

Southern Tasmanian Ski Association  
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Hobart  
TAS 7001

18 March 2015

Representation TWWHA Management Plan  
The Director of National Parks and Wildlife  
GPO Box 44  
Hobart  
TAS 7001

Dear Sir,

**Re: Draft Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) Management Plan**

***Rationale for Submission***

As the principal community organization supporting snow skiing in Southern Tasmania, the Southern Tasmanian Ski Association (STSA) is well placed to comment on the TWWHA Management Plan, particularly in relation to winter activities in the Mount Field National Park. Mount Field National Park is now a key element of the TWWHA, having been added in the 2013 extension. Given Mount Field's status as one of the first two National parks to be declared in Tasmania (in 1916), and its exceptional natural and cultural values we consider that this to be a positive and timely outcome. The draft management plan acknowledges that downhill and cross country skiing have been traditional and popular activities within Mount Field National Park for more than ninety years, but does not provide sufficient assurances for the continuation of this popular outdoor activity. Our submission addresses a number of aspects of the plan, and in particular its shortcomings in respect of presentation and the visitor experience.

***Skiing at Mount Field National Park***

The Southern Tasmanian Ski Association is the peak body representing winter park users at Mount Field National Park with membership of the following major outdoor clubs:

- Alpine Club of Tasmania
- Hobart Walking Club
- Mount Mawson Ski Club
- Oldina Ski Club
- Old Uni Club (Viet Vo Club)
- Ski Club of Tasmania
- Former University Ski Club
- Wellington Ski and Outdoor Club
- Tasmanian Snowboarders

STSA is a not-for-profit volunteer organization whose purpose is to encourage skiing, snowboarding and associated outdoor activities at Mount Mawson. Our volunteers put in many hours of work to maintain skiing infrastructure on the mountain, as well as provide community updates through the [www.mtmawson.info](http://www.mtmawson.info) website. This website includes updates from a high technology web camera that enables users to view Mount Mawson's

snow and mountain conditions via the internet, and is linked to a number of tourist and recreational websites around the world.

Any funds earned from sale of ski tickets are re-invested directly into maintenance and operations of the Mount Mawson Ski Field.

In addition the STSA provides Australian Ski Patrol Association (ASPA) qualified ski patrol services and ski patrol training for the Mount Mawson Ski Field, a function provided continuously over many years. First Aid services are provided free-of-charge to all visitors to the alpine area – not just those using the downhill ski tows. On a number of occasions Ski Patrol volunteers have been used as first response in search and rescue operations for the area, substantially contributing to the safety of the public using the Mt Field National Park.

The TWWHA Management Plan refers to nature-based recreation on page 46, but tends to de-emphasise the importance of snow skiing and associated winter activities in the World Heritage area. Inclusion of a photograph of downhill skiing in the section on social and economic values would provide additional balance. It is also noted that Mount Field National Park is the second most-visited park after Cradle Mountain / Lake St Clair. Significant numbers of visitors come to the park when snow falls, with many taking the opportunity to engage in downhill skiing or cross country skiing. Variability in frequency of snowfall means that peak demand is increased when snow does arrive, with consequent need for visitor facilities that can provide shelter, interpretation and safety for large groups of (often) inexperienced visitors making an infrequent trip to the mountains.

This was evidenced in winter 2014, when the busiest day of the year at Lake Dobson occurred on a Saturday in August 2014 following snowfall to low levels.



Volunteer Tow Manager skinning up the Mawson run early one morning to set up the tow for the day's operation.

## **Visitor Experience**

The Management Objective described in Chapter 6 of the TWWHA Management Plan “Management for Presentation” is *“To provide a diversity of visitor experiences in a manner that is consistent with the conservation of natural and cultural values”*. The STSA submits that downhill snow skiing at the Mount Mawson Ski Field is entirely consistent with this objective. The ski field is a small footprint, low environmental impact operation that has been in constant use for more than fifty years. It supports regional tourism, the local economy and provides additional diversity in the marketing of Tasmania. Interstate and international tourists do visit the ski-fields, even if only to appreciate the uniqueness of downhill skiing with traditional rope tows or to enjoy the winter alpine scenery in company with others.

In the context of categorization of TWWHA experience “streams” (page 116) the Mount Mawson Ski Field and the alpine area surrounding it provide both “Experience from the Edge” and “In from the Edge” day experiences for large numbers of visitors.

