

Conservation Council ACT Region

2024 Biodiversity Statement

The Conservation Council ACT Region 2024 Biodiversity Statement has been prepared by the Biodiversity Working Group to provide further context to the “Protecting our Region’s Nature” 2024 ACT Election Policy Platform.

The Conservation Council ACT region aims to see a future where wildlife thrives, habitat is protected and there are no more extinctions. We are facing an unprecedented extinction crisis, as human actions have a damaging effect on the natural systems that sustain us. Globally, the 2019 United Nations report on biodiversity identified that up to one million species face extinction in coming decades.¹ Australia is not immune, with approximately 100 native species having become extinct since European settlement and a further 1,700 species that remain threatened.² In July 2022, a landmark State of Environment Report was released outlining that overall Australia’s natural environment is “poor and deteriorating.”³ The report found more extinctions are expected in the next decades. Yet we rely on nature for all aspects of human wellbeing; food, medicines, culture, recreation, and learning. Biodiversity, and the natural habitats that support it, are indeed our life-supporting “safety net”.

Despite its small size, the ACT hosts a variety of diverse landscapes, habitats and ecological communities, many of which are unique to the region. Yet nature continues to be impacted through the encroachment of urban areas on habitats, loss of habitats, and invasive plants and animals.² Currently, 58 species of fauna and flora are listed as threatened under national and/or ACT environmental law⁴, with the status of two local ecological communities, Natural Temperate Grassland and Yellow Box-Blakely’s Red Gum Grassy Woodlands, listed as Critically Endangered under the *Nature Conservation Act 2014*. Two threatening processes have been listed: Loss of Mature Native Aged Trees and Unnatural Fragmentation of Habitats.

The inherent conflict between development and environment continues to threaten habitats, and is further exacerbated by the impacts of climate change, which continues to worsen in the face of global inaction. This renders it even more urgent to protect and enhance what remains.

¹ IPBES (2019), *Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*. Chapter 2.2: Status and Trends - Nature, (p. 52).

² CSIRO (2014), [Science and Solutions for Australia: Biodiversity](#), (p.44).

³ Australian Government, 2021. *Australia State of the Environment Report 2021*.

⁴ Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, 2023. *ACT State of the Environment*. Accessed via: <https://www.actsoe2023.com.au/themes/biodiversity/>

The year of 2019 was one of extreme drought, and following that, the summer of 2019-20 saw Australia ravaged by intense, widespread bushfires. The Orroral Valley fire, which tore through Namadgi National Park and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, burnt 37% of the ACT.⁵ The full extent of ecological damage to species, habitat and ecosystem functioning, including water quality, will take time to unfold. However, there is no doubt that events like this present enormous challenges for the long-term conservation of regional and nationally-significant ecological communities and biodiversity. We now have what may be the last opportunity to fundamentally rethink the way we engage with nature, for its value to us, and for its own intrinsic value.

It is therefore timely to expand the Biodiversity Network using a variety of methods to ensure management for conservation purposes of areas with ecological value well in advance of development or further loss. All relevant stakeholders, including traditional owners, non-government organisations, community members and scientists, should continue to be engaged in order to facilitate reinvigoration and embed principles of the cultural practices of First Nations people, and build on more recent land stewardship practices, which have seen hundreds of thousands of hours of investment by local landcare groups to improve local environments, reflecting the extremely strong community support for nurturing our biodiversity.

The ACT must also move to appropriately fund the broad range of strategies and action plans it has prepared to protect and restore biodiversity. Limited resources have left the implementation of these strategies curtailed, and put biodiversity conservation and enhancement at risk. Until biodiversity activities are adequately funded, including the systems required to monitor performance, improved environmental outcomes won't be evident, and the ACT will continue to contribute to the national and global extinction crisis that puts much of life on earth at risk.

Implement the Biodiversity Network for strategic planning and land management that enhances long-term biodiversity outcomes

The ACT continues to lose important ecological habitats as a result of our expanding urban footprint.

