

Current Mining in the unprotected Gardens of Stone area

The Gardens of Stone proposal

August 2018

The spectacular Gardens of Stone landscape occupies the **western plateau and escarpment of the Blue Mountains**, north and south of Lithgow. It is a remarkable combination of dramatic sandstone landforms, featuring rock pagodas and a multitude of threatened plants and animals.

The Gardens of Stone stage 2 (GOS2) proposal would protect 39,000 hectares of largely natural public land, mainly as State Conservation Areas. It includes Newnes, Ben Bullen and Wolgan State Forests. See the Gardens of Stone Stage 2 map at <https://www.bluemountains.org.au/gardensofstone/where.htm>

Current coal mining in the unprotected Gardens of Stone area (GOS2)

Newnes State Forest is a 21,000 hectares plateau north of Lithgow with windswept montane heathlands, nationally endangered upland swamps, unique snowgum-snowgrass woodlands and 67 listed rare plant and animal species. Yet it is unprotected because of coal mining.

While the whole western Coalfields area has been undermined for many years, three current mining leases held by Centennial Coal alone, or in joint venture with overseas companies, together cover almost half of Newnes Plateau. Two of these underground coal mines are currently mining under the Gardens of Stone unprotected area, namely:

- **Springvale**, off the Castlereagh Highway north west of Lithgow and
- **Clarence**, whose mining lease is in the south east of Newnes Plateau east of Lithgow, above Bells Line of Road.

Springvale currently is the sole supplier of coal to Mount Piper Power station while Clarence exports the majority of the coal and supplies Shoalhaven Starches in Nowra. Springvale uses the longwall mining process which is more damaging of the land above.

The third lease, **Angus Place mine**, is currently in care and maintenance but has an extension project part way through assessment. Its mining lease is in the north west part of Newnes Plateau. It is expected to restart underground mining after Springvale finishes in 2024.

In Ben Bullen State Forest, a different part of the Gardens of Stone unprotected area, **Invincible Mine** is expected to restart destructive open-cut mining along the Castlereagh Highway south east of Cullen Bullen soon. Invincible, formerly a Coalpac mine but now owned by the Manildra Group, received approval in February 2018.

More on the current mining operations

Springvale mine

The findings of the Independent Monitoring Panel established in 2015 have confirmed swamps in the Lithgow coalfields can be damaged from longwall mining from further away than was originally claimed. Because of the seriousness of these far field impacts, Centennial has shortened some longwalls in its mining plan and have moved mining further south sooner than originally planned.

However, swamps in the area continue to be damaged as mining progresses, losing water and drying out. As the swamps cannot be offset by similar land, the Government now holds several million dollars from Centennial in bonds. The Gardens of Stone Alliance groups (Colong Foundation, Blue Mountains Conservation Society and Lithgow Environment Group) continue to raise the impacts on the swamps and the gross inadequacy of the offsets process.

As well, Centennial (with Energy Australia) are building a water treatment plant which will stop the need to discharge mine water to the Coxs River and Sydney's drinking water catchment. It is due to be operational in July 2019. It will remove salt from mine water using the reverse osmosis process then send it to Mount Piper Power Station for reuse. Environmental groups have been calling for reverse osmosis treatment for years in the Western Coalfields but coal companies in the past have rejected this as uneconomic. The Gardens of Stone Alliance organisations have helped achieve this change along with 4nature's successful court challenge to Springvale's Extension project in May 2016.

Angus Place mine

Although currently in care and maintenance, Angus Place Centennial has sought approval to increase the mine water it discharges to the Coxs River system. They say they need to pump out underground mine water stored at Angus Place in case nearby Springvale mine needs to store more waste water from its new mining area.

Centennial propose to reduce the very high salt levels in this mine water using a temporary desalination plant! Once the Springvale water treatment plant is operating, Angus Place's discharge will be treated there and discharges to the Coxs River will cease. Although it is good that they are now prepared to treat their mine water, there are other issues with this proposal. (For more, see our Angus Place Mod 5 Submission at <https://www.bluemountains.org.au/>).

Clarence mine

The Environment Protection Authority is still working on stopping polluted mine water from the Clarence Colliery being sent down the Wollangambe River which runs into the Greater Blue Mountains World heritage Area. This is a long process going back to a review of their licence in late 2014.

As the water quality has not achieved a satisfactory level, the option of stopping the discharge altogether has gained support more recently. Lithgow Council has agreed in

principle to investigate taking all the mine water into their water treatment system. There is also the option of a new gold mine project taking it.

For more on Gardens of Stone go to our website at <https://www.bluemountains.org.au/gardensofstone/>

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