Chapter 6 includes a number of important statements that are fully supported by the STSA:

- *“Each experience is supported by the provision of infrastructure and social context, provision of appropriate thematic interpretation and by management presence and planning”* (page 116)
- *“Development of infrastructure, resourcing of management presence.....must all be prioritized where visit demand is highest or there are gaps in presentation opportunities”* (page 116)
- *“It is essential that facilities, management and experiences match the expectations of visitors to the TWWHA”* (page 117)

The issue with the TWWHA Management Plan is that whilst these statements are indisputable, there is little evidence of commitment of appropriate resources and budgets by the Tasmanian and Federal Governments to actually provide the necessary infrastructure and facilities in a timely manner.

In the case of the alpine area of the Mount Field National Park, with its existing, community-based downhill ski field there is both high demand, and a clear gap in “presentation” for visitors. Expectations of winter visitors to the TWWHA (Mount Mawson Ski Field) are not being met. We will comment further on this in a subsequent section.

## **TWWHA Management Plan Comment on Snow Skiing**

The STSA considers that section 6.4.7 “Snow skiing” needs to be written in a more positive manner, and disputes the statement about the Mount Mawson Ski Field’s use being limited by increasingly marginal conditions and the nature of the site. Snowfalls have always been intermittent in the Tasmanian mountains, including the TWWHA, and yet the STSA volunteers at Mount Mawson have been able to offer skiing to the Tasmanian public for more than 50 years. Seasons are shorter than they were prior to the construction of the Lake Pedder impoundment, but the Mount Mawson Ski Field is located to maximize the opportunity for the Tasmanian community and visitors to be able to easily access downhill skiing locally when Winter snowfalls occur. The aspect is such that snow blowing off the Mawson plateau collects on the ski field slopes, enabling low-key downhill skiing and snow play to be readily available for visitors.

The STSA volunteers have also invested significant labour over many years to maintain and improve existing ski field infrastructure. The snow fences adjacent to the ski runs are effective at trapping and retaining snow, meaning that on many occasions it is possible to run the downhill tows when there is insufficient snow for cross-country skiing.

The result is that when a good “snow day” occurs Mount Mawson attracts large crowds to the TWWHA.

### ***Public Shelter and Interpretative Facility***

It is ironic that on page 134 the TWWHA Management Plan notes that “*the Mt Mawson Skifield Site Management Plan, as an action of the Mount Field Management Plan, has not been completed*”, and then goes on to recommend that:

- “*A site plan for the Lake Dobson-Mt Mawson area will be developed within three years of the gazettal of this plan. The site plan will consider:*
  - *Provision of a public shelter and interpretative facility at the skifield area*”.

A further 3 years to develop a plan to act is unacceptable. The current visitor facilities at Mount Mawson are woefully inadequate, and fall well short of what is expected for a property of World Heritage status, or indeed any public recreation space.

Management Plans for Mount Field National Park going back as 2002 have identified the need for a suitable public shelter and visitor facility at the Mount Mawson Ski Field. In May 2014 the Tasmanian Government, through the Parks and Wildlife Service, sought public input in regard to the proposed replacement of the Mount Mawson Public Day Shelter. The STSA undertook community consultation, visited similar facilities in Australia and New Zealand, prepared a detailed brief for the facility and commissioned architects to prepare a set of concept plans to allow this urgent project to be progressed. Details are attached at Appendix A.



Current TWWHA Visitor Facilities at Mount Field National Park

The need for a thermally efficient, custom designed day shelter and associated facilities is supported and understood by all stakeholders, and will provide a significantly enhanced experience for visitors to the alpine area at Mount Field year-round. It is a project ready to commence, and fully consistent with the management objectives outlined in Chapter 6 of the TWWHA Management Plan.

The TWWHA Management Plan needs to include specific actions to illustrate how the objectives are to be met. A commitment by the Tasmanian and Commonwealth Governments to construct a TWWHA Interpretative Facility on the existing prepared site at Mount Mawson is required as part of this plan. Waiting a further 3 years to develop a plan (making a total of 16 years since the requirement was identified as a priority) is not acceptable, is inconsistent with the TWWHA management objectives, and ignores the fact that the Tasmanian Government has already undertaken public consultation on this topic.

Commencement of construction of a TWWHA Alpine Visitors Centre and Day Shelter in 2015 would be a fitting way to mark the centenary of the establishment of the Mount Field National Park in 2016.

### ***Historic Heritage***

In section 6.6 of the TWWHA Management Plan the statement is made:

- *“It is important to acknowledge that local communities have ongoing connections to the history of the TWWHA”.*

This is certainly the case with snow skiing at Mount Field. There is an active interest in the ski history of Tasmania, and STSA delegates will be attending the Australian Ski History Association conference in Thredbo in May this year. Skiing commenced from huts at Lake Fenton in the early 1920's after the pack- horse track was cut, and there was active skiing from the Twilight Tarn Hut for many decades. The Ski Club of Tasmania donated the historic Twilight Tarn Hut to the Tasmanian Government a number of years ago, and it contains a modest ski museum and memorabilia. It acts as a delightful lunch spot for bushwalkers tackling the circuit from the Broad River Valley to the Tarn Shelf.