Ongoing development is putting biodiversity at risk, and as such, should be strictly limited. The Conservation Council supports a focus on urban infill (after appropriate assessment and protection of ecological values) ahead of new greenfield development, and a “green belt” designed to benefit biodiversity and to serve as a marker of the end of urban development, just as hills, ridges and buffers served a younger Canberra. Where future urban development is proposed, it is critical that all areas of ecological value are identified and

⁵ ACT Rapid Risk Assessment Team (2020). *Orroral Valley Fire Rapid Risk Assessment Namadgi National Park*, (p.6) ACT Government, Canberra.

appropriately managed well in advance of identifying future development areas and commencing structure planning.

As such, all off-reserve land in the ACT, regardless of land tenure, should be subject to a comprehensive ecological assessment to identify where development should never occur (including areas where rehabilitation should commence, connecting areas that serve as wildlife corridors and breeding habitats such as hollow-bearing trees). This process will be critical for the Western Edge Investigation Area (WEIA), which was identified for further investigation in the 2018 ACT Planning Strategy. The WEIA is 9,816 ha with five sites identified by Capital Ecology for conservation in its March 2021 [Preliminary Ecological Review](#). The WEIA includes areas of moderate to high conservation value as well as areas critical for landscape connectivity and has been identified as having significant environmental value. Bluetts Block, a site that sits mostly within the western edge, represents the important conservation values in the area and highlights the huge risks associated with continuing urban sprawl. Bluetts Block provides habitat to threatened and rare species including Superb Parrots, Gang-gang Cockatoos, Swift Parrots and rare marsupial populations of Dunnart and Antechinus. The site also plays an important role connecting the Murrumbidgee River through to Black Mountain Nature Reserve.

As the 'bush capital', Canberra is fortunate to host a mosaic of natural areas in and around the city. Many of these natural areas on the hills are protected under the ACT's extensive reserve system. But this system does not adequately protect all the Territory's natural values, leaving many other areas, particularly those that naturally occur on the lower slopes and plains, unprotected and at risk of mismanagement. In December 2022, The Conservation Council ACT Region and Friends of Grasslands published [Building a Biodiversity Network Across the ACT](#)⁶. The aims of this key document are to formalise conservation and management of biodiversity outcomes on multiple tenures including public and leased land, by identifying them as Conservation Areas, through a combination of protection, restoration and reconnection compatible with other land management objectives.

Implementing the Biodiversity Network on leased and unleased land will protect and enhance all remaining threatened species and communities and other important conservation assets in the ACT in perpetuity. By protecting remnants of natural value that are not reserved, these remnants, together with those in reserve, will be unified into a single conservation framework for protection and implementation of ecological management. Therefore conservation can be achieved across land tenures, without compromising the land uses that may exist in those places.

Adopting a collaborative land stewardship approach that incorporates the perspectives of different stakeholders including traditional owners, non-government organisations, community members, farmers and scientists would help sustain the long-term health of conservation areas across the ACT, in key areas of concern such as Central Molonglo, and our environment in general. The ACT should implement the Biodiversity Network, to not only include remnants managed by government, but also to facilitate protection in perpetuity of leased land by means of voluntary conservation agreements that provide in perpetuity

⁶ Conservation Council ACT Region and Friends of Grasslands, 2022. *Building a Biodiversity Network Across the ACT*. Available at: https://conservationcouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/BRIEFING_BIODIVERSITY-NETWORK-_Final_Version_December.pdf

protection, similar to the conservation covenants applied in most States. To ensure this can be achieved, it may be necessary to provide funding to apply conservation management, assisting lessees in applying conservation management and/or compensation for income lost. Furthermore, Commonwealth land managers should be encouraged to implement protection mechanisms, potentially to ensure such areas are managed complementary to ACT lands (e.g. Newline, west Majura). This landscape approach will achieve a comprehensive stewardship approach to our conservation estate.

The low representation of remnants containing threatened ecological communities in Canberra Nature Park or other reserves puts them even further at risk. The ACT is one of the last remaining regions where large, relatively intact, patches of ecological communities including Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Natural Temperate Grasslands can be found. Yet in the ACT, Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Natural Temperate Grasslands representation in conservation reserves remains low.⁷ A number of threatened fauna have less than 50% of their known and potential habitat in conservation areas, including the Golden Sun Moth, Perunga Grasshopper and Grassland Earless Dragon.⁸ The ACT should move to increase representation of all poorly represented communities in the biodiversity network. In the short term, Bluett's Block is an example of land that requires protection and ecological management, as it includes Grassy Woodlands and mature Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gums⁹ and is one of the ACT's most biodiverse habitats, providing fugitive refuge for critically endangered species including the Swift Parrot. Furthermore, the ACT Government has a responsibility to proactively protect areas of significant ecological value currently under Commonwealth jurisdiction, such as Lawson North, by advocating to the Commonwealth for the area's inclusion in the reserve system.

