

# **Strategic Plan for the Management of the Cotter Plots Arboretum within Equestrian Park, Yarralumla, ACT.**

**2014**

Prepared for the ACT Equestrian Association

by

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Generally.

The Equestrian Park Management Group is a subcommittee of the ACT Equestrian Association (ACTEA), formed to administer its licence from the ACT Government to manage Equestrian Park Yarralumla. The area covered by the Licence includes the Cotter Plots arboretum established by Lindsay Pryor on the Cotter Road. In the Plots, spurred by the Menzies Government's restarting of the stalled development of Canberra after World War II, Pryor tested eucalypts and exotics for shelter and landscaping in the new city<sup>1</sup>. While the Plots are not on any Heritage Register they are a significant part of the story of the development of the Bush Capital and the ACT Equestrian Association takes their protection seriously, consistent with its responsibilities under its licence:

*To use the land as an equestrian facility provided that the area is generally available for public recreation and free public access, which does not interfere with the safe use of the area for its primary purpose.*

Until recently the Plots have principally been used for machinery storage and for overflow parking and horse accommodation several times a year during large competitions. The major upgrade of the broader Equestrian Park facilities that ACTEA has undertaken in conjunction with A.C.T. Sport & Recreation Services over the last five years has meant that the park usage has increased to the point where more structured arrangements are needed for handling the mix of competitors, spectators and traffic. This includes incorporating the Plots more fully into the broader Park management regime and taking a strategic approach to their development.

The A.C.T. Sport & Recreation Services in the Economic Development Directorate has made available a grant to complete this strategic plan for the Cotter Plots which takes into account their history, their present uses and their future potential.

Some Canberrans, both within the equestrian community and outside it, feel a strong attachment to the Cotter Plots. Some of the trees are recognised as having international heritage value. Any major development within the Plots will be closely watched by both the community and the ACT government, and it is important to ACTEA that the intrinsic value of the arboretum is protected, enhanced and recognised as work on improving the equestrian facilities progresses.

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<sup>1</sup> Nursery Tales For A Garden City: The Historical Context Of The Records At Canberra's Yarralumla Nursery, Lenore Coltheart A Report For The Australian Garden History Society (ACT, Monaro & Riverina Branch) December 2011

## 1.2. Objectives.

This management plan has been developed in order to;

- Identify and record the key physical characteristics of the Plots particularly those which present land management challenges,
- Understand the value of the surviving arboretum and provide guidelines for the management and protection of important specimens for the benefit to the community, integrated with and as an asset to the equestrian facilities,
- Understand the needs that participants in equestrian activities will have for improved facilities.
- Provide guidelines for the improvement of the equestrian facilities and the management of the arboretum over at least the next ten years, by which time the ACTEA aims to have improved the facilities in Equestrian Park generally to support an increased use of the park and higher levels of competition.
- Demonstrate credibility when applying for approvals and assistance from authorities that the plans for the long term management of the arboretum and improved facilities have been competently developed in response to an informed and well considered understanding of the existing assets and the requirements of the equestrian community.

## 1.3. Context of the Cotter Plots in Equestrian Park

This management plan is concerned with the Cotter Plots arboretum. The arboretum is a part of the area of Equestrian Park, for which ACTEA has an arrangement with the ACT Government to manage under licence.

Although the subject of this Management Plan applies only to the Cotter Plots area, the manner in which the equestrian facilities within the Plots will integrate with Equestrian Park generally has been a major consideration in the evolution of the Management Plan.

Diagram 1 shows the relationship of The Cotter Plots to Equestrian Park.<sup>2</sup> The public road leading to the Woolshed divides the Cotter Plots and the competition grounds of Equestrian Park, and the offset entrances to each are shared by vehicles, horses and pedestrians.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix F - Survey Maps - The ACT Territory Plan



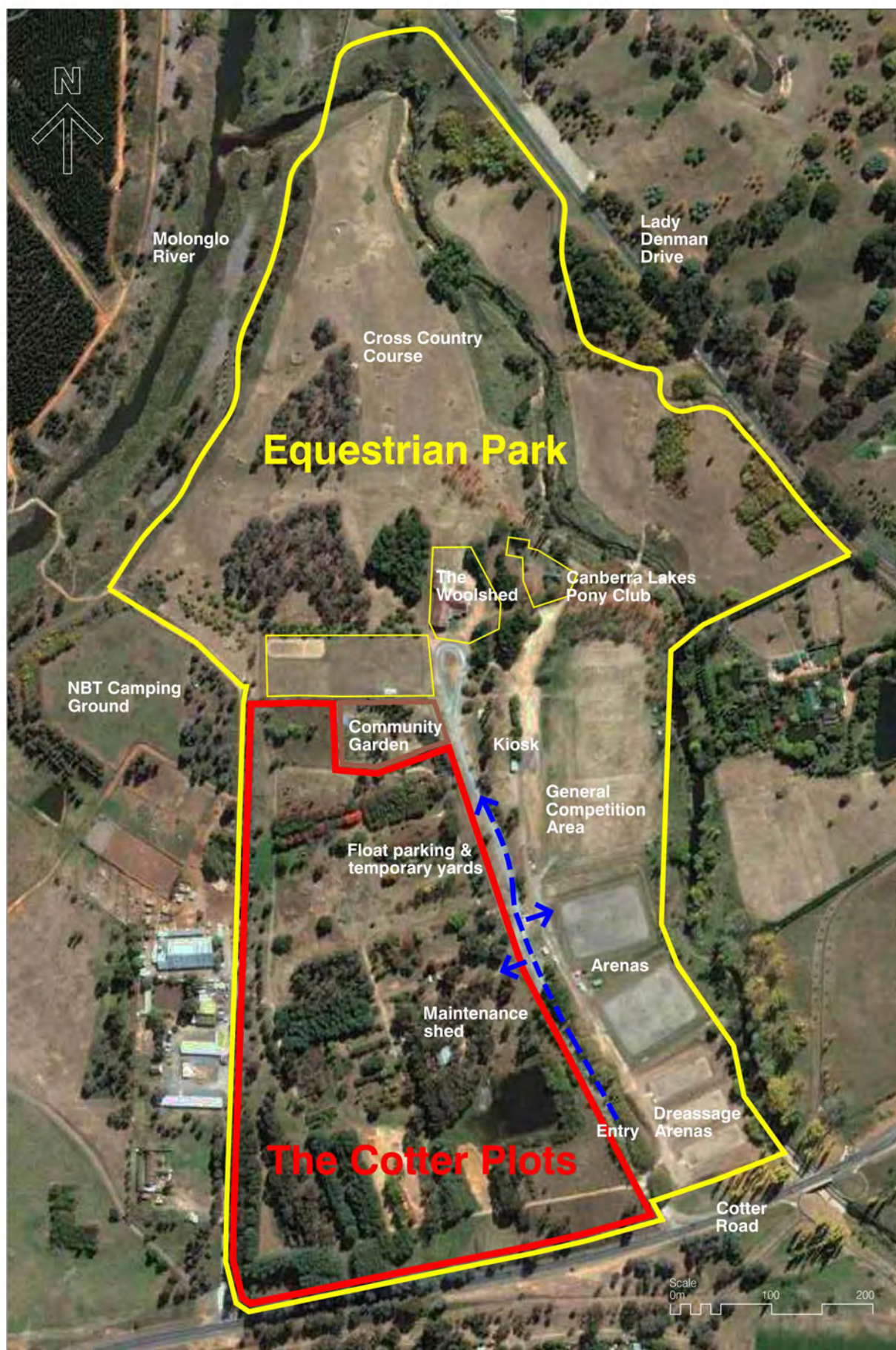


Diagram 1

The area of the Cotter Plots Arboretum and its relationship to the remainder of Equestrian Park.

