails, which are generally already accessible to cyclists and management vehicles. NPWS acknowledges there are parks and trails within parks where horse riding is not appropriate because of conservation, cultural and recreational values.

NPWS will develop a strategic adaptive management framework, with potential application for a broad range of activities in parks. Experts in adaptive management will be consulted during the development process to ensure the framework is robust. The strategic adaptive management framework will be applied to the horse riding wilderness pilots. The wilderness pilots will enable NPWS to determine whether the environmental and social impacts of horse riding can be managed within acceptable thresholds.

The *Code of practice for horse riding in parks* (2010), prepared by NPWS in consultation with horse riders, provides practical guidance to minimise the impacts of horse riding on natural and cultural values. NPWS is committed to working with peak horse riding groups to build awareness about the importance of compliance with the code. While the code is voluntary, all activities in parks, including horse riding, are governed by the NPW Act and the National Parks and Wildlife Regulation 2009.

## **6. Directions for horse riding in national parks**

This strategy fulfils the NSW Government's commitment to improve horse riding opportunities in national parks. The fundamental principles that will guide the delivery of this strategy and the key initiatives that will provide the practical implementation of its goals are outlined below.

### **Guiding principles**

#### **Plan of Management process**

As with all activities in national parks, horse riding opportunities provided in accordance with the strategy must be consistent with the PoM for the reserve. Where new opportunities are to be pursued that are not consistent with the PoM, a PoM amendment will be proposed. Any PoM amendments will be subject to the standard statutory process, including public consultation.

Where the PoM for a national park, state conservation area or regional park is silent on horse riding, the Regional Manager may allow horse riding, on a specific trail or more generally, if this is considered consistent with the intent of the PoM. In this instance, permission for horse riding may be granted through signage or consent issued in accordance with the National Parks and Wildlife Regulation 2009.

#### **Role of National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council and Regional Advisory Committees**

The National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council and Regional Advisory Committees are established under the NPW Act. They are appointed by the Minister for the Environment to provide advice on park management matters. They represent a diversity of community stakeholders with an interest in the establishment and management of national parks.

The existing functions of the Advisory Council and the Regional Advisory Committees, to provide advice on issues of park management and on new or amended PoMs, are maintained under the strategy. In addition, in the priority regions the Regional Advisory Committees will be consulted on significant new opportunities proposed in the region, consistent with existing practice.

#### **Appropriate location**

To ensure the natural, cultural and social values of national parks are protected, it is important that all recreational activities, including horse riding, occur only in appropriate locations. NPWS acknowledges there are locations where horse riding is not appropriate because it may compromise the specific values of the national park or reserve.

The strategy provides for horse riding opportunities to be primarily provided on established management trails. A long history of use in national parks has bequeathed an extensive network of management trails, where cycling and management vehicles are generally already permitted. The strategy also provides for small extensions to existing trails to be considered if this is identified as a priority in the work plan. Consideration will also be given to providing access to historical bridle trails and old stock routes. In some specific locations, horse riding opportunities may be provided off-trail (e.g. this already occurs in subalpine plains in Kosciuszko National Park), based on historical usage and where minimal impacts are likely.

## **Types of experiences**

Horse riders are primarily seeking access to existing management trails. However, in some locations NPWS may propose small extensions to existing trails to create loop trails as these provide more enjoyable horse riding experiences. Horse riders are also seeking access to historical bridle trails and old stock routes and consideration may also be given to providing access to these trails where environmental impacts can be minimised. Additional facilities, such as parking and camping facilities will be considered when identified as priorities in the work plan.

NPWS will aim to cater for a diversity of sustainable horse riding experiences in national parks, including the following:

### *Trail riding*

Trail riding is generally undertaken for a short duration, starting and finishing from a base which may be a designated horse campsite in the park or a base outside the park. Trail riding may be carried out as an organised club event or a commercial activity, or by individuals or small groups.

### *Endurance riding*

This is a more active and intensive form of recreational horse riding. It typically involves riding horses in planned and organised events, generally on loop trails with distances of approximately 80 kilometres. Horses may also be engaged in endurance training rides over shorter distances.

