

Falkland Islands Government

Hill Cove Mountains National Park: Policy & Management Plan

DRAFT FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION
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Purpose of this document

This document sets out the policy basis for the designation of a national park in the Hill Cove Mountains on West Falkland. It also includes a management plan which has been developed to achieve those policy aims, and which will ensure the effective and responsive management of the national park.

Vision for the national park

The national park in the Hill Cove Mountains will be actively managed to conserve and protect its significant natural, cultural and landscape values. The landscape will be preserved in a state as close to natural as possible. The park will be a good example of a protected area that strikes a sensible balance between biodiversity and human use. Outdoor recreation and tourism will be encouraged to occur in harmony with the park's values. The park will be managed in discussion with neighbouring properties, communities and stakeholders.

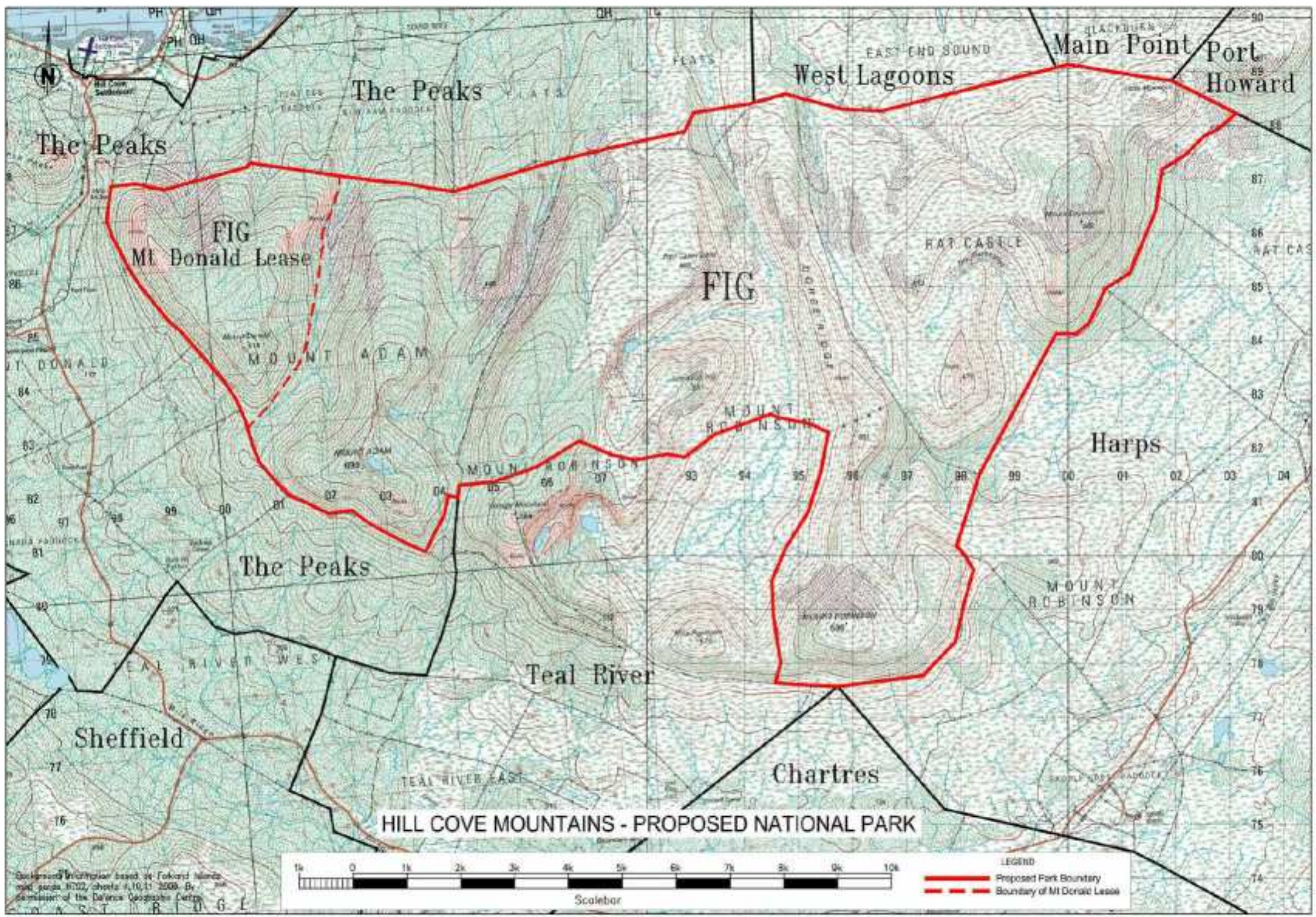


Why the designation of a national park is being proposed

National parks, as defined in the National Parks Ordinance, 1998, are places that conserve, protect and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of a particular area. They provide places for recreation and enjoyment, and confer the right to roam; while also ensuring that activities can be managed in a way that doesn't impact on the values and attributes that the park aims to protect. If approved, this would become the first national park in the Falkland Islands.

Designating a national park will achieve the following:

- Preserve the mountainous landscape
- Protect biodiversity
- Protect half of all native plant species in single reserve
- Confer the right to roam
- Preserve historic sites
- Provide public access
- Meet national and international goals
- Encourage tourism and recreation
- Reduce impacts of grazing on priority species and habitats
- Maintain an existing grazing lease
- Reduce health and safety risks for visitors
- Reduce fire risks
- Enable park to be actively managed and appropriately resourced





Where the park would be located

The proposed national park is located in the Falkland Islands Government (FIG)-owned land in the Hill Cove Mountains. The mountains are located in the northern half of West Falkland and are approximately two kilometres inland from Hill Cove Settlement. The area covers 11,833 hectares (29,240 acres), stretching approximately 20km from east to west and 7km from north to south.

Opposite page: map of proposed national park in relation to Hill Cove Settlement and neighboring properties.

Below: map of the location of the park in the Falkland Islands.





National Park Principles

1

