

## Indicator 6.3b: Range and use of recreation/tourism activities available (2026)



This indicator assesses the range and number of recreation and tourism facilities provided in forests, their level of use and their contribution to the broader tourism sector.

Appropriate and well managed facilities help to optimise visitor satisfaction as well as minimising environmental impacts associated with recreation and tourism.

### Context

Land tenure and management intent are fundamental to the range and number of recreation and tourism activities and facilities available for public use in Australia's forests.

### Key points

- A wide range of recreation and tourism activities can be undertaken on forested land in Australia.
- The range and number of recreation and tourism activities and facilities available for public use in Australia's forests is generally limited by the tenure of the land and the management intent of forests on that land.
- Publicly managed forests provide for the broadest range and largest number of activities and facilities for recreation and tourism in Australia's forests.
- Demand for recreation and tourism in public forested areas has been increasing, including in national parks, state forests and commercial pine plantations.
- The availability of activities and facilities for recreation and tourism in privately managed forest is relatively limited compared to those available in publicly managed forests.

### Recreation and tourism activities available in Australia's public forests

In public forests, some facilities are provided specifically for recreation or tourism activities, such as walking or riding tracks, picnic sites and campgrounds. Other facilities, such as roads and vehicular tracks, are provided for a range of forest management purposes but are also available for use for recreation and tourism activities.

In each state and territory, public forest management aims to provide a range of opportunities for recreational pursuits (such as walking, running, camping, mountain biking, cycling, bird watching, driving, climbing, fishing, hunting, canoeing, and other water sports) consistent with demand, resources, environmental concerns and management intent, as well as facilities appropriate for each forest setting.

Multiple-use public forests (for example, state forests), including commercial plantations, are generally open to the broadest range of public recreation and tourism activities available in Australia's forests, including hunting and motorcycle trail riding. Greater restrictions on recreation and tourism activities are usually imposed in nature conservation reserves, due to nature conservation being the higher management priority.

Multiple-use public forests also provide a range of recreational opportunities generally available free-of-charge to the public, including access to roads and tracks for vehicular activities, and use of picnic and camping areas (with registration required and fees charged for overnight camping at popular camping sites). Some national parks, and

some facilities in national parks, are accessed via an entrance gate with an entrance fee, and fees can be charged for overnight camping, with registration required to access popular camping sites and multi-day hiking tracks.

Organised events and eco-tourism activities in state forests and national parks are administered by permit (or licence) systems and are typically associated with a fee.

## Recreation and tourism in public forests, by state and territory

### Australian Capital Territory

The Australian Capital Territory had nearly 1,500 kilometres of walking tracks in nature conservation reserves in 2020–21, with most people visiting the reserves for walking, hiking, and cultural heritage and nature appreciation. The Australian Capital Territory also hosted 244 events or festivals in its nature conservation reserves, attracting about 20,000 visitors. This was in addition to about 15,000 overnight visitors camping at six dedicated camping sites.

Namadgi National Park is the largest and most frequently visited nature conservation reserve in the Australian Capital Territory, with forest covering much of the park. Camping and bushwalking are the main forms of recreation in Namadgi National Park. Recreational visitation is difficult to quantify in the park due to its size, remoteness, and position on a through road, with many vehicles passing through but not stopping to visit the park.

The commercial pine plantations of the Australian Capital Territory are also used and managed for recreational activities including walking, running, mountain biking, cycling, horse riding, motorcycle riding, four-wheel driving, picnicking, musical events and car rallies. These forests are popular for recreation due to their quality road and track infrastructure, and proximity to Canberra.

In 2020–21, the commercial pine plantations of the Australian Capital Territory had 410 kilometres of tracks available for riding horses, and 379 kilometres of tracks for mountain biking, all of which are also available for walking and running. A total of 452 kilometres of roads were available for driving, including for car rallies and four-wheel drive training, of which 162 kilometres of roads are open to the public year-round. The Australian Capital Territory hosted 157 events or festivals in its commercial pine plantations in 2020–21, attracting about 9,000 visitors. This was in addition to nearly 4,000 overnight visitors camping at two dedicated camping sites.

For more information, see [Table 6.3b-1 and Table 6.3b-2 in the Supporting information for Indicator 6.3b](#).