### *Horse trekking*

Long-distance riding often involves the use of pack horses to carry overnight camping equipment and supplies. It may occur over a number of days or even weeks, sometimes in quite remote areas.

### *Bicentennial National Trail*

NPWS reiterates its ongoing commitment to the Bicentennial National Trail. NPWS will ensure, where possible, that the trail is located on public land instead of private land for the purposes of maintaining its integrity, including proposing amendments to PoMs where necessary and liaising with other public land managers.

NPWS will seek to link new horse riding opportunities with the Bicentennial National Trail where possible. NPWS will facilitate camping opportunities along the trail, consistent with existing PoMs. Parking facilities at trail heads will be considered when identified as priorities through the PoM process.

## **Key initiatives**

### **Horse riding priority regions**

Eight priority regions have been identified as the focus for new horse riding opportunities. The selection of the eight priority regions has been influenced by NPWS understanding of demand for horse riding access in national parks, as well as to provide a spatial spread of opportunities along the coast, in metropolitan Sydney, in subalpine areas and in the Northern Tablelands. The investigation and provision of new horse riding opportunities will primarily be targeted in these priority regions. By focusing on the eight priority regions rather than the entire State, greater efficiencies of effort and resource allocation will be achieved.

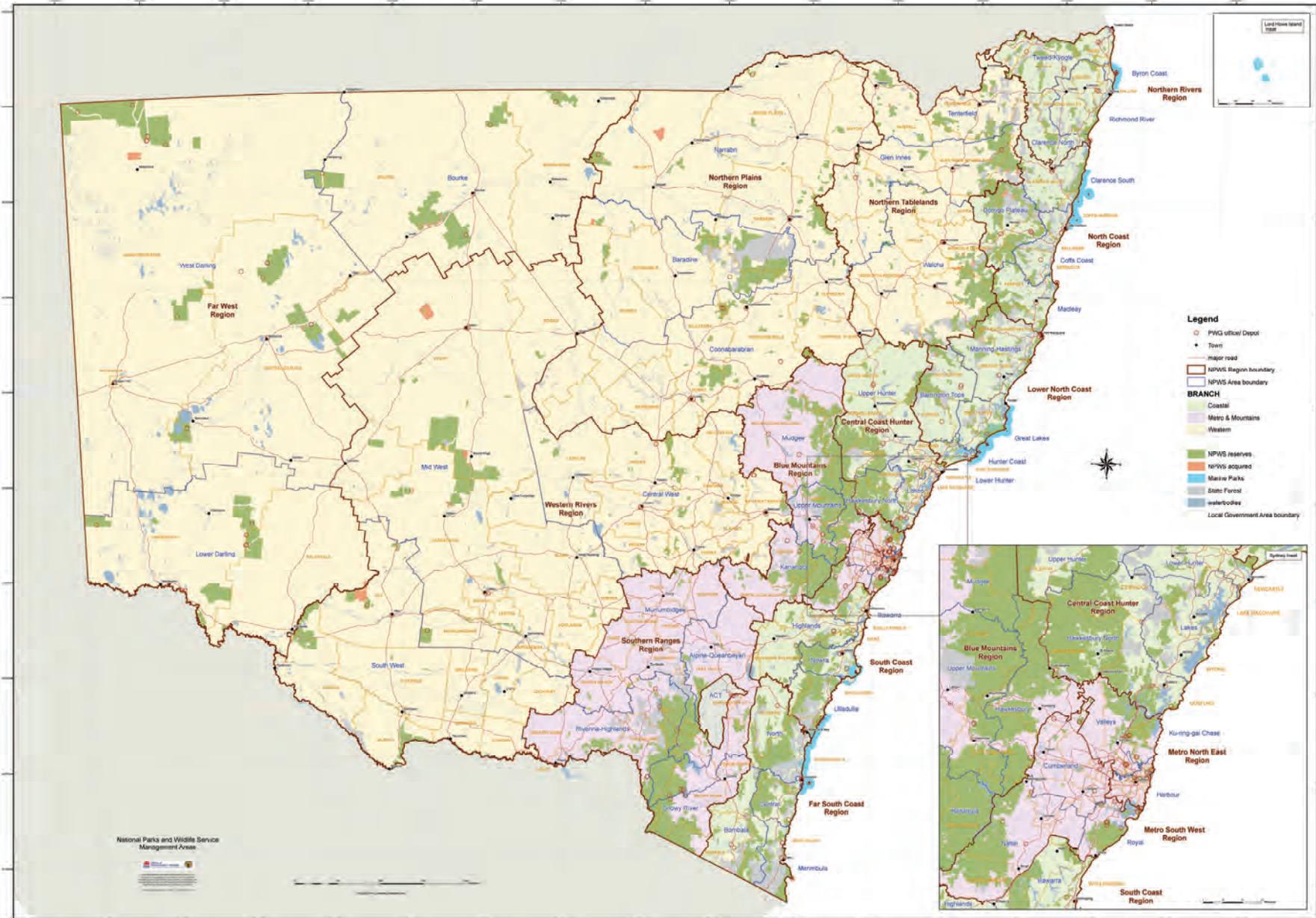
While the focus is on these eight priority regions, NPWS will also provide horse riding groups outside the priority regions with the opportunity to meet with and present horse riding proposals to the Regional Manager. These proposals will be considered in the planning and management of national parks in the region. Additional workshops may be held in other regions in response to demand. Horse riders will also be encouraged to participate in the review of PoMs.