#### 1.4. Terminology

There are three main equestrian disciplines that have made the most use of Equestrian Park; Dressage, Show Jumping and Eventing. The use of the word Eventing can cause confusion however, and competitions in this discipline are increasingly referred to as Horse Trials.

This document has adopted the use of the term Horse Trials for competitions where appropriate, however the discipline is still referred to as Eventing, with an initial capital, and its adherents as Eventers. Where the term events is used in a generic sense rather than referring to Horse Trials, it is spelled with an initial lower case.



## Section 1;

# **The Cotter Plots**

## 2. History

### 2.1. Since Canberra's Inception.

Following settlement, the land now occupied by the Cotter Plots was a part of the Campbell family grazing property Yarralumla. Subsequently it was resumed for the National Capital and the residence became that of the Governor General.<sup>3</sup>

After c.1946 the area was known as the Woolshed Plantations, the woolshed itself being still used by the Campbell family. It is believed that the area was used for experimental horticulture and forestry plots.

During the 1950's the area was used for producing open rooted stock; of deciduous trees for the Yarralumla Nursery before this function was moved to Pialligo in 1959, and of pine seedlings before this function was moved to the Stromlo Nursery.

In 1957 Dr. Robert Boden<sup>4</sup>, who had been responsible for setting up the ACT Parks and Gardens Research Unit, established experimental plantings of *Eucalyptus dives* and *Pinus torreyana* near Cotter Road. During the 1960's the Research Unit made extensive trial plantings of many species of trees and shrubs, and a staff of up to 17 people were engaged in maintaining the experimental plots, which involved the irrigation, fertilising, mulching, weeding and pruning of specimens. One of these was Sue Johnston, who, with much assistance from her husband Joe, was active in the maintenance of the plots area until 2010 and still maintains an interest in their survival. A survey from 1967 shows what was probably the greatest extent of the plantings in the plots<sup>5</sup>.

Detailed records exist regarding the specimens that were planted out in most of the trial plots.<sup>6</sup>

Following self government the area came under the administration of various departments of the ACT Government, and is currently (2014) the responsibility of the Sport and Recreation Services in the Economic Development Directorate, although all of Equestrian Park is located within the Lake Burley Griffin and its Foreshores Designated Land under the National Capital Plan and as such is subject to the *Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988*.

Various ACT departments have since used what has now become known as The Cotter Plots, an area of approximately 17Ha now defined as Section 668 of the ACT Territory Plan<sup>7</sup>, for investigations and evaluations of grasses, shrubs and trees, sports turf management, chemical control of pests and diseases, lake weed management, nursery propagation and plant breeding. This activity continued into the 1990's when the experimentation was deemed to have reached its conclusion. After this time little maintenance was undertaken and the extant plantings were left to survive or not under natural conditions.

In 1962 an area of 27Ha adjacent to the Cotter Plots was allocated for the purposes of horse riding within a public park, and in 1969 a further 19Ha was added to create an area

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<sup>3</sup> For details of the early history of the horticultural activities, See Appendix A, Historical Notes. (The provenance of these notes is not known).

<sup>4</sup> In 1996 Dr Boden prepared a Planting Assessment and in 1997 a Management Plan for the Cotter Plots, see Appendix B.

<sup>5</sup> See Diagram 3 page 13.

<sup>6</sup> See Reference 1 - Cotter Plots detailed planting records.

<sup>7</sup> See Diagram 2, page 10; portion of the Territory Plan 2014 showing the surrounding area including the Cotter Plots.

that ran from the Cotter Road to adjacent to the Molonglo River corridor. In the 1970's the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) commissioned the Australian Olympic equestrian Neale Lavis and the team coach Franz Mairinger to assist with the design of a National Equestrian Centre which was to have been developed by the NCDC and would have included the Cotter Plots. In 1974 the Master Plan was prepared, however it was not implemented and there were objections lodged to the incorporation of the Cotter Plots due to the ongoing horticultural trials being conducted there. The director of the ACT Parks & Gardens Section<sup>8</sup> undertook to make the Cotter Plots available to become a part of the Equestrian Park complex once the trials were completed.

Subsequently an area of approximately 0.6Ha has been leased to the ACT Organic Gardeners for use as a Community Garden, and a portion of the Equestrian Park on the eastern side of Yarralumla Creek, bounded by the Cotter Road and Lady Denman Drive has been used by the ACT Government as a wood dump and to accommodate a cycleway.

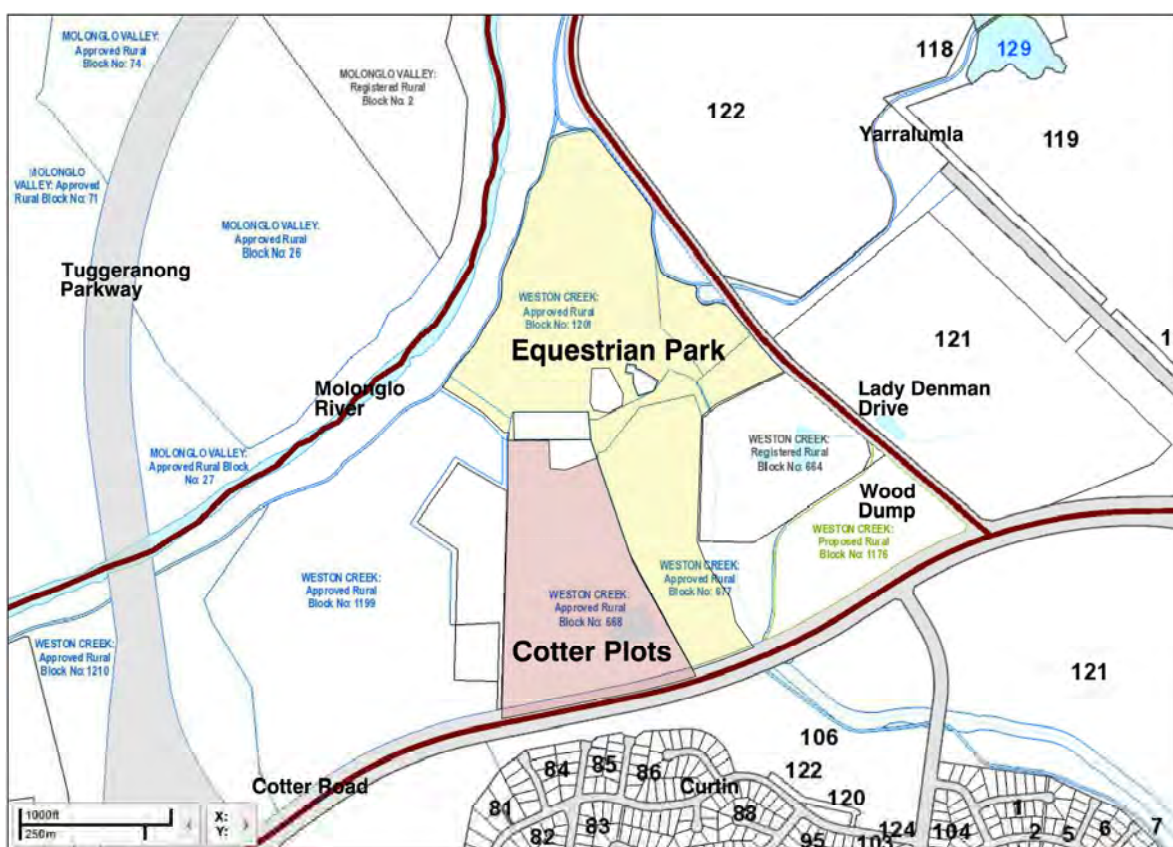


Diagram 2; Location of Equestrian Park on the A.C.T. Territory Plan.