Evidence based decision making. National parks should be designated based on evidence of their importance to conserve biodiversity within the Falkland Islands context. It is therefore imperative to integrate science, local knowledge systems and practices, with ongoing monitoring and evaluation, learning and adaptive management. National parks should therefore be representative of priority species and habitats and contribute to the national reserve network based on research conducted in the area.

2

Respect of private landowners' rights. National parks should not unduly encroach on private land or the rights of private landowners. A national park should endeavour not to impact negatively on neighbouring landowners.

3

Participatory good governance. Management of a national park should promote proper planning and be inclusive in its nature, as far as possible, working together with neighbouring landowners and communities to ensure good governance.

4

Sustainable development. The designation of a national park should ensure that any activities, development or land use occurs in harmony with the biodiversity protection, cultural activities and landscape values of the area to ensure such development to meet the needs of the present without compromising future generations.

5

Public access. National parks should be accessible to the public and confer the right to roam (on foot and horseback).

6

Managing potential conflicts between land use and its values. Designating the Hill Cove Mountains as a national park should assist to ensure that its current uses, including sheep grazing (under FIG lease), and recreation and tourism, can continue in harmony with its cultural, landscape and biodiversity values.

Legislation and policy context

International agreements:

- *Convention of Biological Diversity*. The post-2020 Global Framework for Biodiversity was agreed in 2022 and contains a global target to include 30% of terrestrial and marine habitats within effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas by 2030.
- *Falkland Islands Environmental Charter*. The need for well-managed protected areas is core part of the Falkland Islands' obligations to protect species and habitats under the Charter, signed in 2001.

Falkland Islands legislation:

- National Parks Ordinance, 1998.
- Conservation of Wildlife and Nature Ordinance, 1999.

Falkland Islands Government policy:

- *The Environment Strategy 2021 – 2040*. Objectives include 'to protect and enhance our biodiversity (ecosystem integrity), reducing its loss through tackling threats' and 'to manage and protect our native terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems (including wetlands) and the quality of land and water.'
- *The Islands Plan 2022-2026*. In the plan the Legislative Assembly committed to 'consult on ocean and land management and protection, including protected areas, with a view to conserving ecosystems.'



