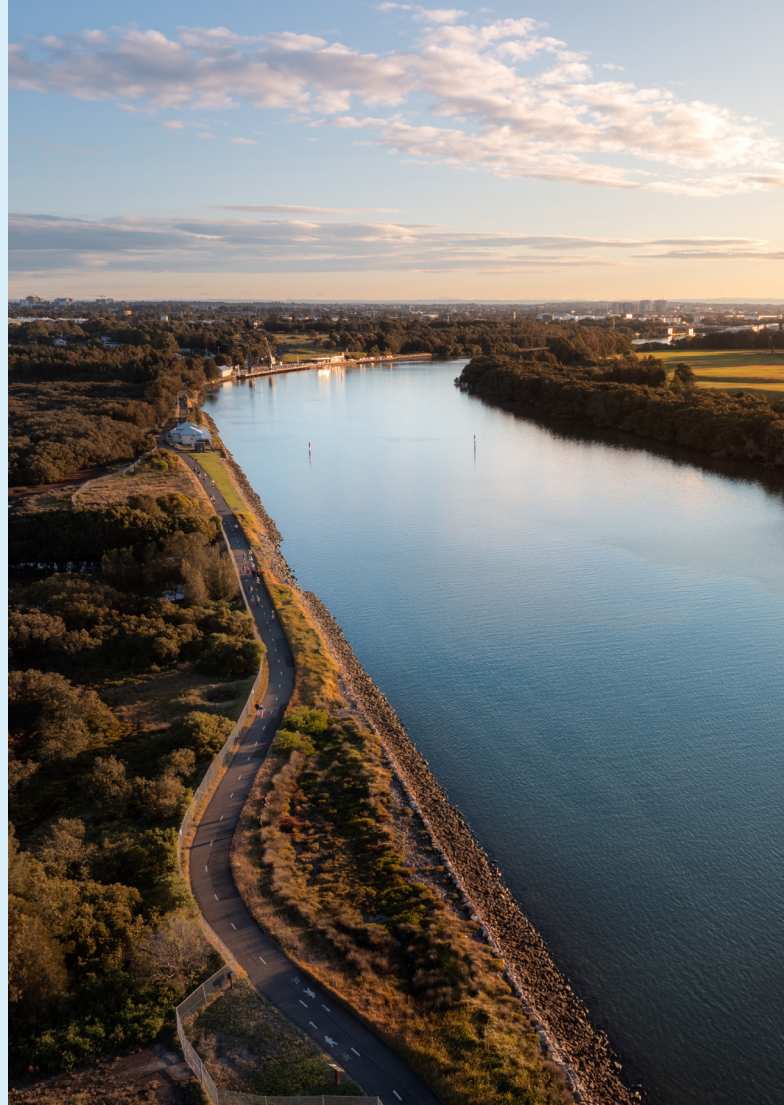


Natural and Nature-Based Recreation

Why This Activity Matters

Natural reserves, bushland, waterways, wetlands and riparian corridors protect biodiversity and ecological processes while providing opportunities for walking, nature appreciation, environmental education, quiet recreation and connection with nature. These areas also contribute to urban cooling, flood resilience, habitat connectivity and the identity of Parramatta's unique landscape.



Key Needs, Gaps and Pressure

Demand for nature-based recreation and nature connection is increasing, while natural areas have finite ecological and management capacity. Informal tracks, uncontrolled access, domestic animals, lighting, noise, weeds, erosion and recreation infrastructure can degrade habitat and cultural values. Some natural areas are readily accessible to surrounding communities but cannot perform the same recreation function as unconstrained local parks.

Access should therefore be improved selectively, with the intensity and form of recreation determined by ecological sensitivity, flood and bushfire risk, cultural values, maintenance capacity and the role of the reserve within the broader network.

Council's Strategic Position

Council will manage natural areas primarily for conservation and ecological resilience, with recreation, interpretation and access provided as compatible, low-impact uses. Open space network planning will distinguish between places suitable for regular walking and nature experience, places requiring controlled access, and sensitive areas where access should be limited or redirected.

Where direct access cannot be provided without unacceptable impacts, Council will use alternative measures such as viewing points, accessible gateways, edge paths, digital interpretation and connections to less-sensitive natural destinations.

NATURAL AND NATURE-BASED RECREATION

Objectives

Objective	Strategic Intent
Protect ecological function	Conserve habitat, biodiversity, waterways and natural processes as the primary purpose.
Enable compatible access	Provide low-impact walking and nature experiences where site capacity and sensitivity permits.
Improve ecological and recreational connectivity	Strengthen habitat and movement links between natural areas, waterways and the wider green network.
Build understanding and custodianship	Use interpretation, education and community participation to foster understanding and support care for natural places.
Respond to climate risk	Integrate flood, heat, bushfire and environmental resilience into planning and management.
Avoid over-embellishment	Limit built infrastructure to what is necessary for safe access, interpretation and management.

Technical and Desired Standards of Service Baseline

- Natural areas do not require a uniform catchment, size or facility standard; site-specific ecological and cultural assessment is required.
- Provide minimal, durable and sympathetic infrastructure such as walking tracks, boardwalks, seating, directional and interpretive signage where compatible.
- Locate tracks and access points to avoid sensitive habitat, erosion, steep slopes, contaminated land and culturally significant areas.
- Use low-impact materials and construction methods and maintain clear environmental protection and rehabilitation requirements.
- Avoid unnecessary lighting in habitat areas and minimise spill and ecological impacts where deemed essential.
- Support access and recreation outcomes that are compatible with ecological restoration, fire-management and long-term conservation.

NATURAL AND NATURE-BASED RECREATION

Strategic Priorities

Planning Priorities

Prepare or update access and recreation plans for priority natural corridors and reserves based on ecological capacity and network role.

Manage informal tracks and access routes to balance recreation opportunities, ecological protection, cultural values and user safety. Establish and maintain a clear trail hierarchy based on capacity, sensitivity and intended network function.

Improve accessible gateways, wayfinding and interpretation at suitable locations without extending intensive infrastructure into ecologically sensitive areas.

Support recreation and access outcomes that complement broader riparian, canopy, habitat and ecological connectivity outcomes

Expand environmental education, citizen science and community custodianship initiatives.

Monitor recreation impacts, track condition, visitor pressures, and climate risks to inform future management and investment.

Measures of Success

- ✓ Improved access to appropriate nature-based recreation opportunities that are compatible with ecological and conservation outcomes.
- ✓ Reduction in damaging informal tracks and unmanaged access points.
- ✓ Increased visitor understanding and appreciation of natural areas through interpretation, education and nature-based recreation experiences.
- ✓ Growth in stewardship, environmental education and community participation programs and initiatives.

Action Plan Cross Reference:

Sections 9.1.2, 9.1.5 and 9.1.6 Activation and Partnerships, particularly Actions CG3, SM1, SM4 and AP1.