A survey from 1980<sup>9</sup> shows the extent of the plantings surviving in the arboretum at that time. It is evident that the trials had been completed in many of the original plots and they have not been maintained. In some areas the vegetation has disappeared, but other specimens have survived despite the neglect.

In 1995 the cross country course on the northern portion of Equestrian Park was approved for Advanced level One Day Events (ODE's) by Wayne Roycroft, then chair of

<sup>8</sup> David Shoobridge

<sup>9</sup> Diagram 4 Page 14

Equestrian Australia<sup>10</sup>. At this time the horticultural trials in the plots had been completed and various ACT Government agencies were using the area for storing waste material. ACTEA renewed efforts to implement the 1974 Master Plan with the intention of using the Cotter Plots area for arenas, yards, float and truck parking and short stay camping for equestrian activities.

In 1997 ACTEA entered into an agreement with the ACT Government to manage under licence the whole of the area of Equestrian Park including the Cotter Plots.

Between 1995 and 2009 the region, as much of Australia, was subjected to a period of deep drought, and some specimens in the arboretum suffered due to the limited amount of maintenance that could be accorded them. In 2001 and 2003 the bushfires that caused so much damage through Canberra reached as far as Equestrian Park and destroyed a considerable amount of the vegetation in the Cotter Plots as well as a number of the assets of several equestrian clubs and ACTEA.

Following this loss Michael Creber, an international respected course designer, was commissioned to prepare a new Master Plan<sup>11</sup> for the development of the equestrian facilities throughout the park, including the area of the Cotter Plots. This master plan was completed in 2002 and has been the basis of works that have been undertaken since then to upgrade the facilities.

Concurrently with the preparation of the Creber Master Plan, Dr. David Hogg was commissioned by ACTEA to prepare a Strategic Plan for Equestrian Sport and Recreation Facilities in the A.C.T.<sup>12</sup>, which examined the current state of equestrian facilities across the ACT, the purpose of which was 'to establish a broad framework within which the ACTEA and its member clubs can plan the future development of their facilities in a logical manner, and seek ACT Government support for such development' over about the following ten year period. This Strategic Plan for the Cotter Plots precinct has been prepared within the framework recommended by the Hogg Report.

This Creber Report forms a significant basis for this Management Plan, which takes into account its recommendations as well as a detailed horticultural survey and advice regarding the significance and stewardship by ACTEA of the arboretum, factors that were not a major consideration when the 2002 plan was prepared.

During Canberra's history there have been many arboreta established across the Territory, including in the Brindabella Ranges, but few remain today. ACTEA recognises the value that the Cotter Plots has to Canberra's heritage, and the particular significance of some of the specimens as rare and endangered species, and this management plan reflects the importance that ACTEA attaches to its responsibility for the stewardship and conservation of the arboretum.

## 2.2. Recent Developments.

In recent years, particularly since 2003, despite years of drought and bushfires, many of recommendations of the Creber Report have been implemented, however little work has been undertaken in the Cotter Plots.

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<sup>10</sup> Wayne Roycroft was Chairman of Equestrian N.S.W. and Equestrian Australia, the Head Coach of the Australian Olympic Eventing Teams at the Seoul (1988), Barcelona (1992), Atlanta (1996), Sydney (2000), Athens (2004) and Beijing (2008) Olympic Games, and Chairman of the F.E.I Eventing Board (2000 - 2009) among other official positions in Australian and international equestrian organisations.

<sup>11</sup> The Creber Report is attached as Appendix C.

<sup>12</sup> The Hogg Strategic Plan is attached as Appendix D.

In 2008 the ACT Government made a grant of \$322,000 under a Drought Proofing for Sporting Facilities program to construct 2 sand arenas which by forming judicious partnerships and the *pro bono* work of its supporters ACTEA was able to translate into two large multi purpose arenas and three small sand dressage arenas.

Equestrian Park now has a three star cross-country course of a standard that supports International and Olympic qualifying events. There is a capacity for 7 sand dressage arenas and a large general purpose grassed area. The toilet block has been upgraded and power facilities on site improved. A large number of new yards have been erected. Until the present time however the ancillary facilities to support these improvements have not been undertaken, and this is inhibiting the holding of some national and international competitions and reducing the numbers of competitors at others.

The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to provide a framework for the implementation of improvements and the expansion of facilities in the Cotter Plots to support holding events at the highest levels in all the disciplines represented by the clubs that use Equestrian Park. The provision of these facilities will see Equestrian Park achieve the potential foreseen in previous reports to become a leading national venue for equestrian sport, and a major asset to the community of Canberra.

### 2.3. Current Developments; The Cotter Road Widening.

The ACT Government is currently undertaking work to widen the Cotter Road. This will have an impact upon the southern boundary which is planned to be relocated northwards, which will involve the removal of a number of Torrey Pines. In recognising the importance of these trees the Government has sought to minimise the number of trees that will need to be removed, and are investigating the propagation of replacement specimens for replanting elsewhere in the Plots.

While this matter is beyond the control of the Cotter Plots Management, ACTEA has actively engaged with the planning authorities to minimise the damage that will be caused to the arboretum collection and is actively supporting the efforts to propagate new Torrey Pines.

The likely encroachment of the relocated boundary into the Plots is indicated on diagrams 5 and 6 (pages 17 and 18).