History of designating Hill Cove Mountains as a national park: 2001 - 2024

2001

A draft management plan was prepared in anticipation of a proposal to designate the area as a national park.

2003

The draft management plan went for public consultation. It received mixed reactions. ExCo supported 'in principle' that the Hill Cove Mountains be declared a national park, subject to more detailed management prescriptions. Formal designation was scheduled for 2004/05. However, this did not happen.

Although the national park was never designated, the idea of declaring the Hill Cove Mountains as a national park was never abandoned. Over the last 20 years several groups and individuals have promoted the idea of designating a national park and have endorsed its environmental values on numerous occasions.

2022

In 2022, Members of the Legislative Assembly revived the aspiration for designating a national park.

2023

In 2023, ExCo authorised the Environment Department to commence development of the detailed policy required to establish a national park; including consulting with neighbouring landowners and communities on West Falkland, other relevant stakeholders and members of the public. This draft policy and management plan is the result of this policy development and consultation.

2024

Public consultation on the draft policy & management plan takes place

- Led by FIG Environment Department
- Consultation findings will be used to refine the policy and management plan
- Final policy and plan will be presented to ExCo for decision in early 2024

What makes the Hill Cove Mountains special?

Landscape

The rugged mountainous terrain ranges in elevation from 100m to 700m above sea level. It is a landscape of peaks, ridges, tarns, streams and valleys. Mt Adam and Mt Robinson, the second and third highest peaks in the Falklands, are located in the park.

Several major streams originate in the mountains. Mt Adam Tarn is the highest freshwater body in the Falkland Islands and possibly the deepest, with a maximum water depth of 16m (Broughton 2003). The geology belongs to the Port Stanley Formation, which is comprised of medium quartz sandstones, some quarzitic, with some fine sandstones and shales (Aldiss & Edwards 1999).

The park will be managed for its unique mountainous landscape, preserving a state as close to natural as possible. As part of that, mineral exploration and extraction would not be allowed, and any proposed developments would require an environmental impact assessment.





Species and habitats

The national park is a very important place for biodiversity, especially for upland plant species. Its vegetation is dominated by whitegrass acid grassland, bluegrass acid grassland with land-tussac, and dwarf shrub heath dominated by diddle-dee and tall-fern. The area also supports rich bryophyte and liverwort flora (Falklands Conservation 2023; Broughton 2003).



The national park contains 112 species of plants, representing over half of the total native flora in the Falklands and is relatively rich for an upland site. Of the 112 species, 103 are native, and of those, nine are endemic (found only in the Falklands). Nineteen species are considered to be a priority for conservation. Only nine species are considered to be non-native or introduced, but none are considered invasive.



The national park is home to five species protected under the Conservation of Wildlife and Nature Ordinance, 1999. In addition, 13 different habitat types are recorded, two of which are a priority for conservation (bluegrass acid grassland and fachine scrub) (Falklands Conservation 2023).

One quarter of all the native species that are considered at risk of extinction in the Falkland Islands are found in the park. This includes three species listed by the IUCN Red List and 12 species on the Falkland Islands Red List (Upson & Lewis 2014). See Appendix 2 for further information about priority species and habitats.



The Hill Cove Mountains became internationally recognised as an Important Plant Area (IPA) in 2012 due to the presence of nationally significant populations of native plants and habitats (Upson 2012). Its status as an IPA was reconfirmed in 2023 from surveys using a range of qualifying criteria that incorporated threatened species, threatened habitats and botanical richness. The number of recorded native plant species increased from 65 species in 2012, to 103 species in 2023, due to improved survey effort (Falklands Conservation 2023).

Plant species that live at higher altitudes are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Species distribution models predict that the 'upland environmental niche' will decrease as the climate changes, and this is likely to have a significantly negative impact on species that are restricted to upland areas. Of particular concern are two priority species that occur in the park, Falklands Nassauvia and Antarctic prickly-burr. Their ranges are likely to become smaller, increasing their chances of extinction (Upson et al. 2016). Environmental monitoring of these areas is therefore particularly important to better understand how the climate is changing, how the species are responding, and if necessary, to enable any adaptation interventions.



