

**Application for a Purpose Permit to clear Native Vegetation for Rail Construction Camp (L47/00075 - ROBE RIVER MISCELLANEOUS LICENCE and L47/00321 ROBE RIVER MISCELLANEOUS LICENCE - PENDING)**

**Proposed Clearing**

Robe River is proposing to carry out clearing on L47/00075 Robe River Miscellaneous Licence. The Company proposes to construct a construction camp at Wildflower to support rail construction personnel. It is anticipated that the total area required to be cleared for the camp will be substantially less than the study area surveyed.

An estimated area of 26ha of native vegetation is required to be disturbed under the proposed construction program. This clearing lies within a larger area of 145ha (see Figure 1 attached).

Clearing within the NVCP boundaries is required in specific areas preparatory to the placement of buildings and infrastructure for the proposed construction camp.

Clearing shall be carried out using the following plant and equipment:

- Bulldozer for large areas;
- Grader for large areas;
- Front end loader and bobcat for smaller areas; and
- Articulated dump truck for the relocation of overburden.

Management strategies will include, but not be limited to the following:-

- No clearing or works will be undertaken outside the approval boundaries;
- The area to be cleared will be kept to a minimum and clearly demarcated using bunting and appropriate signage;
- Topsoil will be stockpiled for rehabilitation purposes;
- Stockpiles will be clearly signposted and kept to a maximum 2m height to minimise erosion; and
- Dust suppression will be carried out on stockpiles using potable water only.

Flora searches have been conducted over the area and the survey report is attached. Heritage Surveys have been undertaken and no sites were identified. Rare flora and rare fauna searches were provided by the DEC, and these are included in the attached survey report.

**1. Native vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises a high level of biological diversity.**

Five intact vegetation types were recorded from the Wildflower Camp area, all of which are typical of such habitats in the locality. The total number of native species recorded from the study area is within the expected range for an area of this size in this locality, and is not considered to represent a high species richness. The proposed clearing will therefore not impact any features of high diversity.

- 2. Native vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises the whole or a part of, or is necessary for the maintenance of, a significant habitat for fauna indigenous to Western Australia.**

The primary habitats present within the Wildflower Camp area are widespread and abundant in this locality. While some Scheduled or Priority fauna species may utilise these habitats, neither the landforms nor vegetation types represent core habitat for any of these species of conservation significance.

- 3. Native vegetation should not be cleared if it includes, or is necessary for the continued existence of, rare flora.**

No Declared Rare Flora were recorded from the Wildflower Camp area and none would be expected to occur. No Priority flora were recorded from the study area. There is a possibility that the Priority 1 species *Goodenia lyrata* may occur on the clayey plains in the southern section of the study area. If there is to be any clearing of this habitat beyond the existing disturbance areas, then further targeted searches for this species should be undertaken in the immediate development areas.

- 4. Native vegetation should not be cleared if it comprises the whole or a part of, or is necessary for the maintenance of a threatened ecological community.**

No Threatened Ecological Communities or Priority Ecological Communities occur within the Wildflower Camp area. The Mulga over Spinifex vegetation occurring at the interzone between the stony and clayey plains may be considered to be an ecosystem at risk, however the proposed clearing of this vegetation is minimal, even at a local scale.

- 5. Native vegetation should not be cleared if it is significant as a remnant of native vegetation in an area that has been extensively cleared.**

Most of the Pilbara bioregion has never been cleared, however a combination of weed invasions, hot frequent bushfires, feral predators and grazing by exotic herbivores is causing a loss of soil fertility and vegetation cover through some pastoral areas. Erosion from increased runoff velocities is also occluding drainage lines in places. While historic clearing has taken place for the previous accommodation village in the Wildflower Camp area, this is negligible in comparison to the Pilbara wide representation of Beard's broad vegetation units mapped for the study area. The vegetation types identified within the project area thus do not represent stands of extensively cleared vegetation units.

- 6. Native vegetation should not be cleared if it is growing in, or in association with, an environment associated with a watercourse or wetland.**

There are no permanent watercourses or wetlands within the Wildflower Camp area.

- 7. Native vegetation should not be cleared if the clearing of the vegetation is likely to cause appreciable land degradation.**

Apart from the areas cleared for the historic accommodation village and associated infrastructure, the habitats and vegetation types of the Wildflower Camp area are in relatively good condition. The soils of the northern half of the study area comprise stony loams which are not overly conducive to erosion or weed invasion following disturbance. The clayey loams of the southern half of the study area would be more susceptible to both erosion and weed invasion and further development in this area should be avoided.

Controlled spraying should be conducted immediately for the infestation of *Melinis repens* on the site of the old Wildflower Camp and this area should be quarantined until this aggressive weed is eradicated. Strict weed hygiene measures must be implemented to ensure that no additional weeds are introduced to the area or the vicinity, particularly given the proximity of the Karijini National Park. Provided these measures are undertaken, it is considered that the proposed clearing will not increase land degradation in the project area.

#### **Comment**

*The Company has done two rounds of spraying so far, and have another round of spraying booked in for August 2008.*

- 8. Native vegetation should not be cleared if the clearing of the vegetation is likely to have an impact on the environment values of any adjacent or nearby conservation area.**

The boundary of the A-class Karijini National Park is less than 200m north-west of the north-western corner of the Wildflower Camp area. Provided that the population of *Melinis repens* is eradicated and effective weed management strategies are subsequently implemented, it is considered that the proposed clearing will have no impact on this conservation reserve.

It is noted that once the WA pastoral exclusion process is enacted in 2015, the additional of a section of Juna Downs Station to the Karijini National Park will mean that the location of the Wildflower Camp will effectively be within the reserve itself. Although the camp will have been decommissioned and the site rehabilitated by the time this extension of the park occurs, it is recommended that the proponent discusses the proposed location of this camp with the Department of Environment and Conservation in light of this.

#### **Comment**

*The DEC is well aware of the plans - both the regional office, Science division, Environmental Management Branch and the Industry Regulation Branch. The camp has been discussed at our regular quarterly meeting with the DEC plus at two 320 Rail specific meetings with the DEC. In addition, it was raised last week at our meeting with the Industry Regulation Branch. The DEC are also advisers / reviewers of our weed management strategy for the camp.*

- 9. Native vegetation should not be cleared if the clearing of the vegetation is likely to cause deterioration in the quality of surface or underground water.**

There are no significant surface drainage systems in the Wildflower Camp area. Given the small scale of clearing required for the proposed project, there is no reason to expect that surface or groundwater quality in the area would be affected.

- 10. Native vegetation should not be cleared if the clearing of the vegetation is likely to cause, or exacerbate, the incidence or intensity of flooding.**

The stony plains of the northern section of the Wildflower Camp area would shed water during heavy rain events to the more low-lying clayey plains in the southern section. There may be some ponding of water on these clayey plains after substantial rain, however given the small amount of vegetation clearing proposed for the study area, this would not be expected to exacerbate either the frequency or the intensity of flooding through these areas.