Diagram 3



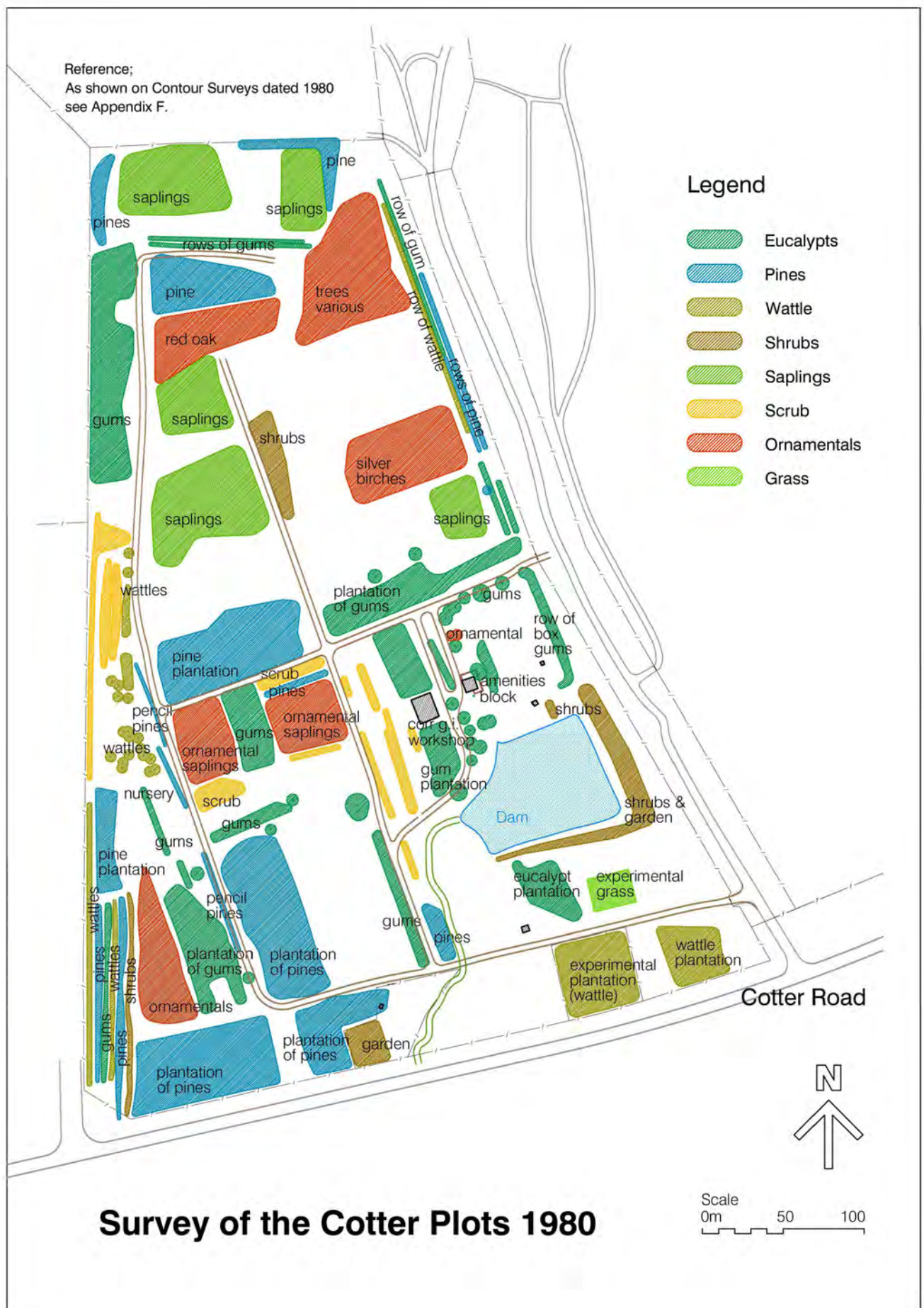


Diagram 4



### 3. The Arboretum

#### 3.1. Generally.

Following the conclusion of the experimental horticultural trials in the Cotter plots in the 1990's, the arboretum was largely neglected by the ACT Parks & Gardens Section. More recently bushfires and drought have ravaged the collection. Some maintenance has been undertaken by concerned individuals, notably the Friends of the (Cotter Plots) Arboretum, now the Friends of the ACT Trees, and Sue Johnston.

With limited funds available for the maintenance of the collection, it has not been possible to fully implement the recommendations of the report prepared by Dr. Robert Boden for the management of the arboretum, however sufficient has been achieved to ensure that the important specimens have survived.

When in 1997 ACTEA entered into an agreement with the ACT Government to manage under licence the whole of the area of Equestrian Park including the Cotter Plots, it was understood that the equestrian community using the park accepted the responsibility for the stewardship of the arboretum. ACTEA have subsequently endeavoured to determine the extent and composition of the collection, and the best management practices that will be required to safeguard the future thrift of the arboretum.

One of the objectives of ACTEA is to provide space for new equestrian facilities that will encourage and accommodate the increased use of Equestrian Park and increased numbers of participants in activities held there as the competition grounds are extended and upgraded to support higher levels of horsemanship.

Being able to integrate these facilities into the arboretum is seen as a considerable asset to the attractiveness of the venue, and ACTEA has encouraged its members to accept a feeling of ownership of the collection, and to be involved with its maintenance.

Basic to this Strategic Plan is the incorporation of a plan for the management of the arboretum. This will be achieved by determining of the condition of the arboretum, and the best procedures for its protection and maintenance. This involves determining;

- The specimens in the collection that have survived;
- The horticultural significance of the surviving material;
- What immediate husbandry is required for the health of the trees and shrubs and to minimise any risks to people, horses and vehicles using the facilities in the plots;
- What ongoing management procedures need to be implemented to ensure the longevity of the collection;
- And how the new facilities can be integrated into the arboretum without endangering the collection, with particular regard for highly significant specimens.

### 3.2. The Condition of the Surviving Arboretum Collection.

In August 2013 a survey of the vegetation in the Cotter Plots was carried out by Steve Thomas, arborist and President of the Friends of the ACT Trees, ACTEA members and myself to identify the species, locations and conditions of the existing vegetation.

This information was compiled with that previously described by Dr. Boden in order to map the surviving specimens and to categorise them. This categorisation represents a combination of the botanical or horticultural significance of the specimens, their significance in the geographical and historical context of the arboretum, and their significance to the future use of the Plots, and has been documented in the Cotter Plots Vegetation Assessment 2013<sup>13</sup>, in which all the extant vegetation has been assessed into four categories;

- Specimens or groups of particular significance which it is recommended should be retained and protected, having high value in terms of botanical interest or rarity,
- Specimens or groups which have value as landscape elements or as windbreaks, and are recommended should be retained and given maintenance,
- Vegetation which has little value in terms of botanical or landscape interest, and may be removed if required. If these groups are to be retained, they generally require maintenance,
- Vegetation now considered to be weed species and which for the health and benefit of the arboretum should be removed.

A number of the specimens assessed as having particular significance have been found to be classified on international registers of rare and endangered species, and the fact that they have managed to survive in the arboretum with little attention imparts particular importance to their protection and maintenance.

The existing vegetation has been mapped by category onto the map of the Cotter Plots so that the proposed equestrian facilities may be planned to ensure the conservation of the significant vegetation, and in particular those specimens that have been determined to be highly significant. This mapping is shown on diagrams 5 and 6 on the following pages.

### 3.3. The Conservation and Management of the Arboretum Collection.

The management of the collection is described in Chapter 8 Environmental Management Plan. Any immediate husbandry that is required for the maintenance and conservation of specimens by way of protection from weeds, soil compaction, grazing, pruning etc. will require the specialised advice of an arborist and is beyond the scope of this report.

The integration of the arboretum with the proposed equestrian facilities is discussed in Section 2 of this management plan.

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix E.