The park supports native invertebrates and native birds, including rufous-chested dotterel, dark-faced ground tyrant, Falklands thrush, black-throated finch, siskins, Magellanic snipe, pipits and peregrine falcon (Broughton 2003).



Native species and habitats will be protected from damaging activities and the park's status as an Important Plant Area will be maintained.

Historic sites and cultural heritage

The mountains have important cultural heritage and historical values that will be preserved and presented in an appropriate format.



The tragic story of Ned Casey took place in the mountains. He became lost in the late 1800s and died. His remains were not discovered until much later, though the precise location is only known to a few (Broughton 2003).

The British Forces operated a re-broadcasting station on the summit of Mt Adam with accommodation, walkways, helipads and water-pump station. It was occupied between 1986 and 2001 until it was decommissioned and the infrastructure removed from the site in 2012. The helipad, some imported flint gravel and reinforced concrete pans are all that remain.



Considerations for management

Sheep grazing

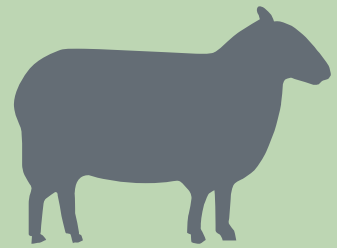
While the Hill Cove Mountains are an important place for native species and habitats that are protected by law and at risk of extinction, they are also an important summer sheep grazing location. This policy and management plan attempts to strike a compromise between grazing and biodiversity.

There is an existing long-term grazing lease for the Mt Donald area in the western end of the park. Up to 2,000 sheep may be grazed each summer in an area approximately 1,300 hectares (3,210 acres) or 11% of the entire park (see map on page 4). Designation as a national park does not automatically result in termination of the grazing lease. Therefore, it is proposed that sheep grazing can continue at Mt Donald. However, it is proposed that new grazing leases will not be issued for the rest of the park, in order to conserve priority plant species and habitats.

Sheep have been recorded throughout the park which may have wandered in from neighbouring properties. All perimeter fences are currently being fixed/ replaced to ensure they are in good condition. A proposed management goal is to arrange regular gatherings of 'wild' sheep.

Tourism and visitor opportunities

The mountains provide opportunities for tourism and outdoor recreation such as hiking, horse riding, photography, wildlife spotting, camping, off-road driving, picnics and connecting with nature. National park law confers the right to roam (on foot and horseback). The park is primarily a day-visitor site; however, overnight camping will be permitted, albeit with strict conditions about the lighting of fires. There is potential for growth of visitor use which, to date, has mainly been residents in the Falkland Islands and guests of nearby accommodations. Suitable and appropriate interpretive information will be publicly accessible and regularly maintained. The park will be marketed as a destination for people to visit and enjoy; however, visitation is expected to remain low, the the majority of people going in the summer months.



Accessing the park

The proposed park is land-locked and surrounded on all sides by privately-owned land. At present, there is no public road leading directly to the park and access is currently only available via informal private tracks. National parks allow the right to roam (on foot and horseback), therefore it is important that there is a way for the public to access the park.

The nearest existing public road is approximately 500 metres away from the western end of the park. To build a new road linking the park to the existing public road would require significant expenditure. The soft, steep terrain involved, in addition to the ongoing maintenance that would be required to keep such a road in good condition, would be extremely expensive, particularly when considering how infrequently the road would be used.

Therefore, this policy and management plan does not propose to build a new road or to improve existing private tracks, or to provide any vehicle access to the park; it focuses instead on providing a walking access point from the public road.

To facilitate the provision of an access point by foot, it is proposed to:

- Draft an agreement with a private landowner to allow the public to leave their vehicle adjacent to the nearest public road (near Hill Cove Settlement) and walk to the park.
- Build a dedicated parking area and install signage about the park that includes a map, suggested walking routes, information about the park, including safety hazards and risks.



Off-road driving in the park

The park is a large area and it is recognised that many people will prefer to access it by vehicle. Off-road driving in the park is not without impacts and risks, and should be carefully managed in order to reduce the likelihood of environmental damage from inexperienced off-road drivers, to protect priority species and habitats, to preserve the landscape, to reduce vegetation loss and erosion, to reduce the risk of wildfires, and to reduce chances of inexperienced drivers becoming bogged or needing assistance. This policy and management plan attempts to reach a compromise between off-road driving and biodiversity.

