

## 2.11. TOURISM AND RECREATION

Many areas of the Mitchell River Watershed are used for Tourism and Recreation. Directly or indirectly many catchment stakeholders are involved in this growing industry. From the mouth in the Gulf of Carpentaria to the ranges of the great divide, the catchment is under increasing pressure from recreational activities. Many of these activities occur on land that is not designated or supported for tourism and recreational use.

Cairns is rapidly growing as a national and international tourist destination, and the region's population is steadily increasing. The Mitchell provides the closest "outback experience" to Cairns. Most overland travellers to Cape York must cross the catchment boundary at some point. As the road from Mareeba to Chillagoe improves, visitors to the caves and surrounds continue to increase. Areas closest to Cairns and the Tablelands may have potential for development based tourism, but most of the catchment is wilderness to most urban populations. Its' value as a tourism and recreation asset will undoubtedly continue to grow.

The access provided by four wheel drives to previously inaccessible areas of the catchment has created a recreational use of the catchment that is particularly difficult to manage. Four wheel drives offer self-contained travel, often producing little economic benefit to areas being visited. Road improvements on the Cape and Burke Developmental Roads are now allowing greater numbers of people in standard vehicles to access the catchment. Management problems including fires, rubbish, access disputes, weed dispersion, site impacts (commonly in riparian zones), and public safety issues and will ultimately increase as visitor numbers rise. Another serious problem associated with some "four wheel drivers" is wilful destruction of wildlife, plant life and stock, as well as vandalism.

Not everyone who lives and works in a place like the Mitchell River Watershed wants the areas thought of as wilderness. Most are working hard to develop the land and its resources. Many people in the wider community are now however, placing a greater importance on retaining wilderness values in undeveloped areas. Many graziers and other landholders are gaining income diversification from tourism services such as Bed and Breakfast or Tourguiding. Tourism and recreation infrastructure development must remain consistent with tourism needs while maintaining natural resource integrity or tourists will move on.

For nature-based activities, inappropriate infrastructure leads tourists and recreationalists to

constantly extend the boundaries of their activities, therefore opening new areas to impacts, developments and management needs. Left unchecked, a spiralling effect can occur. This is not to say the Mitchell is about to become another "Gold Coast", but consideration needs to be given to the way tourism and recreational use of the catchment will develop.

In many ways, access and mobility issues in the Mitchell are the primary concerns for management of tourism and recreation. This is particularly true for access to water for essential and recreational purposes. Throughout the coastal and lower Mitchell Plains tourism can be described as restricted and closely regulated. There is considerable cooperation between resource managers on these issues. The Kowanyama Land and Natural Resource Management Office, neighbouring stations, the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage (EPA) and other government agencies work together to manage access to a large areas of the Mitchell River Watershed. A formal permitting process is in place for access to Kowanyama lands, and to the National Parks within the catchment.

Access to the recreational resources of the Mitchell is important to a large, but hard to identify, segment of catchment stakeholders. Land use and management planning must recognise and account for this. We must plan to develop a more thorough understanding of the way the resources are being used, and by whom, in order to manage the recreational resources appropriately.



**Figure 19** *Camping is a popular recreation in the Mitchell River Watershed. As Cairns and the Atherton Tablelands develop as a tourist destination there will be more pressure on the Mitchell River watershed for the 'outdoors experience.'*

## Goal:

*To develop a sustainable tourism and recreational industry while maintaining the natural integrity of the catchment.*

## Objectives:

- Halt the spread of un-monitored recreational activity and prevent negative impacts of visitation
- Optimise the safety of visitors
- The benefits of tourism in the catchment to be recognised by the local stakeholders
- Enhance the input of landmanagers in the management of tourism
- The catchment to be marketed and recognised as a desirable visitor destination

## Strategies:

### *Education*

TR1 Encourage low impact recreational activities in the catchment

### *Information and Communication*

TR2 Improve visitor information services throughout catchment

TR3 Increase stakeholder understanding of recreational and tourist use of the Mitchell River Catchment

### *Improving Resource Management*

TR4 Provide facilities in areas of high visitation yet maintain the authentic outdoors experience

TR5 Implement a catchment wide management plan for problems specific to recreational use

### *Adopting a Cooperative Approach*

TR6 Encourage the development of a group to guide the future of tourism development, involving commercial and non-commercial stakeholders.