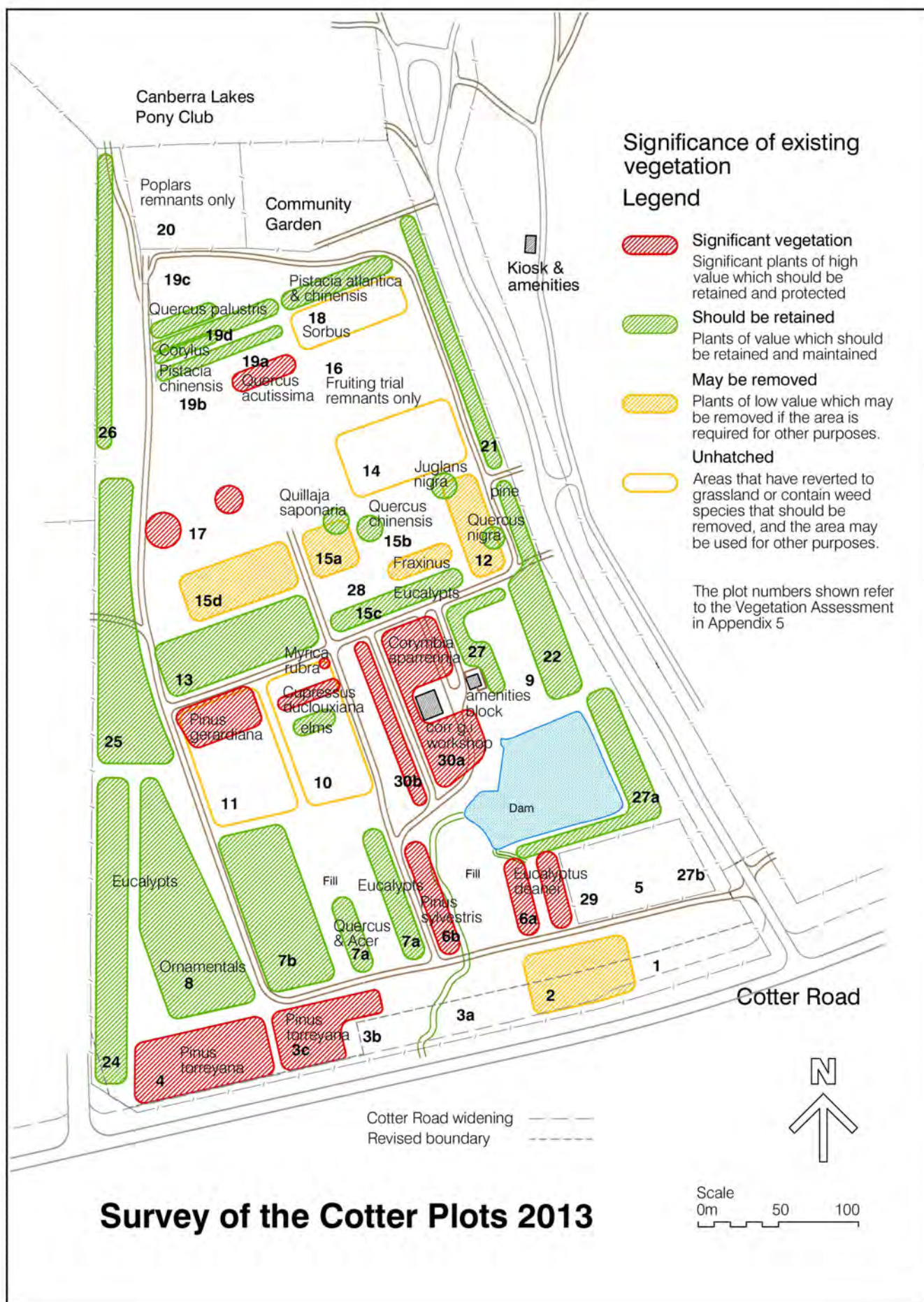


Diagram 5.





**Aerial Photograph showing  
Survey of the Cotter Plots 2013**

Scale  
0m 50 100

Diagram 6.

## 4. The Site

### 4.1. Topography.

A base survey map of the Cotter Plots Arboretum<sup>14</sup> has been prepared using;

- 1:500 contour surveys prepared by the Australian Survey Office<sup>15</sup>,
- ActewAGL map of sewer lines,
- ICON Asset confirmation that there are no fibre optic communications assets on the site,
- TransACT confirmation that there are no cable communications assets on the site,
- Telstra declined to provide information regarding their assets.

### 4.2. Contour Survey.

The contours plotted are those existing when the surveys were prepared in 1980. There has been no significant change to the topography of the site since this time, except for the deposition of areas of fill intended to provide level, trafficable platforms in areas that are known to become waterlogged during heavy or prolonged rain.

### 4.3. Surface Water Flow.

A Preliminary Report on possible drainage issues in the Cotter Plots Arboretum was prepared by Ian Lawrence, Water and Environment Consultant<sup>16</sup>. This report indicated the locations of overland surface water flow across the site and the tributary area in Curtin of the minor creek that crosses part of the site and supplies the dam.

This report identified some concerns regarding the impact of surface water upon the arboretum and equestrian assets and recommended remedial treatment where appropriate. It raised particular concern regarding waterlogging and the possible risk to vegetation arising from the deposition of fill as mentioned in 4.2 above.

During heavy or prolonged rain the ground in some areas becomes waterlogged, especially toward the southern end of the site above the dam and the area to which the dam overflows between the cottage and the Woolshed Road. On some early maps of the region this area was labelled as 'swamp'.

The dam was constructed early in the history of the Plots to provide water to the trial plantings. It remains serviceable, though its current capacity is limited due to the accumulation of silt.

The information provided by this report has been incorporated onto the base map, as shown in Diagram 7.

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix F.

<sup>15</sup> Australian Survey Office, Department of Administrative Services, Canberra, A.C.T., Weston Creek, Sheets Nos. E2052-5997, E2052-6000, E2052-6003, E2056-6000, E2056-6003 and portions of E2056-5997 dated 1980; and copies of other surveys referred to, see Appendix F, Contour Surveys.

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix F, Water and Environment.



#### 4.4. Roads and Trafficability.

The existing roadways within the Cotter Plots can only be regarded as tracks, having been constructed only to provide access by a small number of horticultural staff to the experimental plots. As the area has come to be used to provide facilities to support increasing activities in Equestrian Park these tracks have proved to be inadequate, and during wet weather some are all but impassable.

As noted in 4.3 above some parts of the site are subject to becoming waterlogged and at these times are not capable of supporting vehicles and larger, heavier vehicles such as horse floats will readily become bogged if parked on this ground. Most of the site however becomes slippery and readily degrades into mud if subject to traffic during rain periods.

The main access road, leading to the Woolshed, is constructed of well formed gravel, and with regular maintenance remains serviceable at all times.

#### 4.5. Water Supply Services.

Several maps <sup>17</sup> indicate the locations of water supply systems as shown on Diagram 7, however these should not be regarded as reliable as their provenance is unknown. These systems were constructed to provide mains water to the plots to maintain the plantings, however their locations, capacity and condition cannot now be determined and not all of the taps indicated can be located on site. It is believed that at various times taps or standpipes have been removed and pipes capped off without this work having been recorded, and sections of pipework are known to have failed. It is thought that some of the pipework may be asbestos. A number of pipes near the gate in the south eastern corner of the site are now exposed where they cross the track, and are vulnerable to damage.

The taps that can be located are generally serviceable, however to ensure that a reliable service is available to serve the arboretum and proposed equestrian facilities it will be necessary to have the existing service(s) surveyed and their locations, condition and capacities determined, and any required maintenance or upgrading effected.

It should be noted that this system also supplies water to the Pony Club, the Woolshed, and the Government paddocks (part of the National Bicentennial Trail).

The dam is capable of holding a large volume of water, and will hold considerably more if cleared of silt, however its use for the maintenance of the arboretum remains the subject of negotiation with the A.C.T. Government. ACTEA has a limited licence to extract water from Yarralumla Creek and does not have a licence to take water from this dam for irrigation purposes. The dam also has value as a detention facility during short periods of heavy rain in protecting areas between the dam and Yarralumla Creek, which have been built up to provide equestrian competition facilities, from becoming waterlogged. Once full however the dam still overflows on to these areas. The diesel pump has been removed.

#### 4.6. Sewerage Services.

There are a number of existing sewerage lines that cross the site, including a large service main running east - west.<sup>18</sup> It is likely that any new services required for the proposed facilities may readily be cut into these existing services. Again, this should be

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<sup>17</sup> The locations of some stand pipes are shown on the 1980 survey maps - Appendix F, and some plumbing lines are indicated on the 1971 Map Notes, Reference 1; Detailed Planting Records.

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix F - Utilities assets surveys, ActewAGL - Sewer.

the subject of a hydraulic survey to determine their suitability and the best locations for new connections.

It should be noted that the existing building formerly the cottage, and now used as amenities associated with the workshops, is not connected to the town sewerage system but has its own absorption trench system. This appears to be adequate for even the existing light usage, and will require connection to the sewerage line if its use is anticipated to increase, subject to advice from hydraulic consultants.

#### 4.7. Electricity Supply Services.

Existing electricity services are provided to the cottage and workshop from an adjacent transformer on the overhead line running across the eastern side of the Plots. However this supply will not be sufficient to provide power for the proposed equestrian facilities, and a new transformer cubicle will be required to be constructed.

The location and capacity of the new supply will have to be determined in consultation with Electrical Engineers and the supply authority. In order to minimise future expense, any new supply should be designed to provide for all future stages of work, including any facilities that are anticipated will be constructed in the Equestrian Park competition areas.

#### 4.8. Communications Services.

It is thought that there are no existing communications services crossing the site (although Telstra did not provide advice about their assets).

An internal communications system may be required with the new facilities, subject to determination when/if required.

#### 4.9. Contaminated Surface Water.

Although there is no current problem with contaminated surface water due to the nature of the arboretum or the present level of equestrian use, the expanded facilities and the larger number of horses that will be using them will generate contamination that will be required to be contained and dealt with.