It's proposed that driving vehicles inside the park is only permitted if the Environment Department has issued a permit to do so and if permission has been given by the relevant landowners to cross private land with a vehicle.

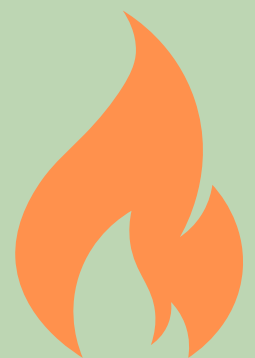
However, the policy does not replace the rights of neighbouring landowners, or interfere with the rights of the leaseholder of Mt Donald and any requirements they have to access the land by vehicle to carry out the functions of their lease.

Managing fire in the park

Fires can endanger life, property and the environment. Fires can be caused by many sources, including natural ignition from lightning strike; accidental ignition from camping stoves, BBQs, hot vehicle exhausts, and cigarettes; or purpose-lit fires such as camp grass burning or arson. Due to the remoteness of the Hill Cove Mountains and difficulty accessing the land, a fire could be extremely hard to extinguish.

This policy and management plan proposes to reduce the risk of fire in the park by doing the following:

- To draft a wildfire management plan for the park, which will help authorities plan a response to fires.
- To ban open fires, BBQs, and smoking in the national park due to the high risk these activities pose to the landscape, wildlife, park visitors, infrastructure, and neighbouring properties.
- To allow small, contained cooking stoves, but only in rocky or sandy areas that are away from grasses, shrubs and peaty soil.



Health and safety

Ensuring the safety of visitors to the park is paramount. Hazards include extreme and changeable weather conditions, patchy mobile phone signal, variable terrain, cliff edges, vehicles bogged or broken down, and remoteness from help. There is also the risk of accidents occurring that affect the safety of park users and neighbouring properties.

This policy and management plan proposes to provide a safer and more enjoyable experience for park users by providing information to visitors so that they can be aware of the risks, make informed decisions about their visit, and therefore be better prepared.

To do that, signage will be installed at park entry points that includes information about key hazards and risks. The information will also be accessible online and on tourism brochures.

Partnerships

Neighbouring landowners, local communities on West Falkland, and stakeholders are important for the successful management of the park. Therefore the park will be managed in consultation with these groups.

Invasive species management

Nine introduced plant species were recorded in the park (Falklands Conservation 2023). Creeping bent was the only introduced species considered at risk of becoming invasive. Introduced plant species are rare and localised in occurrence, and currently pose little risk to native species, therefore no attempts will be made to control or eradicate them at this stage. Mice, rats and cats are widespread on West Falkland and are likely to be present in the park; however, their impact on native species in the park are unknown. A management goal is to ensure that other invasive species do not establish in the park. That will be achieved by promoting biosecurity guidance on park signage and information, and all reports of invasive species will be appropriately responded to.



Infrastructure management

There is currently no habitation or infrastructure (beyond fencing) within the park. The perimeter of the park is marked by 64 km of stock fence which is currently being fixed/ replaced. Fences and gates require regular maintenance in order to keep livestock in the neighbouring farms and to reduce the risk of them wandering into the park.

The need for additional infrastructure, other than signage at entry points and a proposed parking area, is considered low given the relatively low numbers of visitors expected. One of the policy objectives for the national park is to preserve the landscape in a state as close to natural as possible. Therefore, it is not intended that any camping sites, BBQ areas, picnic areas, fire pits, roads, tracks, toilets, buildings or shelters of any kind will be built within the proposed national park, at this time.