Unfortunately the Twilight Tarn Hut has been allowed to degrade in condition, and it is not referenced in the TWWHA Management Plan on page 135. The Plan needs to explicitly reference the importance of the cultural heritage of the Twilight Tarn Hut, and ideally commit to a plan for restoration and maintenance.

On page 136 it is noted:

- *“The 2013 boundary extension contains a number of places where a range of recreational activities have occurred over a long period, and the opportunity to continue them remains of importance to surrounding communities”.*

This is certainly the case for the Mount Mawson Ski Field, including its three main downhill ski tows (Mawson, University and Rodway). Tasmanian skiers and bushwalkers have a long cultural tradition of being able to access skiing at Mount Field National Park, and generations of Tasmanians have made the relatively short trip to the edge of the TWWHA to participate in winter snow activities. For more than fifty years the STSA has continued to operate the ski field as a low key, non-profit, club-run, family- orientated facility that welcomes participation of the general public.



It is essential that the TWWHA Plan recognizes this pre-existing activity, and the cultural and historic connection of the Tasmanian community to skiing at the Mount Mawson Ski Field in the TWWHA.

## **Safety**

The Southern Tasmanian Ski Association believes that the safety of visitors to the TWWHA should be a priority at all times, and endorses the management action outlined on page 138 of the TWWHA Management Plan:

- *“Provide information, interpretation and educational material that raise visitor awareness of individual responsibility for personal safety, with the focus on ensuring visitors understand potential hazards and are sufficiently well prepared.”*

The provision of signage, whilst essential, does not, however, go far enough in providing a proactive approach to safety. The Mount Mawson Ski Field is part of the Visitor Services Zone that the Plan states:

- *“...is an area that provides, or is anticipated to provide, the highest level of developed visitor facilities, and where the majority of visitors experience the TWWHA.....It promotes visitation and provides services and facilities according to levels of usage and environmental constraints” (page 56)*

The absence of a proper, thermally efficient, custom designed day shelter and associated facilities at Mount Mawson poses a significant safety risk for the large number of visitors who hike up to the ski fields, particularly in Winter.

As outlined in the introduction to this submission the Southern Tasmanian Ski Association provides a fully trained and accredited Ski Patrol whenever the downhill ski tows are running, but is unable to provide coverage at other times, or beyond the ski boundary area. The experience of Ski Patrol is that it is often hypothermia of children or inexperienced adults visiting the snow that is the biggest safety risk.

Tasmanian alpine weather can be very changeable at any time of year, and visitors require a facility which provides safety and shelter on Mount Mawson. It is not uncommon to have several hundred visitors on the top of the mountain in cold, snowy conditions, and a small unheated shipping container as currently provided by the Tasmanian Government is grossly inadequate as a place of retreat and shelter.

In August 2014 the shortcomings of the current facilities were emphasized when a visiting French tourist (bushwalker) suffered a medical emergency whilst hiking on the Snow Gum Track at Mount Field (beyond the ski fields) and was evacuated to Hobart by rescue helicopter. Whilst waiting for the helicopter it was necessary for him to be taken to a private ski hut due to the lack of a comfortable place to keep him warm at the ski fields.

A proper public shelter will not only reduce the safety risk, but also enable visitors to the World Heritage Area to enjoy a winter alpine experience supported by appropriate infrastructure that meets their expectations. The need for this facility to address the identified safety risk is very clear, and whilst it is appropriate to *“systematically monitor and evaluate the incidence and cause of deaths & serious injuries” (page 138)* the TWWHA Management Plan needs to commit to pro-active action now, rather than waiting for serious incidents to occur.

## **Management Zones and Overlays**

Map 12 on page 175 of the TWWHA Draft Management Plan proposes a series of management zones and overlays for the Lake Dobson/ Mount Mawson area of the Mount Field National Park. The Southern Tasmanian Ski Association is supportive of the proposed zoning, but notes that the depiction of the ski tows is inaccurate. The map appears to show the Mawson and University tows, but is missing the Beginners and Rodway tows. This is despite the Rodway tow being specifically mentioned on page 134.

Whilst the Map does not purport to be fully accurate (existing buildings are not shown either) the STSA believes that all the existing ski tows should be shown. Each provides a different experience for winter visitors to the TWWHA, and all are maintained by STSA for operation when snow conditions permit.