In particular, runoff from the stables, wash bays and manure handling areas will need to be contained into settlement ponds or otherwise treated before it is allowed to be released into the Yarralumla Creek catchment.

This matter will require the advice of Civil Engineering & Hydraulic consultants to determine the best way of dealing with this contaminated water.

Horticultural advice may also be required to ensure that contaminated runoff does not have any adverse impact upon the vegetation in the arboretum.

#### 4.10. Potential for Flooding.

The 1:100 year flood line for the area<sup>19</sup> shows that the Cotter Plots is not anticipated would be inundated, however significant areas of Equestrian Park would be, and it is probable that the park generally, including the Cotter Plots, would be waterlogged and unusable anyway during these conditions.

The extent of the potential inundation of Equestrian Park is shown on Diagram 8.

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<sup>19</sup> ACT MAPi 2014 data.



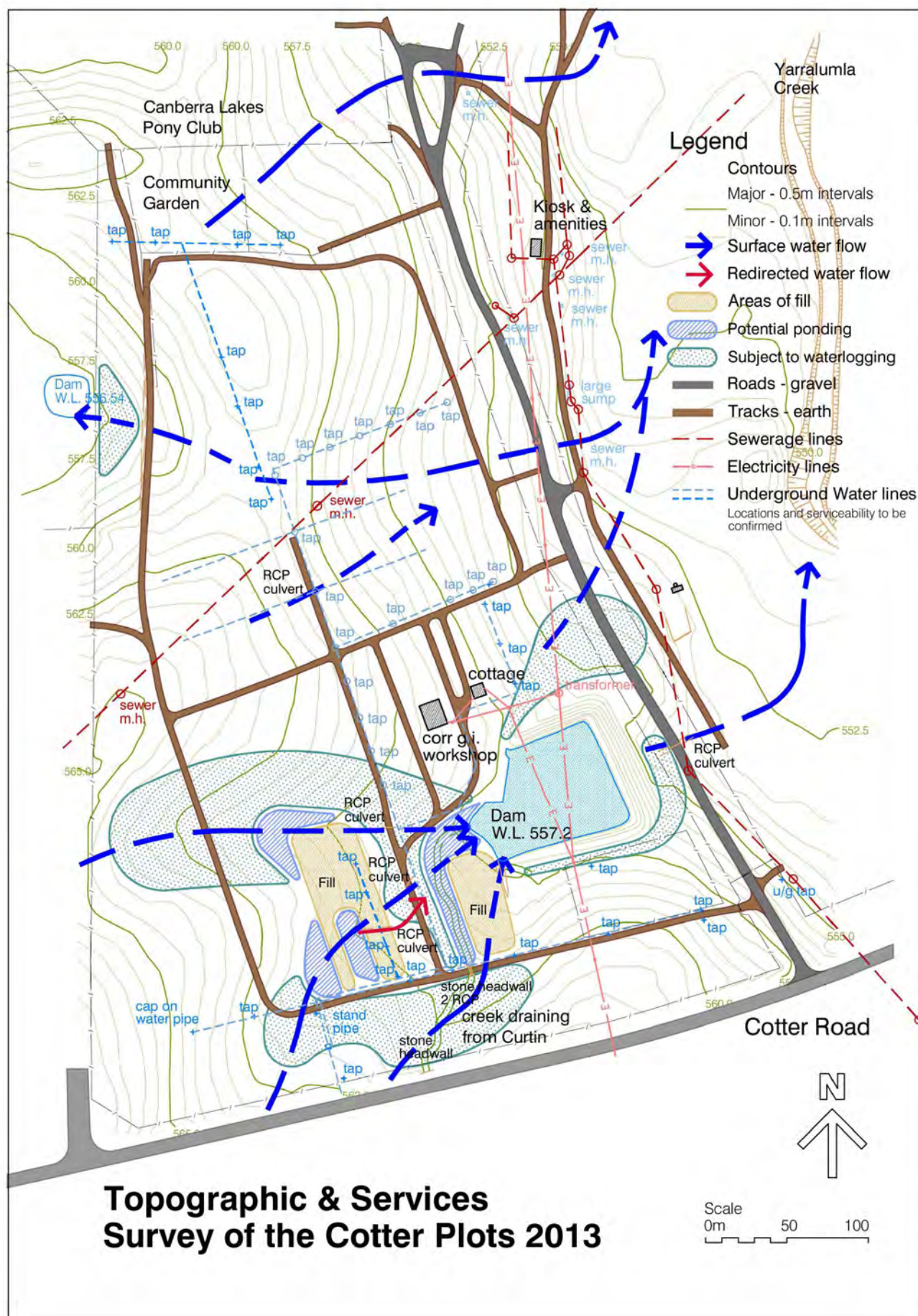


Diagram 7



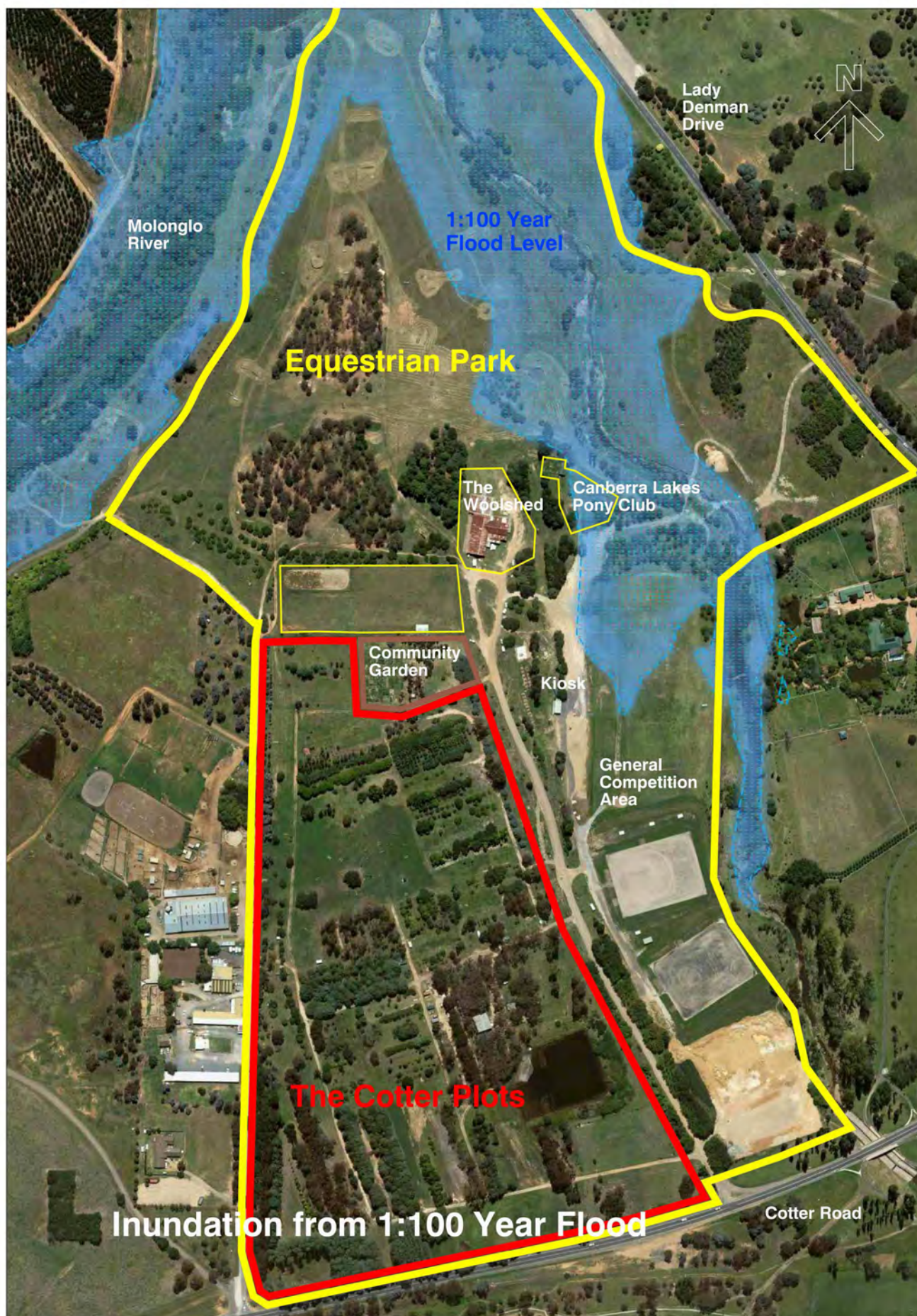


Diagram 8

## 5. Current Equestrian Use

### 5.1. Generally.

At present the Plots area is used only intermittently, generally during larger events either for parking and horse yarding for larger dressage and showjumping events or when the part of the cross country course that lies in the Plots is required for the higher levels of Horse Trials competition. Different disciplines use the plots in different ways, depending on the nature and size of their event, having distinct requirements related to their activities. The lack of certain facilities in the Plots is limiting in the way that some disciplines may use the area. Diagram 9 shows the present state and usage of the Plots.

The greatest use of the Plots is probably made by Eventers, as the advanced cross country courses use the forest areas and all the courses finish in the central grassed area in the Plots. Additionally, major high profile Horse Trials attract competitors from all over Australia (and internationally for some Events) and this is the only area that is available to them to yard their horses. Eventers tend to be more accepting than other disciplines may be of the more basic facilities that are available at Equestrian Park. Due to the lack of organised parking and the poor ground conditions during wet weather, many vehicles park and set up yards along the verges of the Woolshed road, or adjacent to some permanent yards within the competition grounds themselves.

The grassed central area in the Plots is generally used by show jumpers for schooling and practice purposes only, and attendees at show jumping events usually park and yard their horses at the permanent yards provided in the competition grounds, or on the verges of the Woolshed road, where they are closer to the competition arenas. Some show jumpers prefer to not use the unorganised arrangements in the plots due to the value of the horses involved.

Competitors at Dressage events have made occasional use of the Plots for holding horses overnight in hired portable stables, however the existing facilities are more basic than is desired for their purposes. For dressage events the appearance of horses is very important and organised yarding, preferably covered, and enclosed stables are considered to be ideal. Additionally Dressage events frequently include competitors with stallions which for safety require separate, walled stables. Horses used at high profile Dressage events are often of very high value, and secure holding and stabling facilities are required. For this reason Equestrian Park does not at the moment support the highest level Dressage events, despite the recent construction of arenas that are excellent for the purpose. This probably represents the greatest immediate need for upgraded facilities.

Endurance riders have made occasional use of Equestrian Park as the venue for the start and finish of rides, and would do so more frequently were better facilities provided. The Plots area is used for parking vehicles and floats, marshalling and vetting, and course start and finish zones. The vehicles used by endurance riders can be very large.

The shed is used for the storage of machinery for the maintenance of the Park and the area around it is used for the storage, construction and maintenance by Park user clubs of their assets. This area is used frequently by small numbers of people in the area of the shed and in the park generally.



## 5.2. Facilities.

The existing buildings are a steel machinery shed and a small former cottage.

The machinery shed is of typical agricultural design, approximately 15 x 12m, and is used for the storage of machinery required for the maintenance of the park and smaller tools used for repairing club equipment such as show jumping fences and cross country obstacles. It is connected to electricity and water services.

It is not sufficiently large to store all the required machinery, with several tractors and mowing attachments taking up much of the space. This results in a large amount of equipment and club assets being stored in unsecured structures or in the open under the nearby trees. Some clubs have imported shipping containers to provide secure storage for their assets.

