

# PRESS RELEASE

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## Kosciuszko overrun by wild horses

An estimated 43 kilometres of the critical high mountain headwater streams of the Snowy and Murray Rivers are being severely impacted by an out-of-control growth in wild horse numbers in southern Kosciuszko National Park, according to a new report by two mountain experts.

“There are just too many pest horses,” said Australian National University Adjunct Fellow Dr Graeme Worboys, lead author of a new report titled *Observations of Pest Horse Impacts* and protected area manager specialist.

“Our observations in the Mount Pilot Wilderness Area of Kosciuszko National Park showed multiple impacts from an estimated 14,000 horses, including overgrazing, collapsing stream banks, stream erosion and sphagnum bog and streamside wetland destruction.

“This is destroying the natural vegetation and erosion protection of these headwater catchments and what’s serious, with the numbers of pest horses increasing, it can only get worse.”

Ian Pulsford, a mountains expert and former senior conservation and protected area manager, co-authored the report.

“The two of us have inspected this Mt Pilot of Kosciuszko area intermittently for 40 years and while horses have always been present, this is the worst horse impacts we have ever seen,” Mr Pulsford said.

“These high mountain catchments are too important to be damaged because they deliver crystal-clean mountain waters to Victoria via the Snowy River and to Adelaide via the Murray River.

“This Mt Pilot area is the very top of the continental divide and the highest source of these important waters.”

Healthy sub-alpine catchments for the Murray and Snowy Rivers include rich native streamside vegetation, wetlands with abundant vegetation cover and deep layers of

sphagnum moss and an associated rich assemblage of specially adapted Australian mountain native wildlife.

Some native animal species such as the She-oak Skink are not found anywhere else on Earth.

This streamside habitat ensures that the mountain water quality is high, the water runoff from summer storms and winter snow is filtered and there is a steady flow in the streams.

“We have observed that the pest horses are destroying these streamside environments, which means that the streams are eroding, they are charged with sediment and are very susceptible to rapid run-off and flood events,” Dr Worboys said.

“Unfortunately, many of our Australian native animals will die as these sub-alpine streamside and wetland habitats are destroyed.

“Kosciuszko National Park was reserved to protect these Australian species and they are being directly impacted by these introduced horses.

“Victoria, NSW and South Australia all rely on these mountain catchments being natural and healthy and the high quality Alps water flows have been estimated to be worth \$10 billion dollars per annum to Australia. There are no downstream winners when the Australian Alps river catchments become degraded.”

The May 2013 *Observations of Pest Horse Impacts in the Australian Alps, March 2013* report was prepared by Graeme L. Worboys and Ian Pulsford and is available at [www.mountains-wcpa.org](http://www.mountains-wcpa.org)

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