## **Conclusion**

The Southern Tasmanian Ski Association has acted as a custodian of downhill skiing at Mount Mawson for over fifty years, and is pleased that the iconic values of the Mount Field National Park have been recognized as worthy of World Heritage status via their inclusion in the TWWHA since 2013. The TWWHA Management Plan needs to recognize, however, the longstanding connection of the Tasmanian community to the winter landscape at the Mount Mawson Ski Field, and the valuable role the Ski Field plays in enhancing the range of activities available for locals and visitors to the TWWHA.

The TWWHA Management Plan includes principles that will be helpful in the management of the TWWHA over the forthcoming decade. There are, however, a number of critical issues that need to be addressed in the Plan. Foremost amongst these is construction in 2015-16 of a TWWHA Alpine Visitors Centre / Day Shelter and associated facilities at Mount Mawson.

Current facilities are not suitable for the large numbers of visitors to the TWWHA alpine area at Mount Field National Park and pose an unacceptable safety risk. The Tasmanian Government has been proposing to build a suitable facility since 2002, and has recently completed a comprehensive public consultation process to progress the project. The STSA has provided a detailed response, a summary of which is attached at Appendix A.

A commitment by State and Federal Governments to support the TWWHA stated principles and management objectives with the allocation of resources and budgets for visitor facilities at Mount Field National Park will significantly enhance the value and relevance of the TWWHA Management Plan.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Peter L Davis  
President  
Southern Tasmanian Ski Association

## Appendix A:

### Design Brief for an Alpine Visitors Centre Mount Field National Park, TWWHA

#### Mt Mawson Day Shelter

Prepared by Southern Tasmanian Ski Association  
28 June 2014

This document has been prepared by STSA to assist the Parks and Wildlife Service in their consideration of a replacement for the previous Sitzmark Lodge. It includes general principles and concepts for the desired functionality, together with architect – prepared sample floor plans, elevations and artist's impressions for the facility.

#### ***A destination in its own right***

The Mt Mawson day shelter should be an inviting building which is an attractive addition to the Park infrastructure – a smaller alpine version of the Parks Visitor Centre at Russell Falls. For many families the building will be the lunch spot after walking around Lake Dobson and up the Mawson jeep trail – where they are rewarded with views and a safe dry space to stop and rest. Outside decks, picnic tables and toilets are provided.

As such the building needs to be of a human scale that complements other structures already on the mountain (such as the tow motor huts). It needs to be the sort of place where visitors to Mt Field are happy to just relax and enjoy the alpine area, as well as providing a valuable place of retreat in inclement weather year – round.

#### ***Consolidation***

The new facility provides an opportunity to reduce the number of separate buildings in the alpine activity zone by incorporating first aid (ski patrol), belt issue and toilets. This will allow the removal of the existing toilet block (which is inconveniently located 50 metres away), the belt issue hut, and the shipping container housing the first aid facility.

#### ***Location***

The building should be located on the disturbed site previously occupied by Sitzmark Lodge. This is centrally located between the Mawson and University Ski Tows, and adjacent to the Beginners Tow. This location affords good views of the skiing activity, but also attractive views to the Broad River Valley. It is not a skyline location, and is therefore not obtrusive (or visible) from Lake Dobson. The preliminary site survey carried out by CDA Architects for STSA indicates that a building can be constructed with decks accessing the up-hill slope, with space beneath for storage, toilets or a training room / interpretative centre. The site has good vehicular access, and the building could provide a garage space underneath. The drawings prepared for STSA have been based on a



preliminary site measurement and survey, which has confirmed that the proposed building will fit inside the disturbed area from the previous Sitzmark Lodge.

### ***Thermally efficient***

The site is located at 1150 metres elevation, and as such can experience very cold conditions, including blizzards, strong winds and low temperatures at any time of year. Accordingly the building needs to be well insulated (R7) including ceilings, walls and floor, and be double-glazed. Windows should be located to capture winter sun. Doors should have closers and weather seals. An efficient high-output heater should be located in the main lunch area.

### ***External form***

The site lends itself to a relatively narrow building, oriented along the existing cut where the two shipping containers are located. To ensure good connection / views of the mountain and ski slopes it is proposed that the main lunch area has high windows, and is located at the Northern end. This also ensures that the public areas are bright and maximize solar gain, and leads to a simple single-pitch roof design. The building needs to have a generous deck around it for outdoor lunch, and as a gathering place for the public. It is noted that on busy ski days the Mt Mawson ski field is heavily used, with crowds of several hundred visitors in the area.

The lunch room is accessed directly from the outside deck, with a pit and grate at the door to minimize ingress of snow into the building.