### New South Wales

Surveys of domestic visitors to New South Wales national parks every two years show a trend of increasing visitation. From 2020 to 2022, visitor numbers increased by about 5% to 53 million visitors in 2022. This was for all national parks, including forest and non-forest areas. Most domestic visitors were from New South Wales, with 13% from outside New South Wales. Bushwalking and running are the most popular activities in national parks, along with picnicking, sightseeing and water-based activities.

Visitation in 2020 and 2022 was impacted by major widespread disruptions, including natural disasters (e.g. bushfires and floods) and the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2019–20 bushfires impacted about 37% of the New South Wales national park system. Many parks were closed or had restricted access from December 2019 through to March 2020, with some areas closed for longer periods for repair work following the fires.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted access to New South Wales national parks with closures or restrictions from March to December 2020. This included campgrounds, accommodation, visitor centres, tours and events.

New South Wales had about 45,000 kilometres of tracks in multiple-use public forests available in 2020–21 for activities including walking, running, mountain biking, cycling, and horse riding. About 45 camping sites and 35 huts or houses were maintained for overnight stays in multiple-use public forests in New South Wales in 2021.

For more information, see [Table 6.3b-3 in the Supporting information for Indicator 6.3b](#).

### **Northern Territory**

Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory has large areas of forest cover. Kakadu recorded its highest visitor numbers in 13 years in 2022 with 208,056 visitors to the park. This followed disruptions to the tourism industry from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Domestic tourism was a key driver of visitation to Kakadu National Park in 2022, with almost half of all visitors coming from Victoria (20%), New South Wales (18%) and Queensland (10%). Some of the most popular activities at Kakadu National Park included rock art viewing, bushwalking, wildlife spotting and boat cruises.

Litchfield National Park also has large areas of forest cover and receives about 250,000 visitors each year. Litchfield National Park's proximity to Darwin (a 90-minute drive) means it's an attractive day trip location, with camping also available and popular.

There are no multiple-use public forests in the Northern Territory.

### **Queensland**

Queensland's national parks and multiple-use public native forests are used extensively for recreation and tourism. Permitted activities in multiple-use public native forests (for example, state forests) include those enjoyed in national parks, plus others generally excluded from or restricted in national parks in Queensland – such as four-wheel driving, motorcycle riding, fossicking and recreational prospecting (Indufor & Natural Capital Economics, 2022). Permits are required for some activities in some locations.

No published data are currently available on total visitor numbers or revenues for recreation and tourism specifically within state forests in Queensland (Indufor & Natural Capital Economics, 2022).

Queensland has about 310,000 hectares of 'State plantation forests' owned and managed by HQPlantations under a 99-year plantation licence with the Queensland Government. These plantations grow on public land owned by the Queensland Government. The public is generally allowed to access 'State plantation forests' for recreation and tourism, but a permit may be required depending on the activity and where it is performed.

HQPlantations maintains 1,345 kilometres of formed roads. These roads are available for public use, but they are not maintained or signed specifically for the purpose of public use. Users of these roads must be licenced and be driving registered vehicles. Driving or motorcycle riding on unformed roads is not permitted. HQPlantations does not manage facilities or sites for tourism or recreation and does not record general visitor numbers or level of use. HQPlantations issued permits for 86 events in 2020–21, which attracted nearly 11,000 visitors.

### **South Australia**

National parks in South Australia are available for the same range of activities as national parks elsewhere, including walking, camping, picnicking, and cultural heritage and nature appreciation. Mountain biking, horse riding and walking dogs is also permitted in specified areas. Hunting waterfowl is also allowed under permit at ten specified game reserves during a gazetted open season. All participants must pass the Waterfowl Identification Test before they can be issued with a permit and then complete a survey on species populations and distribution 30 days after the close of the season.

ForestrySA reported 630,000 visitors in 2023–24 to the 32,300 hectares of multiple-use plantation forest and native forest reserves managed by ForestrySA in the Mount Lofty Ranges and Green Triangle areas. This included:

- about 10,000 people attending 491 community events
- 4,617 students attending 74 camping trips
- 8,843 permits issued for camping, horse riding, fossicking and adventure caving.

Several dedicated mountain biking areas and a commercial TreeClimb operation are also maintained within forests managed by ForestrySA (ForestrySA, 2025).

ForestrySA reported 1,700 kilometres of fire trails in 2020–21 available for walking (including with dogs), running, riding horses and cycling, and another 331 kilometres of dedicated walking tracks. ForestrySA forests are closed to the public for motorised vehicle access.