References

- Aldiss D. & Edwards E. (1999) *The Geology of the Falkland Islands*. British Geological Survey Technical Report WC/99/10.
- Broughton D.A. (2003) Draft Management Plan for the Proposed Hill Cove Mountains National Park, West Falkland. Report for public consultation.
- Falklands Conservation (2023) *Hill Cove Mountains Important Plant Area Assessment*. Falklands Conservation report.
- Upson R. (2012) *Important Plant Areas of the Falkland Islands*. Report to Falklands Conservation.
- Upson R. & Lewis R. (2014) *Updated vascular plant checklist and atlas for the Falkland Islands*. Report to Falklands Conservation.
- Upson R., McAdam J. & Clubbe C. (2016) *Climate Change Risk Assessment for the Plants and Soils of the Falkland Islands and the Services they provide*. Report to Falkland Islands Government.

Works programme: 2024-2029

This proposed works programme details the actions that will be carried out to achieve the desired outcomes for the national park. Indicators of success will enable progress to be measured. The Environment Department will oversee the implementation of the programme and will review it every five years.

Desired outcomes	Actions	Indicators of success
<p>Landscape The park is maintained for its unique mountainous landscape, preserving a state as close to natural as possible.</p>	<p>Restrict development that is inconsistent with, and detracts from, the park's values.</p>	<p>Impact assessments are carried out for all proposed developments or major maintenance works in the park. Mitigations are applied so that all developments are consistent with, and improve, the park's values.</p>
<p>Species and habitats Native species and habitats are protected from damaging activities.</p>	<p>Carry out environmental surveys to maintain the park's status as an Important Plant Area.</p>	<p>Important Plant Area survey repeated every 10 years, (scheduled next for 2033).</p>
	<p>Implement a permitting process for vehicles in the park and regularly review it.</p>	<p>Permitting process in place at least 12 months after national park designation.</p>
	<p>Reduce pressure of grazing on priority species and habitats in all areas except Mt Donald, by removing 'stray' sheep from the park.</p>	<p>'Stray' sheep are gathered regularly.</p>
	<p>Install a weather monitoring station at Mt Adam that will inform climate change models and adaptation.</p>	<p>Weather station installed at Mt Adam at least 6 months after park designation.</p>
<p>Historic sites and cultural heritage Historic sites and cultural heritage are preserved and presented in an appropriate format.</p>	<p>Protect the historic sites linked to Ned Casey by not publicly identifying their actual locations.</p>	<p>Do not include actual locations of Ned Casey sites in park interpretation, at least 6 months after designation.</p>
	<p>Preserve the memory of the previous British Forces facility on Mt Adam.</p>	<p>Include the old British Forces facility on Mt Adam in park interpretation, at least 6 months after designation.</p>

Desired outcomes	Actions	Indicators of success
<p>Tourism and visitor opportunities Suitable and appropriate interpretative information is publicly accessible and regularly maintained.</p>	Plan and commission the design and procurement of park interpretive information.	Park information signage is installed at entry points; and printed and online information is accessible at least 6 months after designation.
	Maintain infrastructure that enables visitors to access and enjoy the park.	Conduct site visits and carry out routine maintenance at least two times per year. All reports of infrastructure requiring attention are appropriately responded to.
<p>Grazing Sheep grazing is continued on Mt Donald under lease with government, but no new grazing leases are issued.</p>	Continue the current grazing lease at Mt Donald.	Current lease continued.
	Refuse new grazing leases for the park.	No new grazing leases issued for the park.
<p>Partnerships The park is managed in consultation with neighbouring landowners, local communities and stakeholders.</p>	Involve neighbouring landowners, local communities and stakeholders in park management planning.	All park management plan reviews involved meaningful consultation with neighbouring landowners, local communities and stakeholders.
<p>Fire management Risk of fire is reduced.</p>	Ensure visitors are aware of fire rules through all park information, including signage at park entry points.	Park information signage, that contains fire rules, is installed at entry points; and printed and online information is accessible, at least 6 months after designation.
	Produce a fire management plan for the park.	Fire management plan in place upon park designation.
<p>Health and safety The park is a safe place for people to visit.</p>	Ensure visitors are aware of health and safety risks in the park through all park information, including signage at park entry points.	Park information signage, that contains information about hazards and risks, is installed at entry points; and printed and online information is accessible, at least 6 months after designation.