The eight priority regions, based on NPWS boundaries, are:

- Northern Rivers
- Northern Tablelands
- Lower North Coast
- Central Coast Hunter Ranges
- Blue Mountains
- Metropolitan North East
- Southern Ranges
- Far South Coast.

These regions are shown in Figure 1 (next page).

Figure 1 – Priority regions



### *Delivering horse riding opportunities in the priority regions*

NPWS recognises the importance of local involvement in the identification and prioritisation of horse riding opportunities. To ensure this, NPWS will hold workshops with local horse riders and horse riding groups in each of the priority regions. The workshops will help form the basis of the development of a work plan, by the Regional Manager, of horse riding opportunities to be implemented in the region over the following two to three years.

The work plan will identify short-term priorities to be implemented in the first year and longer term priorities to be implemented in the second and third years. Short-term priorities will generally focus on horse riding opportunities that are consistent with the PoM and require minimal physical works. This includes trails where horse riding access is restricted due to gates, or trails where access is not explicitly provided under the PoM, but where access could be granted by the Regional Manager because horse riding is consistent with the overall intent of the PoM and other statutory controls.

More complex opportunities that require amendments to PoMs or more substantial physical works will generally be prioritised in the work plan for implementation in the second and third years. These may include horse riding opportunities that would require amendment to the PoM, short extensions of existing trails to form loop trails and the provision of facilities for horse float parking or vehicle-based horse camping. They may also include the provision of access to historical bridle trails and old stock routes that are currently maintained by NPWS.

Consistent with existing practice, the Regional Manager will consult the Regional Advisory Committee, which represents a diversity of local community views, on significant horse riding proposals. For parks under Aboriginal joint management arrangements, consultation with the joint management committee will be undertaken to determine what opportunities will be pursued. Broader community involvement will be facilitated through the PoM process for proposals that require amendments to the PoM.

Regional Managers will report annually on new horse riding opportunities introduced each year, for the duration of the work plan. After the conclusion of the work plan, Regional Managers will determine whether it is necessary to develop another work plan for the region, following the process outlined above.