### **Tasmania**

Tasmania's state forests, national parks and other reserves are used for recreational activities including bushwalking, mountain biking, camping, climbing, abseiling, caving, nature observation, photography and swimming. Hunting continues to be allowed on Permanent Timber Production Zone (PTPZ) land and on some reserve classes: game reserves, conservation areas and regional reserves. Fishing is also permitted on PTPZ land and in most reserve types. Horse riding is authorised on specified tracks and some fire trails within some reserve types. Major investment in mountain bike facilities in forested environments has occurred in recent years in Tasmania.

The Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service records visitor numbers at 14 selected parks and reserves, many with substantial areas of forest cover. Visitors to these parks and reserves totalled about 1.4 million in 2023–24, a steady increase in visitors in the years since closures due to COVID-19 in 2020-21 when 1.0 million visitors were counted (Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service 2025).

### **Victoria**

Multiple-use forests and nature conservation reserves are generally available for recreation and tourism in Victoria. Facilities available for recreation and tourism activities in multiple-use forests in Victoria increased between 2011–12 and 2020–21 (see [Table 6.3b-4 in the Supporting information for Indicator 6.3b](#)). This included an increased number of kilometres of tracks for riding or walking animals, mountain biking, and tracks dedicated to walking or running. It also included an increased number of sites available for camping, picnicking, fishing and cultural heritage appreciation.

Facilities available for recreation and tourism activities in forests in nature conservation reserves in Victoria include a relatively small number of kilometres of tracks for riding or walking animals and mountain biking or cycling, and a very large number of kilometres of tracks dedicated to walking or running. Victoria also hosts a large number of events in nature conservation reserves and has many sites available for picnics, nature appreciation, camping, and water-based activities.

In 2020–21, about 15.9 million people are estimated to have visited Victoria's multiple-use forests and 50 million people are estimated to have visited Victoria's nature conservation reserves, including reserves with forest and non-forest vegetation.

For more information, see [Table 6.3b-4 and Table 6.3b-5 in the Supporting information for Indicator 6.3b](#).

## Western Australia

A diverse range of recreation activities are available in public forests in Western Australia, particularly in the southwest, including bushwalking, mountain biking, camping, picnicking, rock climbing, caving, fishing, kayaking, canoeing, four-wheel driving on designated roads and tracks, and horse riding in designated areas.

Annual visitation to recreation sites in public forests managed by the Western Australia Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions in the southwest of Western Australia totalled 12.4 million visitors in the 2020–21 financial year. This was 28% higher than the visitation of 9.7 million in the 2013–14 financial year (Conservation and Parks Commission, 2019).

## Recreation and tourism in forests on private and leasehold land

Public access for recreation and tourism to forests on private land is generally restricted or not permitted, and little information is available on permitted uses. If access is required, it would be on application to the private landowner or manager for permission to undertake certain activities, unless specific commercial arrangements are advertised (for example, a wildlife park). The same applies for native forests on leasehold land, most of which is privately managed under long-term pastoral leases that grant the lessee rights of custody of the land — these leases impart a level of responsibility for the management of the land.

South Australia has about 80,000 hectares of plantation forests on public land in the Green Triangle region under leasehold to OneFortyOne, a private forest manager. The public is generally allowed to access these forests for recreation and tourism during daylight hours, but a permit may be required depending on the activity and where it is performed, for example, cave exploring, cave diving, and horse riding. Plantation access may be limited at times for operational, safety or environmental protection reasons.

## Supporting information for Indicator 6.3b: Range and use of recreation/tourism activities available

### Visitor monitoring via mobile phone usage

Modern monitoring of visitors to forests for recreation and tourism is by the collection of ‘mobility data’. Mobility data measures de-identified, aggregated mass movement across geo-locations using pings from mobile phones, Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and mobile applications (apps). Some local councils use these data to make resource allocation decisions for the maintenance and upgrade of visitor facilities including, roads, car parks, picnic areas, campgrounds, toilets, sites of interest and signage.

Mobility data also assist local councils in assessing the success and ongoing maintenance of facilities built specifically to attract tourists. Dedicated mountain biking tracks are built at a significant cost to local councils in forested regional areas. These facilities attract many tourists and bring significant economic benefits to some regional areas. This includes money spent on accommodation, and in cafes, restaurants, and shops.

Mobility data are relatively expensive to collect and are generally not publicly available for specific areas.

