



Woodlands for wildlife: highlights from the last three years

The ACT has some of the biggest, best connected and most botanically diverse woodlands in Australia.

The most recent review of the ACT Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy has highlighted activities that are improving the protection, management and restoration of woodlands, including the critically endangered Yellow Box–Red Gum Grassy Woodland.

Woodlands are home to many diverse species, including several threatened plants and birds. They also provide shelter for animals, store carbon, protect water quality and provide recreation opportunities for the public.

The review drew attention to the strong collaboration between government, research institutions, Greening Australia, rural landholders and community groups which allowed the activities to be successfully implemented.

Background

The ACT Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy 2004 (Action Plan 27) is one of the action plans developed under the *Nature Conservation Act 1980* to protect and manage threatened species and ecological communities. The ACT Flora and Fauna Committee regularly review implementation of action plans.

The aim of the woodland strategy is for the ACT to make an outstanding contribution, regionally and nationally, to conservation of lowland woodland.

The woodland strategy's major goals are:

- Conserve all types of lowland woodland communities in the ACT as viable and well-represented ecological systems.
- Conserve viable, wild populations of all lowland woodland flora and fauna species in the ACT and support regional and national efforts towards conservation of these species.
- Manage and rehabilitate lowland woodlands across all tenures with appropriate regeneration, restoration and reinstatement practices.

The review of implementation of the woodland strategy highlighted:

- the area of lowland woodland under, or identified for, conservation management has increased by 2200 hectares
- a 60,000 hectare woodland restoration program is underway
- significant research projects, including projects to restore woodland in the Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary and propagation and translocation of threatened plants are being undertaken
- the important role of vegetation and connectivity mapping in informing decisions
- ongoing active woodland management by ParkCare and Landcare groups
- more rural landholders are protecting or restoring woodland remnants on their lands.





Major achievements

Some of the many activities that have taken place to ensure our woodlands continue to survive well into the future are outlined below.

Reserve network

Urban development has been largely concentrated away from lowland woodland vegetation, while some woodland areas of high conservation significance, previously identified for future urban use, have been added to the reserve network. Since 2004, approximately 2200 hectares of lowland woodland, including Yellow Box–Red Gum Grassy Woodland, have been added to the reserve network, are managed for conservation or have been proposed as reserve.

Additions include Callum Brae, Goorooyarroo, Kama, West Jerrabomberra, Condor, Percival Hill and Kinleyside, Molonglo, East Bonner, north and east Throsby and Kenny.

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In planning for additional suburbs, offsets were required for Yellow Box–Red Gum Grassy Woodland as it is a Matter of National Environmental Significance under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. These offset areas will be added to the reserve network and can be viewed on ACTMAPI at <http://www.actmapi.act.gov.au/home.html>.

Management of woodland and forest reserves within Canberra Nature Park were strengthened following a 2011 inquiry by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. The Commissioner made several recommendations that are being implemented.

Woodland restoration

A number of restoration projects have been, and continue to be, carried out across woodlands in the ACT, contributing to a wider woodland restoration program that extends into NSW.

The largest project, Restore ACT and Greater Goorooyarroo Woodlands, began in 2012. The six-year project aims to protect, consolidate and connect 60,000 hectares of the largest remaining box-gum grassy woodland landscape in Australia through on-ground restoration and regeneration works. It will enhance the biodiversity and carbon storing capacity of the landscape, improving resilience to climate change.

The project is funded by the Australian Government and the ACT Government. In addition, it involves the NSW Government entities, NSW's South East Local Land Services, Greening Australia Capital Region, researchers, local landholders, Aboriginal and urban communities and volunteers.



Woodlands have been further improved with tree planting and weed control under the ACT Million Trees Program.

These projects involve working with land managers and volunteer groups such as ParkCare, Landcare, Friends of Grasslands, Bush on the Boundary and the Canberra Ornithologists Group to identify and help restore woodland areas.

Connectivity mapping

Wildlife populations are more likely to survive when they can move through ‘corridors’ of connected woodland vegetation; corridors provide better access to safety, food and breeding sites.

CSIRO research has found most animals of southern Australian woodlands and forests will not usually cross a canopy gap of more than 100 metres, and will not travel more than 1.1 kilometres from at least a 10 hectare sized patch of suitable living habitat. Under contract to the ACT Government, the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage used this information to model fauna habitat and connectivity values across the ACT and region, identifying areas that are key to existing wildlife movement and areas where connections can be easily restored.

This information and connectivity mapping tools, available through ACTMAPi, are important elements of woodland management, guiding development considerations and restoration efforts.

Vegetation mapping

The ACT Government is updating mapping of the Territory’s vegetation. The map will provide information on the extent, distribution, and representation in the reserve network of the seven types of woodlands, as well as the six dry sclerophyll open forest communities, two forested wetlands and six sub-alpine woodland communities that adjoin lowland woodland communities.

The mapping will provide accurate information and allow better analysis of the communities, their habitat and condition, and how they work together. When complete, the mapping information will be used to help revise the woodland strategy (Action Plan 27).

Research

While much research has been done on woodlands and woodland species in the last decade, the review highlighted research at Mulligans Flat–Goorooyarroo on threatened plants and birds and kangaroo populations.

The ACT Government established the Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary in 2009 with the aim of restoring the woodlands to pre-1850 conditions, including reintroducing native animals and monitoring

their effects on the woodland ecosystem. Leading-edge research in the sanctuary and surrounding Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve has seen the successful reintroduction of the Eastern Bettong, native grass understorey and woody debris.

ACT funded research outside the Goorooyarroo Nature Reserve has looked at helping land managers improve their land and participate in restoration programs; for example, which native forb species are best for restoring the understorey in degraded box–gum woodlands.

The ACT Government and Australian National Botanic Gardens are researching threatened woodland plant species, including the Tarengo Leek Orchid and Small Purple Pea, and propagating them where possible to ensure populations will survive into the future. ACT Electricity and Water (ACTEW) has also supported translocation of the Small Purple Pea to a conservation site as part of its offset obligations.





The ACT Government is supporting research on woodland bird conservation, particularly looking at why some species are apparently continuing to decline and how conservation of these species can be improved. Understanding bird–habitat relationships can inform urban planning to create more bird-friendly suburbs.

Research on kangaroo populations is focussed on 15 urban and peri-urban reserves with the aim to more clearly define the relationship between the numbers of kangaroos and the effects their grazing has on other species, including plant diversity and reptiles. Results from this research will be used with research from other institutions to advise the ACT Government’s Kangaroo Management Plan.

Contributing organisations

- ACT Government
- NSW Government (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service)
- NSW Pasture Protection Board
- Australian National University
- Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)
- University of Canberra
- Australian National Botanic Gardens
- Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre
- ACTEW
- Greening Australia

- Canberra Ornithologists Group
- Capital Woodland and Wetlands Conservation Trust
- Friends of Grasslands
- ParkCare
- Landcare
- Bush on the Boundary
- Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Authority
- Mulligans Flat Management Committee

For more information

ACT woodlands

www.environment.act.gov.au/cpr/conservation_and_ecological_communities/lowland_woodlands

ACT Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy (Action Plan 27)

www.environment.act.gov.au/cpr/conservation_and_ecological_communities/woodlands_strategy

Commissioner for the Environment and Sustainability inquiry into Canberra Nature Park

http://www.environmentcommissioner.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0009/234990/Summary_and_recommendations.pdf

ACTMAPi

<http://www.actmapi.act.gov.au/home.html>

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