### ***Materials***

The building needs to be constructed of low energy, low maintenance materials which are sympathetic to the alpine site. STSA believes that this can be achieved through the use of rot and mould-resistant timbers which require minimal maintenance – eg spotted gum or macrocarpa. A review of other buildings in the alpine environment at Mt Field indicates that window ledges in particular are susceptible to rotting due to accumulation of moisture from the very damp environment and it is recommended that powder-coated, double glazed aluminium frames be used for all windows.

For the internal lunch room the floor should be hardwood, possibly covered with indoor-outdoor carpet or vinyl. This needs to be an easy-clean option – recognizing that ingress of water, snow and possibly mud will occur on occasions.

External decks should be treated pine, with powder-coated aluminium balustrades.

For the basement of the building (which can be subject to snow accumulation) it would be possible to use locally-sourced dolerite to provide an attractive stone base. This will ensure that the building is an attractive addition, sympathetic to the landscape in which it is situated. Tasmania has a number of excellent stonemasons who can use random stone, and the use of already disturbed rock piles on the site could provide the additional benefit of enhancing the grooming of the beginners run in front of the building.

## **General Layout**

A range of options exist for the interior layout of the building, and STSA has developed concept plans to illustrate a proposed solution to the design brief. The key elements are as follows:

- Lunch room / public day area – located at the Northern end of the building, with large windows for views and solar gain. Picnic tables available both inside and outside. A heater centrally located and screened from children. The lunch room will also have facilities for the conduct of PWS or STSA training, including supporting ASPA training for both Ben Lomond and Mt Mawson.
- Kiosk – a lockable kiosk area which could be operated on ski days by the STSA in conjunction with Waterfalls Café to provide hot and cold drinks, pies, sandwiches and confectionary. The kiosk has two serveries- one directly into the lunch room, and one to the outside deck. Includes lockable storage. The kiosk will require a sink, electricity and gas supply for food preparation.
- Belt Issue room – this is where the 200 belts used for the rope tows are housed, and tickets sold to downhill skiers and snowboarders. Its location adjacent to the kiosk assists with efficient operations for both volunteers and visitors.
- Toilets – male, female and disabled toilets are provided adjacent to the belt issue room. These can be accessed from either inside or outside the building for added convenience for users. By being located upstairs they are convenient to users, and the holding tanks can be readily accessed from below for pumping out.
- First Aid / Ski Patrol – this is a critical facility for winter operations, and meets the requirements of the Australian Ski Patrol Association. Key elements are external level access and wide door to allow an injured patient to be brought indoors on the akya (rescue sledge), together with a patient bed, drug storage, general storage, sink and heater. Consideration needs to be given to provide separation of an injured patient awaiting evacuation from members of the public seeking assistance with minor injuries.
- The Ski Patrol room is located at the Southern end of the building to maximize views of the ski area, and to monitor visitor arrivals.
- Interpretation displays. The building can also be used to house interpretative material outlining some of the history of the Park, together with information on flora and fauna. Pictures and some artifacts could be displayed in the lunch area, but the split level nature of the building means that there is space for a museum-type display area in a room below the lunch room. Alternatively this room could be used for training purposes or storage.
- Store-room/ workshop – the downstairs part of the building can be used to provide storage for both STSA and PWS spare materials and tools used on the mountain. The height of the building means that the store area can be accessed through an external roller door, with direct vehicular access.

## **Energy Systems**

### *Heating*

The building will require a high-output, energy efficient heater for the main lunch area, together with a secondary heater for the First Aid room. Options for the main heater include slow combustion wood, LP Gas, or diesel. Provision of a wet back system on the heater will provide hot water for use in the kiosk and ski patrol.

Wood, whilst familiar to most users, has the disadvantage of being bringing dirt and dust into the public space, with potential fire risk. LP gas is efficient, and could be used for water heating as well. If this solution was adopted it would be necessary to provide a

reasonable-size LP gas tank for the building, and fit the heater with a timer to ensure it turned off after, say, one hours use.

An alternative heating source, as demonstrated at the Mt Cheeseman Visitors Centre (NZ) is a diesel heater. This looks like a wood heater, and again would need to be fitted with a timer to avoid excessive fuel use. It would be necessary to provide a separate diesel tank for the heater to avoid running down the fuel required for the diesel tow motors. Diesel refueling could potentially be linked with refueling the ski tow tanks.

### *Electricity*

The kiosk, belt issue room and first aid room will require 240 V power. An inverter running off batteries charged by a photovoltaic array can provide this. The lunch room should be provided with 240 V outlets to enable it to be used for training and seminars (projection of films etc). Similarly it would be appropriate to provide 240V outlets in the kiosk, ski patrol room and any interpretative display area and the storeroom. The building should be fitted with a limited number of LED lights with timer switches.