### Australian Capital Territory – data tables

**Table 6.3b-1: Facilities available for recreation and tourism activities in multiple-use forests and forests in nature conservation reserves in the Australian Capital Territory, 2020–21**

Activity	Metric	Multiple-use forests	Nature conservation reserves
Riding or walking animals	kilometres of tracks	410 <sup>1</sup>	n.a.
Cycling (incl. mountain biking)	kilometres of tracks	379 <sup>2</sup>	n.a.
Driving (incl. motorbikes)	kilometres of roads	452 <sup>3</sup> 162 <sup>4</sup> (open year-round)	289 <sup>5</sup>
Walking or running (incl. bushwalking)	kilometres of tracks	789 <sup>6</sup>	1,483 <sup>7</sup>
Events or festivals	number of events	157	244
Climbing, caving, canyoning	number of managed or documented sites	1 (climbing)	5 (climbing)
Cultural heritage appreciation	number of managed or documented sites	986	2,633
Nature appreciation and enjoyment	number of managed or documented sites	20	69
Camping	number of managed or documented sites	2	6
Huts, houses	number of managed or documented sites	Accommodation (overnight): 1 Huts (visiting): 5	Accommodation (overnight): 4 Huts (visiting): 17
Picnicking and playing	number of managed or documented sites	9	45

n.a., not applicable

<sup>1</sup> All tracks and trails in the multiple-use plantation forest estate, includes fire trails, light unit roads, tanker roads, does not include main roads or rigid float or articulated float standard roads.

<sup>2</sup> These tracks are specifically for mountain biking.

<sup>3</sup> Multiple-use plantation forest roads available via permit bookings for events, for example four-wheel-drive training, and motor sport rally use.

<sup>4</sup> Multiple-use plantation forest roads open to the public year-round.

<sup>5</sup> Estimate of public roads in national parks.

<sup>6</sup> Walking and running tracks are the total of animal/riding tracks and cycling tracks, all of which are multi-use single tracks.

<sup>7</sup> Roads and tracks in conservation areas (excludes rigid float or articulate float standard roads) available for walking.

Source: ACT Parks and Conservation.

**Table 6.3b-2: Level of use of recreation and tourism facilities in multiple-use forests and in forests in nature conservation reserves in the Australian Capital Territory, in 2020–21**

Activity	Metric	Multiple-use forests	Nature conservation reserves <sup>1</sup>
Riding or walking animals	number of visitors	200 <sup>2</sup>	n.a.
Cycling (incl. mountain biking)	number of visitors	Kowen pine plantation 18,600 <sup>3</sup> Stromlo Forest Park 560,000 <sup>4</sup>	n.a.
Driving (incl. motorbikes)	number of vehicles	1,180 <sup>5</sup>	n.a.
Walking or running (incl. bushwalking)	number of visitors	2,000 <sup>6</sup>	Walking: 78.6% of visitors surveyed Hiking: 58.6% of visitors surveyed
Events (incl. festivals)	number of visitors	9,000 <sup>7</sup>	20,000
Nature appreciation and enjoyment	number of visitors	no data	Nature appreciation: 61.4% of visitors survey
Camping <sup>8</sup>	number of overnight visitors	3,862	14,664
Huts, houses	number of overnight visitors	Accommodation (overnight): 287 Huts (visiting): not tracked	Accommodation (overnight): 53 <sup>9</sup> Huts (visiting): not tracked
Picnicking and playing	number of visitors	no data	39.0% of visitors surveyed

n.a., not applicable

<sup>1</sup> Data expressed as the percentage of visitors who undertook this activity; of 773 visitors surveyed between March – July 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Events data only: Average of 2020 and 2021 calendar years, source: ACT Public Land Use Permits database, Transport Canberra and City Services.

<sup>3</sup> Estimated 17,000 mountain biking visitors per year at Kowen pine plantation based on fixed position personal counters. Plus 1600 participants in cycling events in pine plantations (excluding Stromlo Forest Park) per year from the ACT Public Land Use Permits database, Transport Canberra and City Services.

<sup>4</sup> Source: <https://canberraweekly.com.au/new-cycle-track-at-stromlo-forest-park-improves-safety/>

<sup>5</sup> Events data only: Average of 2020 and 2021 calendar years, source: ACT Public Land Use Permits database, Transport Canberra and City Services.

<sup>6</sup> Events data only: Average of 2020 and 2021 calendar years, source: ACT Public Land Use Permits database, Transport Canberra and City Services.

<sup>7</sup> Average of 2020 and 2021 calendar years, source: ACT Public Land Use Permits database, Transport Canberra and City Services.