The cottage was formerly used as an office; however it provides only basic accommodation, having very small rooms with low ceilings and minimal fittings. It is of timber framed construction with asbestos cement sheet cladding. The asbestos cement is painted, and may be considered safe as long as it is not disturbed, which limits the opportunities for undertaking renovation work that would involve altering or removing the external cladding.

The cottage contains shower and toilet facilities and a kitchenette which are used by club members when working in the shed area, and is connected to electricity, water and an on site sewerage disposal system that is prone to failure and will not be of sufficient capacity to deal with more fittings than are currently provided in the cottage.

## 5.3. Competition Areas.

The areas of the Plots that are used for riding lie along the western boundary, and in the south western part of the site where the advanced level cross country courses traverse forested tracks. In the central area of the plots is a large space in which none of the original plantings of exotic species have survived except for two large and attractive oak trees and a group of Zelkova. This area is now grassed and is used as the finishing zone of the cross country course and for show jumping competitions and schooling.

These parts of the site are generally higher ground and less subject to waterlogging than the lower parts, and the vegetation has been maintained as a significant asset to the equestrian activities.

## 5.4. Parking & Yards.

The north western part of the Plots is used during large events for parking vehicles ranging from cars to towed horse floats, small trucks and large sometimes articulated floats. There are no organised, allocated parking spaces and attendees locate their vehicles on an ad hoc basis.

Temporary yards are provided for a fee and allocated to attendees at some competitions, but due to the lack of organisation of parking spaces the yards are frequently not utilised as allocated. Many people bring their own portable yards that are set up wherever space is found. There is no electricity, and water is available from taps that were installed for the purpose of watering the trial plots and bear no relationship to the setout of vehicles parking.

The area that is used for parking and setting up yards contains a number of trees that are considered to be significant, however they are not labelled or protected and at large

competitions the disorganised manner in which vehicles are parked and yards set up does not facilitate their conservation.

The only amenities are a small number of toilets outside the plots in the kiosk building and in a small block located between the competition pads, and temporary portable units that are hired for the event. Showers are available only at a nearby sports ground, at a considerable distance from Equestrian Park and on the other side of the Cotter Road; most attendees consider this to be a less than convenient arrangement.

#### 5.5. Areas Available for Future Facilities.

There are several areas that may be used for the siting of future facilities, though some will require some remediation before they are suitable.

There are several areas to the north and east of the areas currently used for parking and yards which have ground conditions reasonably free of waterlogging and contain few trees considered to be significant. These areas could be better used for parking and yards.

A further area in the south eastern corner of the site may be suitable for overflow parking and yards for a very large event, however it is not conveniently located to be considered as a part of the main facilities. At present it contains species of weeds that need to be removed. Access to this area would be by the entry directly onto the Woolshed road on the outside of the Equestrian Park entry gates, which will make it difficult to maintain security and is likely to be disruptive to traffic entering from or exiting to the Cotter Road, which is presently being duplicated and provided with slip lanes for access to the Park. This area is also overlooked from the Cotter Road and buildings or other facilities here may be vulnerable to vandalism. It would be desirable to use the strip of land between the internal vehicle track and the southern boundary for plantings to provide some visual screening of the park.

There are two smaller areas to the east and west of the maintenance shed and cottage that may become waterlogged. That to the east also contains a number of large eucalypts that are considered to be significant, and which are known to be prone to dropping limbs without warning. This danger may be minimised with arborial husbandry, but some danger will persist. Introducing fill and drainage to the area may minimise the risk of waterlogging but would also impact upon the health of the trees.

The area to the west contains no vegetation that is considered to be significant, and could be filled to ameliorate any waterlogging in order to provide an area for expanding the clubs' maintenance and storage facilities once the fill has adequately consolidated.