To maximize solar input to the PV array the array could be located on the Northern roof of the existing Mawson motor hut – this has the correct slope and orientation for solar gain.

The PV/battery/inverter system should also be backed with a key-start generator. Depending on the decision made for the principal heater source this could be either gas or diesel powered.

### *Water*

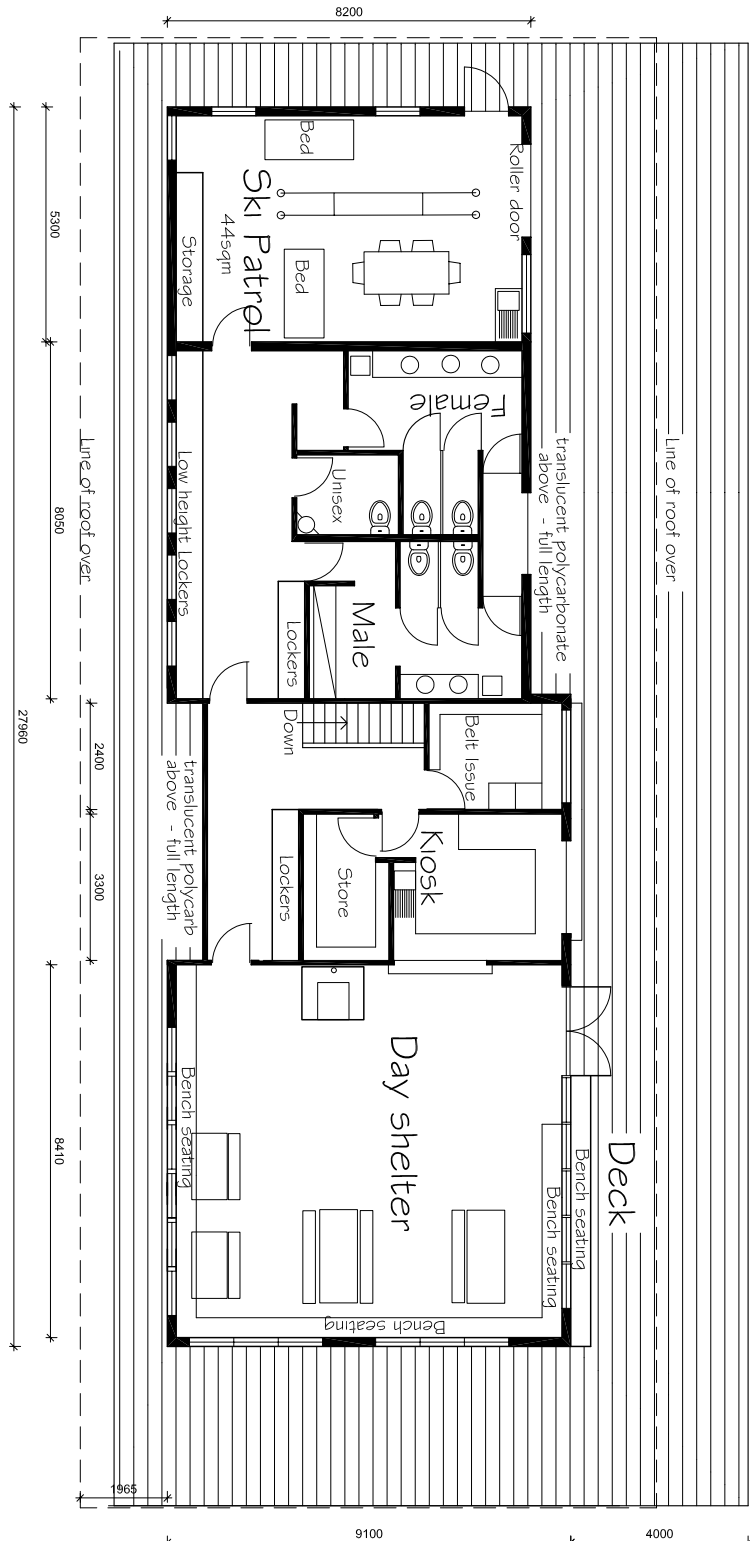
Rainwater should be collected off the building roof to provide water to the sinks in the toilets, first aid room and kiosk. The rainwater tanks can be located under the building.

### *Toilets and Grey Water*

It is assumed that the toilets will be “long drop” into an aerated composting system, which can be accessed from underneath the building. Alternatively a commercial on-site wastewater treatment system could be used. Water from the sinks can be treated through the same system or a grease trap.