## Outcomes:

Achievement of these strategies will result in the following outcomes:

- A sustainable tourism industry for the catchment
- Recreational sites with suitable infrastructure to meet visitors needs yet protect the sites
- Stakeholders who understand the benefits of tourism management
- Strategies to manage issues arising from recreational use of the catchment

**Strategy TR1**

Encourage low impact recreational activities in the catchment

Actions	Stakeholders	Performance Indicators	Priority	Cross Reference to
Use signage at popular sites to suggest ways of minimal impact	EPA, DNR, MRWVG, Lgov		★	
Restrict high impact recreational activity in vulnerable/sensitive areas taking seasonal changes into account	EPA, Lgov		★★	
Include low impact activity on promotional brochures	MRWVG, Lgov, EPA		★★	TR2
Provide visitor facilities in areas of high visitation	EPA, MRWVG, Lgov		★★	TR4

**Strategy TR2**

Improve visitor information services throughout the catchment

Actions	Stakeholders	Performance Indicators	Priority	Cross Reference to
Develop and distribute visitor information to local servicepeople, eg, petrol stations, to increase their knowledge of the catchment from a tourist's perspective	MRWVG, Lgov, EPA	All tourist service centre's to have relevant information	★★	
Develop promotional brochures for distribution at service centres	MRWVG, Lgov		★★	TR1
Employ trained rangers to inform visitors and police recreational sites	MRWVG		★	TR4

**Strategy TR3**

Increase stakeholder understanding of recreational and tourist use of the Mitchell River Catchment

Actions	Stakeholders	Performance Indicators	Priority	Cross Reference to
Invite tourism organisations to information days to give stakeholders an insight into tourism and recreation	GLADA, TTNQ, All interested stakeholders	Representati-ve presence from all stakeholder groups	★	TR4
Facilitate surveys of tourist movements and activities	Tourist service centres		★	TR2
Regularly collect and collate visitation information/statistics for distribution to stakeholders	MRWVG, Tourist service centres	2 distributions per year	★★	

**Strategy TR4**

Provide facilities in areas of high visitation yet maintain the authentic outdoors experience

Actions	Stakeholders	Performance Indicators	Priority	Cross Reference to
Provide stabilising infrastructure to areas subject to erosion	EPA, MRWVG	Decrease in environment-al impact	★	LD5
Maintain a ranger presence in high visitation areas	MWRMG		★	TR2
Provide aesthetically pleasing, low maintenance waste disposal and toilet facilities	MRWVG, Lgov		★★	
Hold workshops to discuss new developments in outdoors facilities	MRWVG, Lgov, EPA	1per year	★★	TR3
Provide signage to outline acceptable behaviour and recreational guidelines	MRWVG, EPA, Landmanagers		★★★	

**Priorities Achieved By:**

★ 1 - 2 years

★★ 2 - 3 years

★★★ 3 - 5 years

**Strategy TR5**

Implement a catchment wide management plan for problems specific to recreational use

Actions	Stakeholders	Performance Indicators	Priority	Cross Reference to
Designate specific areas for acknowledged recreational use to be managed accordingly	MRWMG,		★ ★	
Hold workshops to ascertain priority problems/issues	MRWMG, EPA, Lgov	1per year	★	
Form a sub-committee of stakeholder groups to address the priority issues	Other Stakeholders		★ ★	
Develop and identify funding for a management plan which addresses the issues and can be implemented catchment wide	Sub-committee		★ ★	

**Strategy TR6**

Encourage the development of a group to guide the future of tourism development, involving commercial and non-commercial stakeholders

Actions	Stakeholders	Performance Indicators	Priority	Cross Reference to
Invite all interested stakeholders to a workshop to compare ideas on the direction of tourism in the catchment	All stakeholders	1 initial workshop	★	TR3
Incorporate the tourism specific problems management plan (TR5)	Sub-committee		★	TR5
Encourage networking between tourism stakeholders	MRWMG		★ ★	

**Priorities Achieved By:**

★ 1 - 2 years

★ ★ 2 - 3 years

★ ★ ★ 3 - 5 years