Desired outcomes	Actions	Indicators of success
<p>Infrastructure maintenance Park infrastructure is maintained to a high standard.</p>	<p>Maintain in good condition all infrastructure, including fences, gates, signage, parking areas, entry points and access routes.</p>	<p>Conduct site visits and routine maintenance at least two times per year. All reports of infrastructure requiring attention are appropriately responded to.</p>
<p>Access to park The park is accessible to the public.</p>	<p>Build a designated parking area where the public can leave their vehicle and walk to the park.</p>	<p>Parking area constructed at least 12 months after park designation</p>
<p>Off-road driving Off-road driving is carefully managed to ensure it does not impact on the park's values.</p>	<p>Design and implement a vehicle permitting process to allow vehicles to be driven inside the park.</p>	<p>Permitting process in place at least 12 months after national park designation.</p>
<p>Invasive species Non-native invasive species do not pose a threat to the park.</p>	<p>Ensure invasive non-native plant species do not establish in the park.</p>	<p>All reports of invasive non-native plant are appropriately responded to within 6 months.</p>

Appendix 2- Priority species and habitats

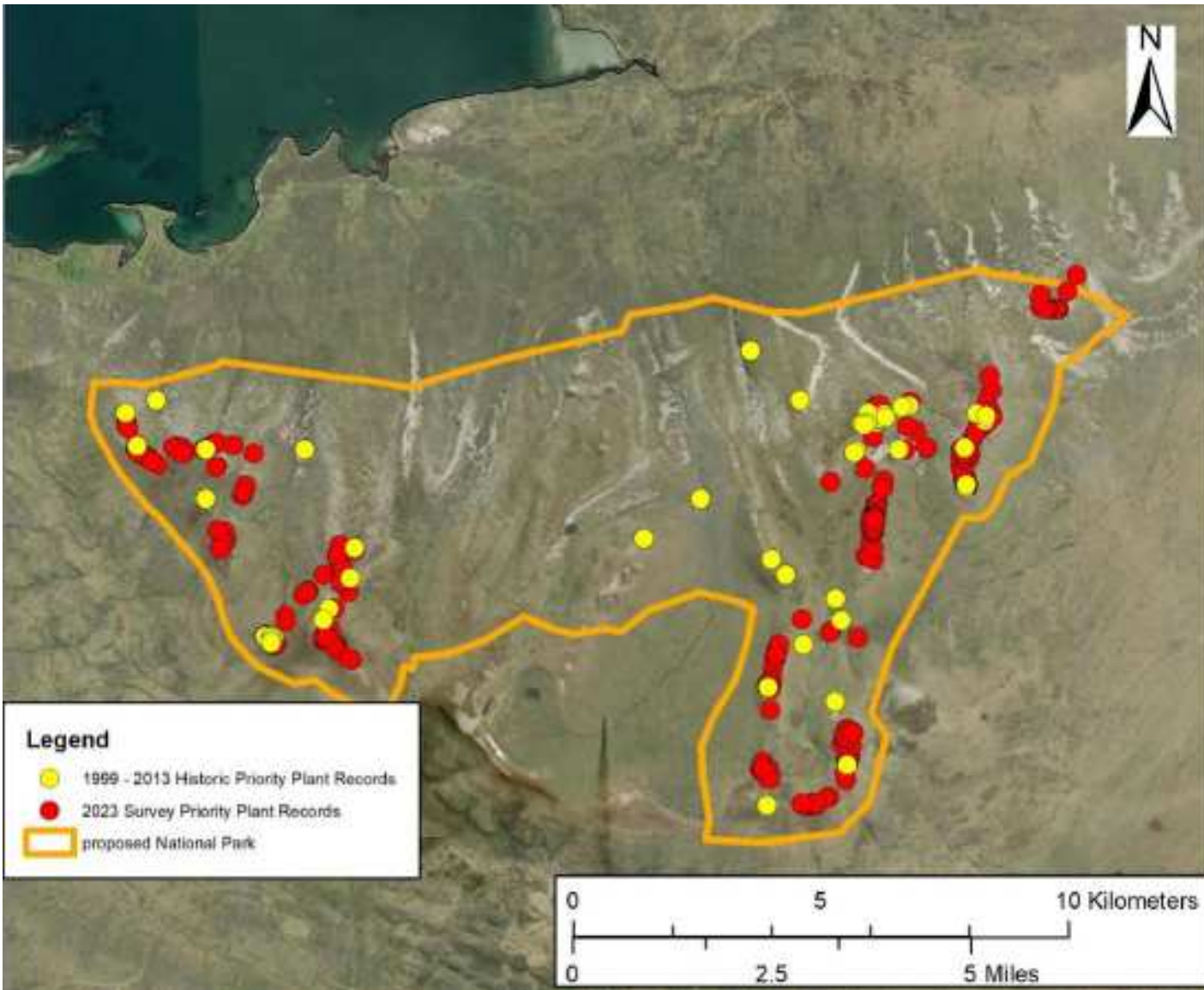
The following 19 species are considered a priority for conservation and protection due to being endemic to the Falklands, protected by law or at risk of extinction.