### *Security*

The First Aid Room, Belt Issue, Kiosk and store rooms should be lockable, but the public day shelter (lunch room) and toilets should remain accessible at all times. Signage will be required to discourage overnight usage of the public space for camping.



## Upper Level Floor Plan

Scale 1:100



Mt Field Ski Fields Day Shelter

Proposed New Building

Tasmanian National Parks & Wildlife Service/STSA  
Mt Field National Park

Scale 1:100  
June 2014

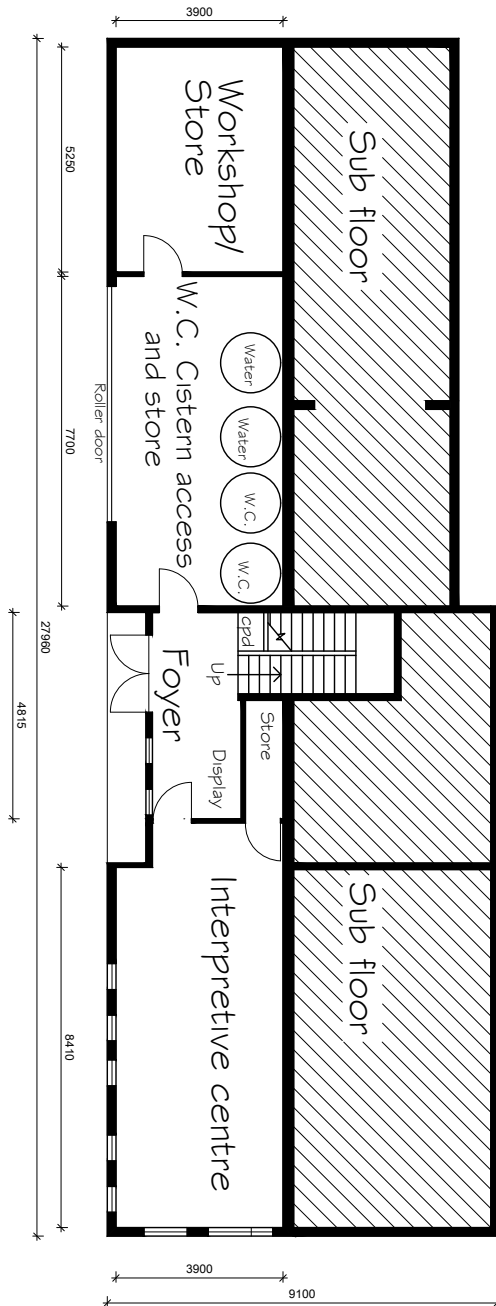
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Scale 1:100  
June 2014



## Lower Level Floor Plan

Scale 1:100

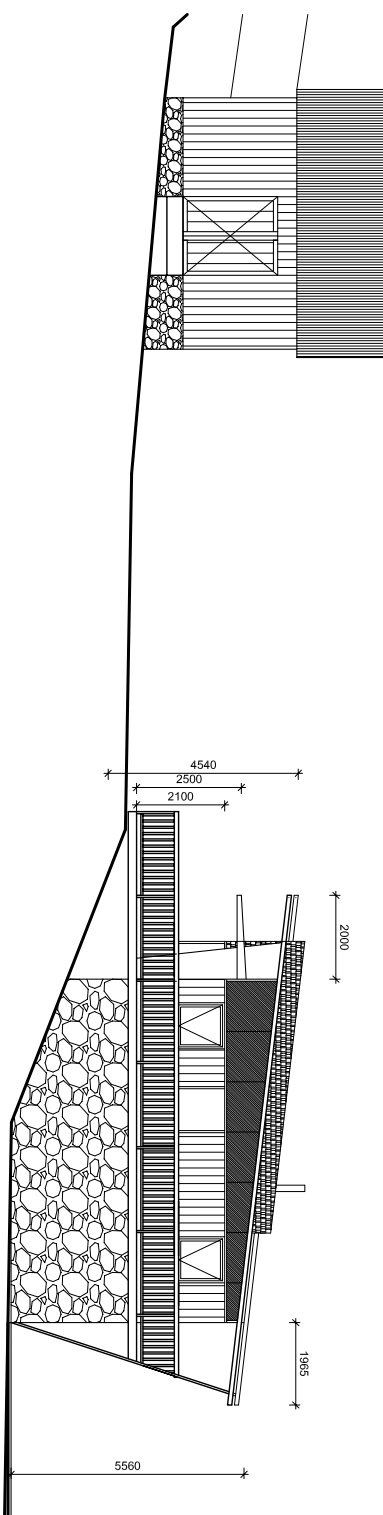
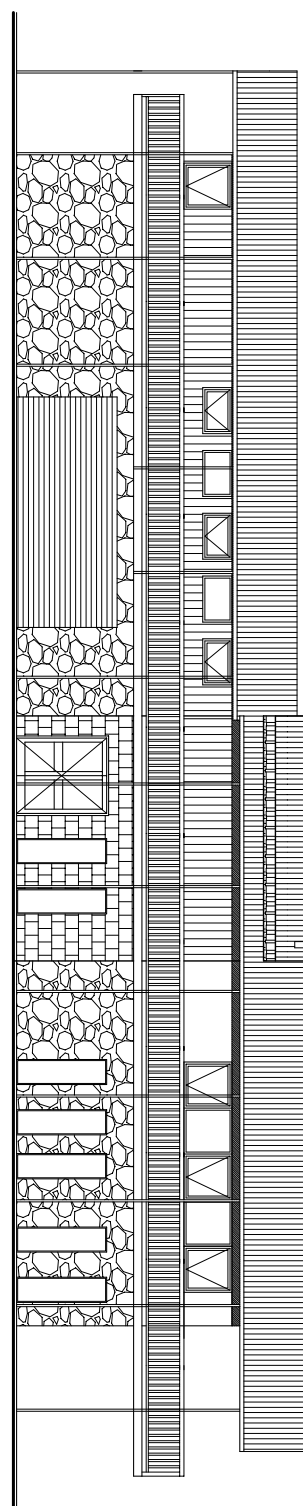
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Mt Mawson Alpine Visitors Centre  
Proposed New Building  
Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service/STSA  
Mt Field National Park