There are two areas to the south of this where fill was imported in 2013 to build platforms above the level of waterlogging. However, as these contain a considerable depth of fill composed largely of material excavated from building sites, and have been placed upon ground subject to waterlogging it may take some time for them to consolidate sufficiently to be used for any but light weight bearing activities. They could provide useful areas for parking and workspace for club members undertaking maintenance activities.





**Existing Equestrian Activities in the Cotter Plots 2013**

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## 6. Issues Arising due to the Current Usage.

### 6.1. Increasing Numbers of Users.

As the competition grounds at Equestrian Park have been upgraded, there has been an increased number of events held at the Park and an increasing number of attendees at these events - competitions, clinics, schools and casual users.

Prior to the completion of the sand arenas, Equestrian Park was being used irregularly by a small group of clubs. The improved surfaces, increased yarding and refurbished toilet facilities have attracted a broader and more frequent range of users. By November 2013 the Park was already booked for 34 weekends in 2014. ACTEA booking estimates suggest that the number of horses using the Park for formal competition or training purposes rose from 2,033 in 2012 to 3,177 in 2013 – an increase of 56%. It is anticipated that this will increase again in 2014. There are not only more events being held, but there are more riders participating in those events. This count does not include the many private and casual users who take advantage of the arenas and the Park at large any day of the week.



The existing facilities don't provide a secure environment for valuable horses.

### 6.2. The Need for Increased Security.

As the competition grounds at Equestrian Park are improved, permitting higher levels of competition and training, so it is increasingly attracting riders with very valuable horses. Horses that compete at a national level, internationally and at the Olympic Games are elite athletes and may be worth many hundreds of thousands, or even millions of dollars. Competitors bringing such horses to events frequently travel with considerable management and support staff, and require a higher level of security for their horses than may be provided by the existing facilities at Equestrian Park.



The lack of suitable facilities to support the standard of the competition grounds deters high level competitors from attending events here. This paucity of the most advanced riders and horses attending here results in the quality of the competitions being less than the grounds are capable of sustaining, and limits the opportunities that local riders may have to improve their own capabilities by competing against Australia's elite riders.

In order to provide facilities that will encourage elite riders to attend events at Equestrian Park ACTEA needs to be able to provide facilities that will ensure the security of these high value horses. To do this will require having;

- Yards and stables constructed in a manner that will ensure the safety of horses,
- Facilities that cater for the secure accommodation of stallions, particularly for advanced dressage events,
- Parking suitable for the large, expensive floating trucks and articulated vehicles that such competitors typically use, including the provision of reticulated electricity and water services,
- The ability to provide a secure environment in which these competitors may locate themselves during their attendance, with access that may be controlled and monitored to prevent any felonious activity from taking place.



The shared use of roadways by vehicles, horses and pedestrians represents a risk to all, and the use of portable amenities does not provide facilities matching the high standard of the competition grounds.

### 6.3. Traffic Congestion.

As the number of events being held at Equestrian Park increases, and the standard of these events becomes higher, increasing numbers of competitors and spectators are attending the events. As more elite and professional riders and horses are attending there has also been an increase in the size and weight of the vehicles that these attendees use. This is resulting in increasing traffic congestion, and new facilities need to address this issue in the design of improved traffic handling facilities. Factors that are resulting in increasing congestion include;

- An increasing volume of vehicular traffic, with a wide range of vehicle types trying to use the same circulation, from smaller passenger vehicles to four wheeled drives towing floats, small floating trucks and up to large articulated trucks providing accommodation for numbers of horses and living quarters for crew and support staff,
- The unfortunate fact that due to the Woolshed road bisecting Equestrian Park it is necessary for vehicular, pedestrian and horse traffic to cross each others paths. This may be ameliorated by providing distinct circulation for vehicles and horses, such that a small number of crossing points may be readily controlled,
- The poor state of the ground within the plots and the lack of organised circulation there slows the movement of traffic, puts horses and pedestrians at risk and does not allow for the vegetation to be protected,
- If significant rainfall occurs during the conduct of an event the ground in the Plots rapidly degrades and becomes muddy and slippery, and vulnerable to damage from vehicle movements. In extreme conditions, vehicles have become bogged and have required heavy machinery to be brought in to remove them, causing chaotic traffic conditions.
- There has also been an increase in the number of events being hosted at the Woolshed, resulting in vehicles unrelated to equestrian activities using the road that bisects Equestrian Park. If an event at the Woolshed occurs concurrently with an event in Equestrian Park, there is additional congestion from these unrelated traffic movements.



Large vehicles have difficulty manoeuvring and can block the movement of traffic.

- These factors generally have made undesirable the use of the verges of the Woolshed Road for parking floats and trucks at large events. This may only be achieved if alternative facilities are available.
- As the Cotter Road is duplicated in response to increased traffic movements serving the new residential estates in the Molonglo Valley it will become more difficult for traffic moving into or from Woolshed Road. This is being addressed in the design of the Cotter Road by the provision of turning lanes. Provision will also need to be made at the entry to Equestrian Park by way of increasing the amount of manoeuvring and queuing space provided between the intersection and the entry gates. This will most readily be addressed by relocating the entry gates further inside Equestrian Park.
- As the sizes of competitions increases it is important for reasons of the safety of people and horses that competitor's vehicular traffic, especially the big rigs, be kept away from the competition grounds near the arenas.

#### 6.4. The Priorities of User Clubs.

As well as the input made at the regular ACTEA and Equestrian Park Management Group (EPMG) meetings, clubs that use or would potentially use Equestrian Park were formally surveyed in 2012 about their priorities regarding the provision of facilities at Equestrian Park.<sup>20</sup>

As may be anticipated this revealed priorities that vary widely between the different disciplines represented, however there was reasonable consensus about the need for several facilities;

- New amenities to provide toilets and showers, and
- More, and higher standard yards and stables.

These facilities have been treated as being important in the planning of the proposed facilities in the Cotter Plots, and it is anticipated that these facilities, and those required to support them (such as roads, parking, power and water services) will be the first to be constructed when the strategic plan commences to be implemented.

#### 6.5. The Priorities with regard to Equestrian Park Management

As the body responsible for the management and maintenance of Equestrian Park, the EPMG also has priorities for the development of the facilities, distinct from those of the user groups.

- Increased secure storage facilities for grounds maintenance equipment,
- Increased, organised under cover storage facilities for clubs, to enable equipment currently stored in the open where it may inhibit the maintenance of the arboretum,
- The provision of office and workspace accommodation for visiting competition officials, veterinary officers, farriers and the like,
- Organised groundworks that will allow the movement and parking of vehicles, and especially large rigs, without risking damage to the grounds or the arboretum, and to minimise congestion.

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendix G Stakeholder Club Priorities for Equestrian Park - 3 Feb 2012





The increasing number of users and somewhat haphazard parking and setting up of yards causes congestion and can potentially compromise the health of vegetation.

#### 6.4. The Priorities with regard to the Arboretum.

Due to the rather haphazard manner in which the Plots area is used for equestrian activities, and the lack of knowledge regarding the contents of the arboretum, an increase in the number of people using the Plots is likely to have an adverse impact upon the arboretum unless ACTEA, as the custodians of the arboretum, take measures to avoid this.

The priorities for the management of the arboretum entail acquiring and implementing expert advice regarding;

- The content, significance and condition of the surviving specimens in the arboretum,
- Determining if any of the present management practices is having an adverse impact upon the vegetation in the arboretum,
- The manner in which significant specimens may be protected and conserved as assets to the Park and the community,
- The history and value of the arboretum to the Canberra community,
- The management and construction of new facilities in the Plots such that they do not risk damaging specimens in the arboretum or compromise the value of the arboretum as a whole, and that the ongoing operation of those facilities ensures the safety and thrift of the arboretum into the future.
- The recognition that the arboretum is a significant asset to the environment and appearance of Equestrian Park and its value to the equestrian community.