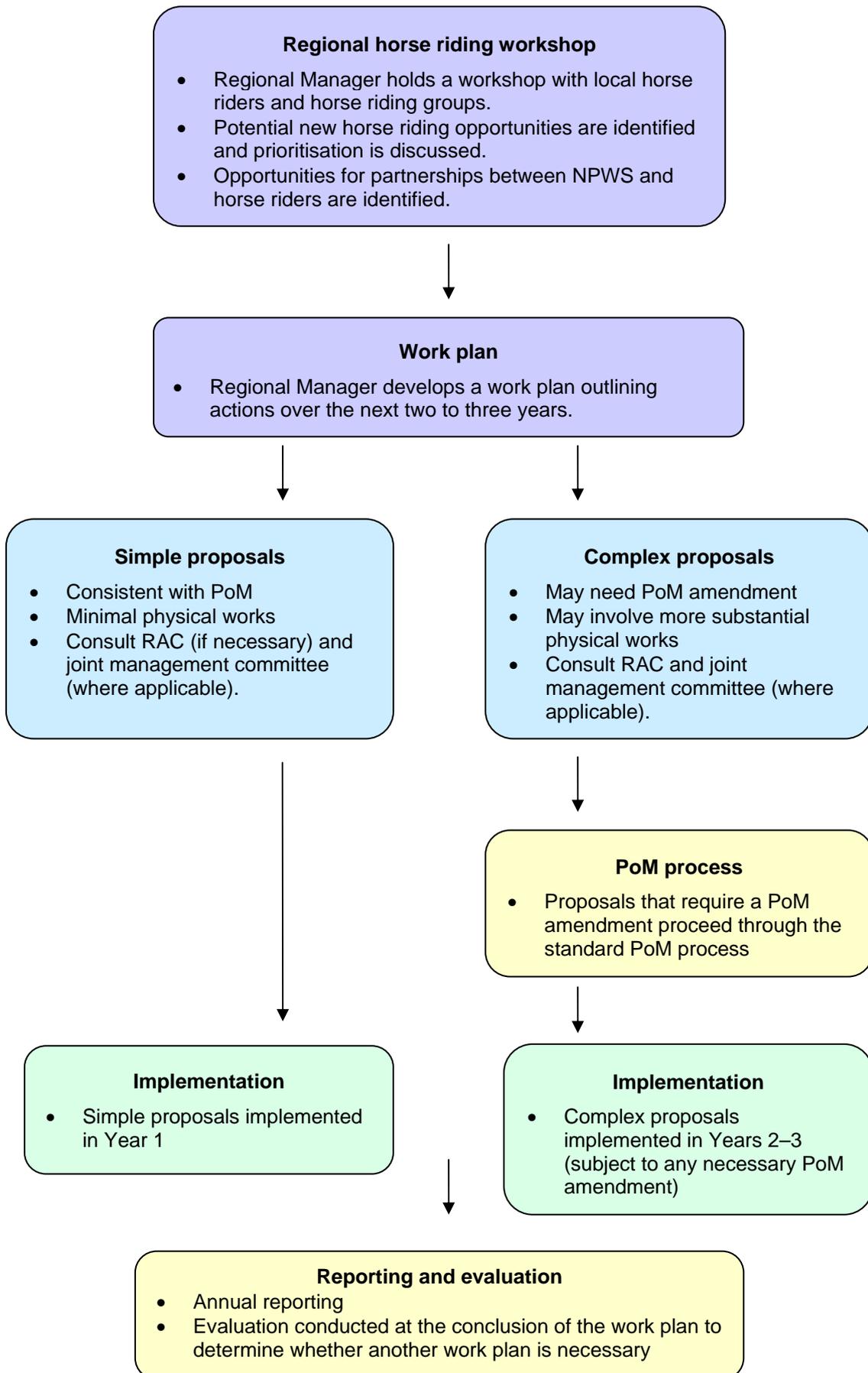
Any new recreational horse riding opportunities that involve physical works to trails or the provision of new facilities will be subject to standard environmental assessment processes. Environmental assessment may also be required for new horse riding experiences that involve a change in use of an existing trail but no new physical works, as outlined above.

Figure 2 below outlines the proposed process for delivering horse riding opportunities in the priority regions. More detail, including relevant timeframes, is provided in 'Section 8: Implementation and evaluation – the action plan'.

### *Partnerships with local horse riders*

The Regional Manager will also invite local horse riding groups to be involved in delivering specific horse riding opportunities or projects, in partnership with NPWS. Opportunities for horse riders to assist with activities such as trail monitoring and maintenance, pest and weed reporting, camp maintenance and bush regeneration will also be sought.

