Principles for Management of African Lovegrass in the ACT Region

14 May 2026

About Us

The Conservation Council ACT Region is the peak body for environment and climate groups in the ACT Region. We represent close to 50 member groups, bringing together a united voice on environment and climate issues to Government, business and community.

Since 1981 we have been at the centre of the region's most important wins for wildlife, bushland, climate and communities. As a hub for the ACT Region's environment and climate movement and a not-for-profit, non government organisation, we run campaigns, promote and upskill local groups, undertake research, advocate passionately, and engage and inform our community.

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Introduction

This paper, developed for the Nature Conservation Forum meeting of 21 May 2026, outlines the initial policy position of the Conservation Council of the ACT Region (the Conservation Council) regarding the management of African Lovegrass (ALG).

Landcare ACT supports this paper being presented to the Nature Conservation Forum as a formal consultation group of the ACT Government. Landcare ACT strongly supports the management principles outlined in this paper for the management of African Lovegrass in the ACT.

On 19 February 2026, the Nature Conservation Forum considered a report from the Conservation Council's African Lovegrass Advisory Group.[1] At the Forum, participants discussed that management principles for ALG were needed, with the City and Environment Directorate co-chair advising that consideration would be given to how to respond to the recommendations in the report, and that further advice would be provided. Following the Forum meeting, the Conservation Council provided the Conservator of Flora and Fauna with input into possible future ALG management principles and an ALG management strategy.

This paper reiterates and formalises the initial input provided to the Conservator. It also draws on the outcomes of Landcare ACT's *Recommendations on the Management of Weeds in the ACT* report[2], which provides a practical framework for coordinated weed management across the Territory.

As the Australian Government's *Australian Weeds Strategy 2017–2027* makes clear, effective weed management is a shared responsibility between landholders, community, industry and government. Coordination amongst all of these groups is necessary to successfully manage ALG at a landscape scale across the ACT.

We urge the ACT Government to acknowledge the significant fire, economic and environmental risks posed by ALG, as outlined in the Conservation Council's Advisory Group report, and the need to act with foresight to prevent escalation. The rapid spread of ALG into Canberra's suburban landscapes, including neighbourhood greenspaces, children's parks, shared paths and community recreation areas is creating seasonal and visible impacts for Canberrans. These areas are central to community character and wellbeing.

The ACT's planning framework emphasises liveability, access to greenspace and bushfire resilience. Without intervention, African Lovegrass will undermine all three.

To this end, we recommend the following management principles:

1. *Adopt an ACT wide zonal approach that prioritises prevention*
2. *Act in accordance with the ACT's General Biosecurity Duty*
3. *Strengthen cross-jurisdictional coordination*

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1 https://conservationcouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/CCACT-ALG-Advisory-Group-Report-to-the-ACT-Government.pdf

2 https://landcareact.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Recommendations-on-the-Management-of-Weeds-in-the-ACT-FINAL.pdf

4. *Partner with environment and community groups*
5. *Ensure ongoing data collection, monitoring and accountability*

To ensure these principles translate into outcomes, the next step is to operationalise them through clear, whole-of-government governance arrangements. Effective ALG management requires coordinated action across relevant ACT Government agencies, with shared responsibility for implementation. A governance structure that supports compliance with statutory obligations and prioritises consistent on-ground action will be essential to prevent further spread and enable effective remediation.

Beyond ALG, there are several invasive weeds — including Serrated Tussock, Blackberry, and St John's Wort — causing serious environmental impacts across the ACT region. Following the expiry of the previous *ACT Weeds Strategy 2009-2019*, we urge the Government to develop a holistic territory-wide management strategy for weeds that establishes a framework for shared responsibility among government, landholders, and the community. This is particularly relevant given that the new draft *ACT Nature Conservation Strategy 2026-2036* commits to halting or reversing the loss of priority conservation values to weeds by 2035 (Target 20a); and to effectively control and reduce the spread of pest plants, animals and diseases by 2035 (Target 20b).