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Elevations  
Scale 1:100

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Mt Field Ski Fields Day Shelter

Proposed New Building

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Mt Field National Park

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Perspective sketch from the North West  
Scale: unrated

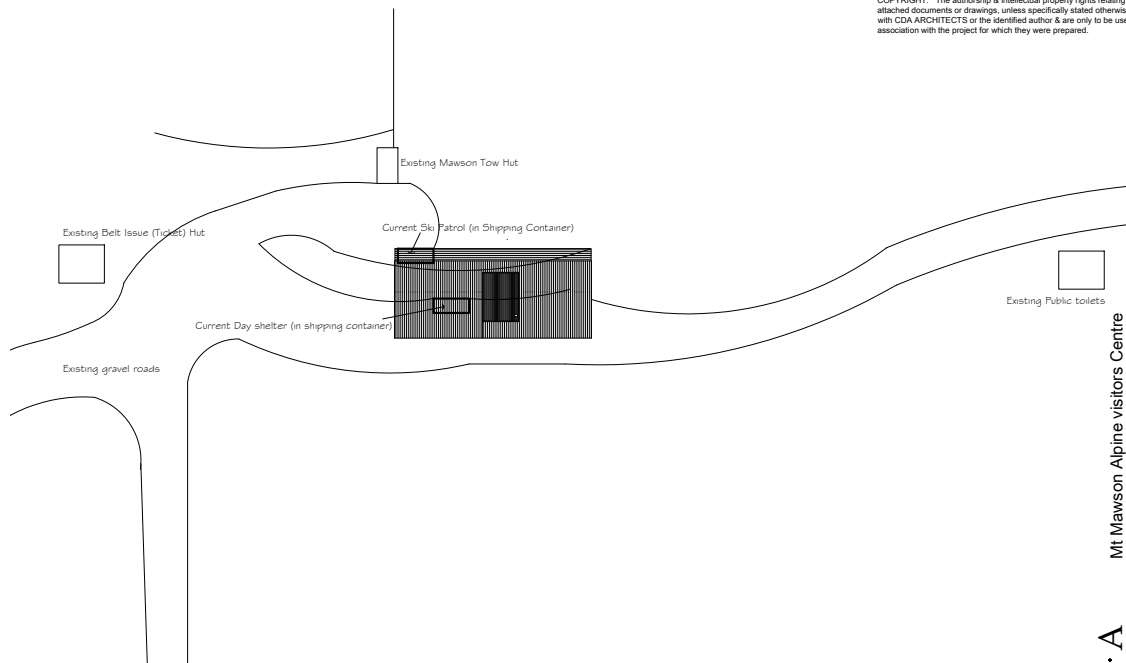


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Mt Mawson Alpine visitors Centre  
Proposed New Building  
Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service/STSA  
Mt Field National Park

Scale: NTS  
June 2014

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Roof and site Plan  
Scale: 1:500



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Proposed New Building  
Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service/STSA  
Mt Field National Park

Scale: 1:500  
June 2014

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