**Figure 2 – Delivery of horse riding opportunities in the priority regions**



## **Interim horse riding policy directive**

NPWS will develop an interim policy directive to provide clear guidance on the initiatives outlined in this strategy, including the wilderness pilots. The interim policy directive will remain in place for the duration of the implementation of the strategy.

The National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council will be consulted on the interim policy directive. The policy directive will include the following key principles:

### *All national parks, state conservation areas and regional parks*

- Where PoMs are silent on horse riding, either on a specific management trail or more generally, the Regional Manager can allow horse riding on established management trails if consistent with the overall intent of the PoM. Approval can be given through signage or consent.
- The Regional Manager's decision will be based on environmental and safety considerations as well as other uses of the area and historical horse riding usage.

### *Wilderness pilots*

- Wilderness pilots will be undertaken in five locations identified by the NPWS, subject to amendments to the relevant PoMs.
- The wilderness pilots will be undertaken for two years, in accordance with the strategic adaptive management framework.

## **Communication**

NPWS is committed to improving communication with local communities about existing and future horse riding opportunities in NSW national parks. This will primarily be undertaken through the new NPWS visitor-oriented website which is progressively being rolled out. The website allows the public to identify parks and trails where horse riding is available and provides information about access, facilities and attractions.

Maps identifying horse riding opportunities may be developed for parks not included in the initial rollout of the new website, where considered a priority in the work plan.

Signage upgrades will occur where identified as a priority in the work plan.

The Horse Riding Consultative Group and local horse riding groups will be asked to disseminate information on horse riding opportunities through their existing networks.

## 7. Wilderness pilots

Approximately 30 per cent of the total area covered by NSW national parks is declared wilderness. The designation of wilderness carries with it more stringent management, including greater restrictions on activities that have the potential to impact on the wilderness values and the natural condition of the area.

There is a history of recreational horse riding in a number of NSW wilderness areas, prior to their declaration as wilderness. In recognition of this strong historical usage, the NSW Government has committed to trialling horse riding in five wilderness locations through two year wilderness pilots. The wilderness pilots will enable the NPWS to determine whether potential impacts on park values can be managed within acceptable thresholds.

The pilots will be designed and implemented within the statutory bounds of the *Wilderness Act 1987* and the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*. The wilderness pilots are contingent on proposed amendments to the PoM for the relevant parks, discussed below.

Potential routes for the wilderness pilots, on established trails, will be identified by NPWS in consultation with local horse riding representatives, the Regional Advisory Committees and any Aboriginal joint management committees. The wilderness pilots will be subject to a comprehensive environmental assessment to ensure there are no unacceptable impacts on the natural or cultural values of the area.

The pilots will be subject to standard operational requirements. For example, they may need to be temporarily suspended or access may need to be restricted to minimise environmental impacts during wet weather or fire, or for other park management purposes including seasonal closures.

### Plan of Management

The PoMs for most national parks that include wilderness specifically prohibit horse riding in the wilderness areas. In order to facilitate the wilderness pilots, amendments to the relevant PoMs will be proposed.

In accordance with the NPW Act, public notification and consultation will be undertaken on the proposed amendments. After considering public submissions and the advice of the Regional Advisory Committee and the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council, the Minister will determine whether to adopt the amended PoMs.

This process will commence in late 2012. If amended PoMs permitting the wilderness pilots are adopted, the commencement of the proposed pilots will be subject to seasonal conditions.

### Strategic adaptive management framework

NPWS will develop a strategic adaptive management framework for the reserve system, with potential application to a broad range of existing activities.

This approach involves gathering targeted evidence using systematic and rigorous measures based on a detailed understanding of the activity and impacts in the location. It enables the identification of thresholds that trigger a management response, ensuring a precautionary approach to managing the risks of serious and irreversible damage as required by the principles of ecologically sustainable development. Expert scientists, with experience in adaptive management, will be consulted on the development of the strategic adaptive management framework to ensure it is robust.