Management Principles

In developing a management strategy for ALG in the ACT region, we recommend the ACT Government adopt the following principles:

Principle 1 - Adopt an ACT-wide zonal approach that prioritises prevention

A zonal approach directs management efforts toward areas where they will have the greatest long-term impact, and ensures scarce resources are used efficiently. While management approaches for invasive weeds may exist for protected areas or areas of high conservation value, rural lands and suburban settings still lack a policy framework.

An ACT-wide zonal framework for ALG management, with the following zones, would prioritise prevention and early intervention to protect areas from infestation, while applying proportionate strategies in more heavily infested areas (see Appendix 1 for a detailed explanation of zones).

- *Prevention zone – ALG-free and low infestation areas, high biodiversity value and agricultural asset areas*
- *Containment zone – areas with moderate infestation*
- *Suppression zone – areas with high infestation*

The invasion curve shows that the highest return on investment occurs when resources are directed towards prevention and early intervention, before an incursion becomes established and control costs escalate.

The cost-effectiveness of a prevention-first approach is well-documented, with the NSW Department of Primary Industries citing examples of strategic weed management investment delivering estimated returns of $260M-$5.5B over 20 years (with benefit-cost ratios ranging from 59:1-777:1).[3] The nature of ALG as a highly invasive transformer species, driving significant fire, environmental, social and economic impacts, means that prevention and early intervention in the ACT would be expected to deliver highly cost-effective returns, by preventing exponential long-term management costs.

While the zones help direct effort, it is essential that the ACT Government also work to limit ALG spread across the broader landscape, as increasing infestation outside priority areas will make it progressively harder and more costly to protect high-value suburban, ecological and agricultural areas over time. African lovegrass is now at a critical juncture, and without decisive action, the spread of ALG will outpace the ability to protect these priority areas.

Principle 2 - Act in accordance with the ACT's General Biosecurity Duty

All land managers, including government agencies, contractors, and utilities, must act in accordance with the *ACT Biosecurity Act 2023* by meeting the General Biosecurity Duty to take all reasonable steps to manage ALG across the Territory. Clear responsibility for preventing and managing ALG impacts, must be assigned, monitored, and enforced, with all land managers fully aware of their obligations and the penalties for non-compliance.

The spread of ALG from government-managed roadsides, river corridors, and urban greenspace onto adjacent private land is causing direct and ongoing harm to rural landholders and conservation values alike. Strict hygiene protocols, including mandatory wash-down before moving from infested to clean areas, must be consistently applied and enforced across all government agencies, contractors, and utilities. Public land management must not spread ALG, and Government mowing efficiency cannot take precedence over meeting biosecurity obligations.

Land management agreements hold rural landholders in the ACT accountable for their General Biosecurity Duty, yet little Government support is provided to encourage landholders to undertake management actions. For instance, farmers could be licensed to use grazing to contain and control ALG and blackberry on rural roadsides and public lands, particularly where these areas are adjacent to farms without infestation or contain significant biodiversity values. Such measures would strengthen compliance and reduce cross-boundary spread.

Principle 3 - Strengthen cross-jurisdictional coordination

Invasive weed species such as ALG are managed inconsistently across the broader ACT and Southern NSW region, with varying legislative and governance frameworks in place. To prevent silos from forming within and across government agencies, and to acknowledge that invasive species do not recognise jurisdictional boundaries, the ACT Government should engage with

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[3] https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/dpi/biosecurity/invasive-plants-and-animals/weeds/local-government-and-weeds/weeds-action-program

NSW agencies to share information, coordinate approaches and learn from the most effective management practices.