Common name	Scientific name	Status	Legal protection	IUCN Red List	Falklands Red List
Adder's tongue	<i>Ophioglossum crotalophoroides</i>	Native	YES	n/a	Vulnerable
Antarctic prickly-burr	<i>Acaena antarctica</i>	Native	No	n/a	Vulnerable
Brittle bladder fern	<i>Cystopteris fragilis</i>	Native	No	n/a	Vulnerable
Coastal nassauvia	<i>Nassauvia gaudichaudii</i>	Endemic	No	Least Concern	Least Concern
Common violet	<i>Viola maculata</i>	Native	YES	n/a	Least Concern
Falkland nassauvia	<i>Nassauvia falklandica</i>	Endemic	No	Critically Endangered	Critically Endangered
Falkland rock-cress	<i>Phlebotobium maclovianum</i>	Endemic	YES	Endangered	Endangered
Falkland smooth ragwort	<i>Senecio vaginatus</i>	Endemic	No	Least Concern	Least Concern
Falkland woolly ragwort	<i>Senecio littoralis</i>	Endemic	No	Least Concern	Least Concern
Fir clubmoss	<i>Huperzia saururoides</i>	Native	YES	n/a	Vulnerable
Fuegian sedge	<i>Carex magellanica</i>	Native	No	n/a	Endangered
Lady's slipper	<i>Calceolaria fothergilli</i>	Endemic	No	Least Concern	Least Concern
Patagonium hawkweed	<i>Hieracium patagonicum</i>	Native	No	n/a	Endangered
Silvery buttercup	<i>Hamadryas argentea</i>	Endemic	No	Near Threatened	Near Threatened
Small dusky sedge	<i>Carex acaulis</i>	Native	No	n/a	Vulnerable
Snake plant	<i>Nassauvia serpens</i>	Endemic	No	Least Concern	Least Concern
Strap fern	<i>Grammitis poeppigiana</i>	Native	No	n/a	Vulnerable
Vanilla daisy	<i>Leucheria suaveolens</i>	Endemic	No	Least Concern	Least Concern
Yellow maiden	<i>Sisyrinchium chilense</i>	Native	YES	n/a	Least Concern

Legal protection = listed as protected in the Conservation or Wildlife and Nature Ordinance, 1999

IUCN Red List = listed in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species

Falklands Red List = listed in Upson & Lewis 2014



Map: Locations where priority plant species have been recorded in the proposed national park.

The following two habitats are considered a priority for conservation in the park due to being unique to the Falklands, rare in occurrence, and at risk of disturbance:

Fachine scrub

Mature fachine scrub exists as a narrow riparian habitat alongside streams where steep banks or stone-runs have protected it. Dispersed fachine scrub is in recovery along some wet drainage lines in acid grassland and whitegrass.

Bluegrass Acid Grassland

Bluegrass acid grassland occurs on the upper slopes and whaleback ridges of Mount Adam, Mount Edgeworth, and the upper cone of Mount Robinson. Hill Cove Mountains would be considered within the top five sites for extent and quality of the mountain bluegrass phenotype. Surveys in 2023 recorded the habitat was preferentially grazed by sheep (Falklands Conservation 2023).