



Gardens of stone and the lost city adventures

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Over 30,000 hectares of NSW state forests, including the iconic Gardens of Stone will be transformed into a new eco-tourism and adventure destination on the edge of the Blue Mountains near Lithgow.

The centrepiece of the investment will be the Lost City Adventure Experience, an iconic project, that will include Australia's longest zipline and a spectacular elevated canyon walk.

It will also feature NSW's first Via Ferrata rock-climbing opportunity, a protected climbing route employing steel cables, rungs or ladders, fixed to the rock that climbers can safely attach to.

Premier Dominic Perrottet said the NSW Government was investing \$50 million to transform the area, which will be added to the national parks estate, into an eco-tourism and eco-adventure destination generating jobs and economic growth for the entire region.

"We're investing record amounts in our national parks to protect our natural gems while also generating new industries in our regions to support jobs and creating new iconic experiences so more people can enjoy our natural wonders," Mr Perrottet said.

"This new set of reserves will improve access to this spectacular region attracting domestic and international tourists with upgraded lookouts, walking trails, a 4WD circuit and a world class 35km mountain bike network."

Deputy Premier Paul Toole said this will be a massive boost for Lithgow's local economy, drawing an estimated 200,000-plus extra visitors to the region every year.

"This investment will deliver an iconic tourism and adventuring experience right on Sydney's doorstep and represents one of the State's largest ever investments in a regional ecotourism project," Mr Toole said.

"We expect this new set of reserves to create at least another 190 jobs for the Lithgow region, not to mention the millions of tourism dollars that will flow into the local economy."

Treasurer and Environment Minister Matt Kean said the new reserve will also feature one of the world's great long-distance walks extending from the Wollemi to the Gardens of Stone.

"This new set of reserves will rival the Three Sisters in Katoomba as the destination for visitors and tourists to the mountains west of Sydney," Mr Kean said.

"It will also provide a much-needed lasting legacy for the environment, protecting and providing habitat for numerous threatened and endangered species for future generations."

Key facts

The new reserves will be established by legislation to be introduced in November and will cover 31,500 hectares including:

- Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area (total 28,944 ha) created by the transfer of Newnes, Ben Bullen and Wolgan State forests and Crown land
- additions to Gardens of Stone National Park (342 ha) from Crown land
- additions to Wollemi National Park (2,259 ha) from Newnes State Forest.

An iconic great walk – set to become one of the world's great long distance walks - will extend from the Wollemi to the Gardens of Stone.

This six-day (five-night) walk will feature incredible views across the Wollemi wilderness, allowing visitors to explore ancient pagoda formations and visit one of the world's great birding locations, the Capertee Valley, while enjoying comfortable accommodation and purpose-built eco-cabins.

The new reserves are expected to attract an estimated 200,000+ additional visitors per annum, creating more than 190 jobs in the Lithgow region.

The new reserve contains a diversity of ecosystems and high species richness, and is characterised by striking geological features such as the scenically spectacular 'pagoda country' which represents internationally significant geoheritage.

In addition

The Newnes Plateau is the highest elevation sandstone plateau in the Blue Mountains and contains species such as the Wolgan Snow Gum (*Eucalyptus gregsoniana*) that is not found in the existing Blue Mountains reserves.

The landscape is characterised by cliffs, steep gullies, slot canyons and grassy woodlands.

Threatened ecological communities are present, including significant areas of elevated swamps listed under both Federal and State legislation, as well as box woodland and tableland grassy forest that has been heavily cleared elsewhere.

A number of rare and threatened species are found on the reserves including koalas, spotted-tailed quolls, regent honeyeaters and the Blue Mountains water skink.

The new reserve has exceptional cultural value, with many recorded sites including artefacts, art engravings and pigmentations, carved and scarred trees, stone arrangements and grinding grooves. It encompasses the Mayinygu Marragu Aboriginal Place, a place of special meaning to Wiradjuri people and highly valued by the wider Aboriginal community which contains Aboriginal rock shelters with painted art and is a teaching and occupation site.

This proposal will also allow responsible applications to extend the life of current underground coal mines such as Angus Place, while ensuring additional protections for the environment and unlocking new tourism opportunities.