Relevant partners include NSW Government agencies, South-East Local Land Services, and local councils such as the Snowy Monaro Regional Council, the Queanbeyan-Palerang Council, and the Yass Valley Council. For instance, the Snowy Monaro Regional Council has an existing Strategic Weed Management Plan, including a Management Plan for African Lovegrass [4], outlining an objective to 'keep the clean areas clean' by delivering a strict compliance program in areas of the region with little or no African Lovegrass, or where it is in its early to moderate stages of establishment. This approach is consistent with the prevention-first zonal framework proposed in Principle 1 and provides a useful model for future joint work with the ACT.

Principle 4 - Partner with environment and community groups

Environmental volunteer groups, including Landcare and ParkCare groups, make a significant contribution to weed control throughout the ACT. The ACT Government should seek to partner with environmental groups, working through Landcare ACT and allied bodies to harness and expand the existing skilled volunteer workforce for community-led, on-ground action. For instance, this could include improving mowing practices to reduce ALG spread into areas being stewarded by Landcarers; reviewing and updating Reserve Plans of Management to include data to enable Parkcarers to maximise their value in ALG control; and supporting community Landcare organisations to offer training on best-practice ALG management techniques. In addition, the ACT Government should commit to maintaining and increasing funding for organisations that support community environmental volunteers, to enable longer-term stability and certainty in their operations.

Principle 5 - Ensure ongoing data collection, monitoring and accountability

Accurate and comprehensive data is essential for effective weed management. Monitoring, mapping, and reporting of ALG in the ACT are currently outdated and inconsistent, limiting the capacity of all land managers to make evidence-based decisions and meet their obligations under the General Biosecurity Duty. Ongoing monitoring must be outcome-focused, measuring changes in ALG distribution and management effectiveness, with results made publicly available at least annually. Data collection tools should be consistent, accessible, and streamlined across all weed managers, including volunteers and rural landholders, reducing the administrative burden that currently limits participation. Responsibility for ALG management outcomes must be clearly assigned across relevant government directorates, monitored through a cross-portfolio governance mechanism, and reported on transparently.

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4 https://www.snowymonaro.nsw.gov.au/files/assets/public/v/1/environment-and-waste/biosecurity/snowy-monaro-region-local-weed-management-plan.pdf

Appendix 1 - Zonal Approach

Prevention zone - areas where ALG is absent or present only as small incursions

- The goal is to keep it out entirely or to eradicate any new plants immediately through strict biosecurity, early detection and rapid response.
- Review contractual arrangements, including mowing, to ensure biosecurity statutory obligations are clear and enforced.
- Enforce strict mower and machinery hygiene, including wash-down before moving from infested to clean areas (do not use infested mowers in clean areas) i.e. do not take in nor use.
- Provide immediate training for mower operators to recognise ALG (noting ALG is easily recognisable when in flower/ seed).
- Prohibit mowing ALG with seed in clean and low-infestation suburbs; map and rapidly treat small outbreaks.
- Prevent cross-boundary spread from government land to adjacent land, including private property, Commonwealth land and land managed by other ACT government directorates.
- Treat clean and low infestation areas as assets that must *not* be allowed to become infested.

Containment zone – moderate infestation areas

- An area where ALG is established but still has manageable, defensible boundaries.
- The goal is to prevent the weed from spreading beyond the zone by controlling edges and dispersal pathways while reducing infestations inside the zone
- Improve mower timing (aim for early flower development where possible).
- Use buffer treatments to prevent cross-boundary spread.
- Prioritise containment and rehabilitation.

Suppression zone – high infestation areas

- Areas where ALG is widespread and eradication would be too costly or unrealistic.
- The goal is to reduce density and spread of the weed so it does not expand further or dominate.
- Prioritise high value areas, such as incursions into nature reserves.
- Prioritise government land with the highest risk of dispersal to surrounding areas.
- Prioritise long-term suppression and rehabilitation.
- Reduce fire risk in heavily infested suburbs and rural-urban edges.
- Avoid resource drain that would compromise prevention efforts in cleaner suburbs.
- Given that ALG has been allowed to become so dominant that standard treatments are not feasible, innovative methods should continue to be tested.