

RESPONDING TO LOSS: MANAGING KOSCIUSZKO NATIONAL PARK'S MOUNTAIN HUTS AS PART OF A LIVING LANDSCAPE

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Abstract

Draft Abstract

In 2003, wild fire destroyed many of the vernacular mountain huts and vast areas of Kosciuszko National Park, a landscape of national significance in Australia. People with close connections to these huts were devastated, arguing for their immediate rebuilding. Developing a management response that recognised the complexity of this cultural landscape and the value of cultural connections was the challenge facing the park managers, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NSW). The *Huts Conservation Strategy*, developed by the authors, offers innovative policy responses to the management of huts and their settings as living rather than relict places.

The Strategy draws out the importance of the rich layering of cultural connections in the Kosciuszko landscape over time for Indigenous and settler peoples, and recreation users. The hut landscapes bear witness to these many cultural connections: including travel routes, patterns of use, named places, stories and traditions. Here the connection between setting and place is indivisible.

The Strategy proposes an integrated, 'whole of landscape' approach that tests new ways of recognising and planning where natural and cultural values coexist, offers a decision-making framework in relation to the critical issue of hut rebuilding and identifies ways of building partnerships with associated communities.

Further background for reviewers

This paper arises from the findings of a project undertaken by the authors for the New South Wales Department of Environment and Conservation, Parks Service Division (NPWS) in 2004/2005. A key issue was the management of dynamic change, in particular that resulting from ongoing natural and human threats to over 70 remote huts in Kosciusko National Park. A fire in 2003 had destroyed 15 huts and a key issue was whether to rebuild the huts.

The methodology included understanding tangible and intangible values, working with associated people and groups, appreciating natural and cultural values and the

challenges of managing them together, and recognising the importance of a whole of landscape approach that valued and sought to conserve significant aspects of the huts' physical, historical and social setting