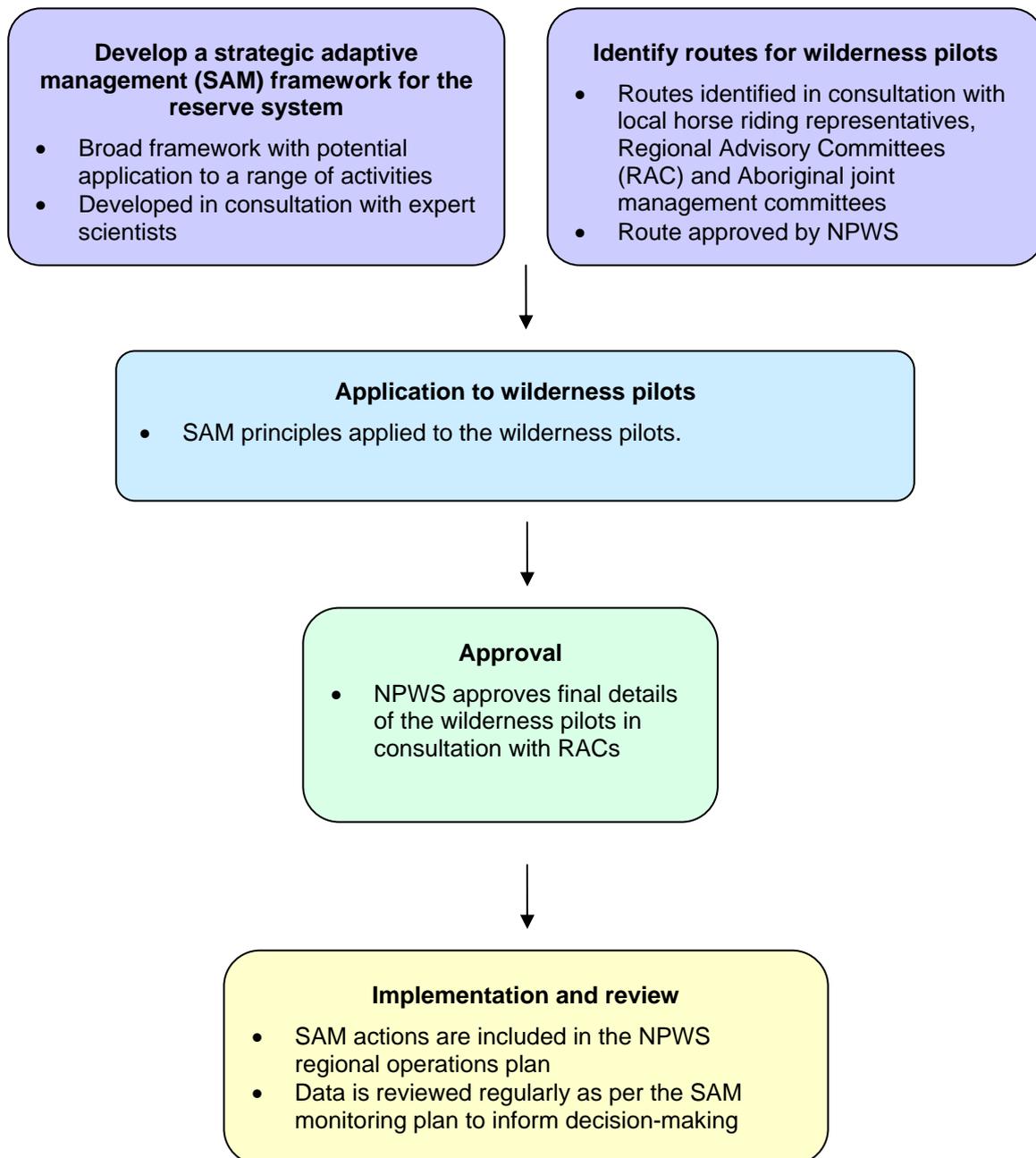
The framework will be applied to the wilderness pilots. Consultation will be undertaken with the Regional Advisory Committees as well as people with knowledge in local ecosystem management, horse riding and social impact assessment, on the application of the strategic adaptive management framework to the wilderness pilots. This will enable the determination

of triggers i.e. exactly what is to be measured and the related threshold, and management responses. The framework for the wilderness pilots is shown in Figure 3.