<sup>8</sup> Numbers of visitors impacted by the following closures: Cotter Campground closed July 2020 – October 2020 inclusive due to COVID-19; Honeysuckle Campground closed December – March 2021 inclusive due to 2020 bushfires; Orroral Campground closed for the whole of 2020-21 due to 2020 bushfires and flood damage to the access road.

<sup>9</sup> No public guests due to COVID-19. The number of accommodation visitors reported is for overnight stays by commercial operators, contractors, artists-in-residence, and park management volunteers.

Source: ACT Parks and Conservation.

## New South Wales – data table

**Table 6.3b-3: Facilities available for recreation and tourism activities in multiple-use forests in New South Wales, 2020–21**

Activity	Metric	Multiple-use forests
Riding or walking animals	kilometres of tracks	45,000
Cycling (incl. mountain biking)	kilometres of tracks	45,000 (145)
Driving (incl. motorbikes)	kilometres of tracks	66,000
Walking or running (incl. bushwalking)	kilometres of tracks	45,000 (450)
Cultural heritage appreciation	number of managed or documented sites	14
Camping	number of managed or documented sites	45
Huts, houses	number of managed or documented sites	35
Hunting or fishing	number of managed or documented sites	223 (1.2 million hectares)

Data estimates are based on Forestry Corporation of New South Wales 'road classifications', with 'Four Wheel Drive Track' and 'Natural Surface, Dry Weather, One Lane' categories interpreted as 'Riding or walking animals' and 'Cycling', while 'Walking or running' include these categories as well as 'Walking Track'. Signposted cycling tracks are reported within the brackets. Tracks that can only be used for walking/running are reported in brackets. Driving figures are for public access roads.

Source: Forestry Corporation of New South Wales.

## Victoria – data tables

**Table 6.3b-4: Facilities available for recreation and tourism activities in multiple-use forests in Victoria, 2011–12, 2015–16, 2020–21**

Activity	Metric	2011–12	2015–16	2020–21
Riding or walking animals	kilometres of tracks	40	96	118
Cycling (incl. mountain biking)	kilometres of tracks	320	364	406
Walking or running	kilometres of tracks	761	745	879
Cultural heritage appreciation	number of managed or documented sites	42	58	65
Fishing	number of managed or documented sites <sup>a</sup>	33	54	89
Camping	number of managed or documented sites	240	256	329
Picnicking and playing	number of managed or documented sites	250	267	271

<sup>a</sup> Sites specifically promoted for fishing.

Source: Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Victoria.

**Table 6.3b-5: Facilities available for recreation and tourism activities in forests in nature conservation reserves in Victoria, 2020-21**

Activity	Metric	Nature conservation reserves
Riding or walking animals	kilometres of tracks	43 <sup>a</sup>
Cycling (incl. mountain biking)	kilometres of tracks	138 <sup>b</sup>
Walking or running (incl. bushwalking)	kilometres of tracks	2687 <sup>c</sup> 415 <sup>d</sup>
Events or festivals	number of events	564
Climbing, caving, canyoning	number of managed or documented sites	14
Cultural heritage appreciation	number of managed or documented sites	41
Nature appreciation and enjoyment	number of managed or documented sites	407
Camping	number of managed or documented sites	395 <sup>e</sup>
Huts, houses	number of managed or documented sites	10
Picnicking and playing	number of managed or documented sites	613 <sup>f</sup>
Water-based recreation	number of managed or documented sites	331 <sup>g</sup>
Hunting or fishing	number of managed or documented sites	238

<sup>a</sup> Horse riding tracks only.

<sup>b</sup> Includes cycling and mountain biking.

<sup>c</sup> Walking/running only.

<sup>d</sup> Shared tracks.

<sup>e</sup> Includes all camping grounds, and camping areas where facilities to support camping exist e.g. toilet or campfire pit.

<sup>f</sup> Includes day visitor areas, picnic areas and picnic grounds.

<sup>g</sup> Includes boating, canoeing/kayaking, house boating, jet skiing, kite surfing, rock pool rambling, scuba diving, sea kayaking, snorkelling, stand up paddle boarding, surfing, swimming, white water rafting, water skiing, wind surfing.

Source: Parks Victoria.

## References

Conservation and Parks Commission (2019). *End-of-term review of performance of the Forest Management Plan 2014–2023*. Conservation and Parks Commission, Perth.

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## More information

Learn more about [Criterion 6 of Australia's State of the Forests Report](#).

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### Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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