It's all systems go for the
Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve

A team from Australia Zoo has commenced an in-depth wildlife survey and eco-system assessment work on the recently declared Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve, located on the former Bertiehaugh pastoral station north of the Wenlock River.

The Reserve has been set aside as a tribute to Steve Irwin, Australia’s world leading Wildlife Warrior.

The nationally significant Wildlife Reserve was set aside by the National Reserve System section of the Department of the Environment following assessment of a submission presented by Australia Zoo earlier in the year.

As well as protecting an extensive area of the catchments of the Wenlock and Ducie Rivers, the area is also going to be a focal point for a wide range of research work under the guidance of Professor Craig Franklin from the University of Queensland.

As well as the survey work, the team has been busy assessing different locations for the studies.

Australia Zoo has been a major partner in co-operative crocodile research with the University of Queensland and Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service in Lakefield National Park and the Weipa, lower Wenlock River area since 2003.

The dedication of the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve will enable the continuation of this groundbreaking research on a long-term basis along one of the nation’s most biologically important rivers systems.

Other planned research work is focusing on fire ecology and significant reptile, bird and mammal species.

It is anticipated that researchers from Queensland Fisheries Service and University of Queensland are also going to extend their studies of freshwater sharks, sawfish, and rays over parts of the Wildlife Reserve.

The small but biologically significant rainforest areas that are dotted across the reserve are a priority for research and management.

These “relic” rainforests contain rare plant species with perhaps new species awaiting discovery.

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These scrubs will be carefully managed to protect them from fire and damage from feral animals and weeds.

The Witherspoon family, who will maintain a sublease over part of the Reserve for a set period, have been vigilant in weed control and managing their cattle to keep them away from watercourses and the “sensitive scrubs.

This fact will make managing the reserve a lot easier for all concerned.

Australia Zoo is also looking forward to working with the area’s Traditional Owners and the Mapoon Community Rangers in monitoring and protecting the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve and the Wenlock and Ducie River catchments generally.

The nature of wildlife research and survey work is very...
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sensitive to human activity, and for this reason, the Steve Irwin Wildlife Reserve will remain closed to all public access.

Both educational signage, and signage advising of the closed status the Reserve will be erected, and the closure will be strictly enforced.

However, it is expected that people will respect the need to give the crucial research into the unique animals and plants of this special Wildlife Reserve a fair go.

Regular articles will keep people up to date with what is happening and different findings as the research continue.

Australia Zoo Rangers will also be visiting various schools and communities from time to time to give talks and likewise learn from people about the local wildlife.

Terri Irwin said that she is “Thrilled that the unique wildlife of this special part of the world that Steve loved so much is going to be protected by the reserve.

The fact of carrying out long term research is something which he always strived for, and he would be absolutely rapt to see the range of innovative research that is going to be carried out here.”

A photo of a Wet Closed Forest and the Wenlock River inside the Steve Irwin Wildlife reserve.