### **Evaluation**

Evaluation of the wilderness pilots will be ongoing throughout the duration of the trial to ensure there are no unacceptable impacts on park values. At the conclusion of the pilots, a comprehensive assessment of the outcomes of the pilots will be undertaken. Decisions about future expansion of horse riding in wilderness areas will be undertaken in consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council.

**Figure 3 – Strategic adaptive management framework for the wilderness pilots**



## 8. Implementation and evaluation – the action plan

*Strategic directions for horse riding in NSW national parks* will be implemented and evaluated in accordance with the following action plan.

### Key

	Ongoing actions
	Short-term actions (Year 1 of implementation)
	Medium-term actions (Year 2 of implementation)
	Long-term actions (Year 3 and onwards)

Initiative	Actions	Timeframe
<b>State-wide stakeholder engagement</b>	<p>NPWS consults with the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council on the development, implementation and review of initiatives to support improved recreational horse riding, including new and revised PoMs.</p> <p>NPWS works with the Horse Riding Consultative Group to provide strategic direction and guidance on policy and implementation of improved recreational horse riding opportunities across the reserve system.</p>	Ongoing
<b>Horse riding opportunities in the priority regions</b>	<p>Regional Manager hosts a workshop with local horse riders to identify and discuss priority horse riding opportunities in the region and to identify potential partnerships between NPWS and local horse riders.</p>	November 2012 – February 2013
	<p>Regional Manager develops a work plan of opportunities to be delivered over 2–3 years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Year 1: less complex opportunities that can be delivered without requiring changes to PoMs and with minimal physical works.</li> <li>Years 2–3: opportunities that require changes to PoMs or more extensive physical works.</li> </ul> <p>Work plan identifies partnerships between NPWS and local horse riders to deliver horse riding opportunities.</p>	February 2013
	<p>Implementation commences for opportunities identified as priorities for Year 1.</p>	March 2013
	<p>Reporting on implementation of Year 1 opportunities.</p> <p>Implementation commences for opportunities identified as priorities for Years 2–3.</p>	<p>February 2014</p> <p>March 2014</p>

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
	<p>Reporting on implementation of Year 2 opportunities.</p> <p>Regional Manager evaluates horse riding opportunities in the region and determines whether it is necessary to develop another work plan, following the process outlined above.</p>	<p>February 2015</p> <p>Conclusion of work plan</p>
<b>Wilderness pilots</b>	<p>NPWS determines the route for the wilderness pilots, in consultation with local horse riding representatives, RACs and Aboriginal joint management committees.</p>	December 2012
	<p>NPWS commences the process to propose amendments to the PoMs to permit the wilderness pilots.</p>	December 2012
	<p>Strategic adaptive management framework is developed.</p>	March 2013
	<p>Strategic adaptive management framework is applied to the wilderness pilots.</p>	March 2013
	<p>Pilots commence, subject to PoM amendments and seasonal requirements.</p>	April 2013, subject to PoM amendments
	<p>Ongoing monitoring and implementation of the adaptive management framework and reporting.</p> <p>The wilderness pilots are evaluated. Decisions about future expansion of horse riding in wilderness are made in consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council.</p>	<p>2 years</p> <p>Mid 2015</p>
<b>Horse riding policy</b>	<p>An Interim Horse Riding Policy Directive is developed to provide policy guidance for the initiatives outlined in the strategy.</p>	December 2012
	<p>The outcomes of the Interim Horse Riding Policy Directive are assessed.</p> <p>The need for a review of existing policies or continuation of the policy directive is determined.</p>	Mid 2015
<b>PoM reviews for national parks, nature reserves, state conservation areas and regional parks</b>	<p>Opportunities for horse riding are identified during the preparation of new PoMs or statements of management intent, and during PoM reviews.</p>	Ongoing
<b>Communication of horse riding opportunities</b>	<p>New horse riding opportunities are publicised through the NPWS visitor website.</p> <p>Horse riding maps are developed for parks not currently included on the NPWS visitor website, where this is considered a priority in the work plan.</p> <p>Signage is upgraded, where this is identified as a priority in a work plan.</p>	Medium term