Central Molonglo also contains one of the twenty largest remnants of Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland remaining in Australia.¹⁰ In 2008, the ACT Government agreed that Central Molonglo was not to be developed in perpetuity, as an acknowledgement that any development would impact significantly on biodiversity, including the loss of the last two breeding territories for the Little Eagle in the ACT¹¹ and nesting habitat for the threatened Superb Parrot. Management of Central Molonglo should place a greater emphasis on habitat enhancement, and the ACT should move quickly to develop a strategic management plan, tailored for specific flora and fauna, that protects and manages the conservation values of this area long term, allows it to become a focus for research and rehabilitation, and ensures it can be enjoyed for environmental and social benefit into the future.

Offsets continue to be utilised across the ACT as a mechanism to counteract the impacts caused by new developments, however a 2019 review of the offsets in the ACT illustrated that offsets are unlikely to achieve no net loss and their management is not sufficiently

⁷ Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, 2023. *ACT State of the Environment 2023* (p.172).

⁸ Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, 2023. *ACT State of the Environment 2023* (p.171).

⁹ Canberra Ornithologists Group, (n.d.) *What are Grassy Woodlands*, accessed 8 May.

¹⁰ Conservation Council ACT Region (2008), *Proposed Molonglo Urban Developments and their Significant Impact on Endangered Woodlands*, p. 6.

¹¹ Canberra Ornithologists Group (2008), *Molonglo Valley DV 281 (Molonglo and North Weston) Submission*, p. 6.

transparent.¹² The ACT can play an active role in encouraging the Commonwealth to establish a nationally consistent offset scheme that follows the offset framework as developed at the EIANZ offsets conference in 2019¹³, to ensure the use of offsets is restricted to being a last resort and highly regulated to deliver best environmental outcomes for biodiversity, are not used on moderate to high conservation areas, and are regularly reported on using a public register. This will ensure consistency between jurisdictions and reduce the loopholes that are currently allowing high and moderate conservation value areas to be developed.

Implementing the Biodiversity Network is the key policy position for the Conservation Council ACT Region as its implementation will result in planning and land management that enhances long-term biodiversity outcomes.

Implement changes to legislation to ensure in-perpetuity protection for Conservation Areas within the Biodiversity Network

1. In line with Recommendation 20 of the Inquiry into the Territory Plan¹⁴, implement the [Biodiversity Network](#) to ensure Conservation Areas outside the reserve system of moderate to high conservation value or needed for environmental connectivity are protected in perpetuity, and managed for their ecological values.
2. Introduce a formal program of voluntary environmental stewardship on rural and other leased land, that incorporates protection in perpetuity.
3. Consider options to provide protection through the Planning Act and the Nature Conservation Act that includes enabling simultaneous compatible uses¹⁵.
4. Restrict and regulate the use of offsets to be within the same bioregion and demonstrate high quality conservation outcomes, with no habitats of moderate to high conservation value to be used as biodiversity offsets.
5. Improve the ACT offsets register to include data used for the impact and offset calculations, conditions of the offset, funding allocated to the offset and outcomes from monitoring.
6. Develop and utilise strategic ecological assessments on all off-reserve land to identify areas of conservation value to be permanently excluded from development.
7. Include all remaining poorly-represented ecological communities within the biodiversity network, including Natural Temperate Grasslands and Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodlands and the species that they support.
8. Ensure a "green" buffer between the urban edge of the ACT and adjoining areas of NSW which defines the urban edge and protects environmental values.

¹² Connors, B, (2019) A review of biodiversity offsets implemented in the Australian Capital Territory under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, Honours Thesis.

¹³ EIANZ (2019). *2019 National Biodiversity Offsets Conference*, see <<https://www.eianz.org/document/item/5100>>.

¹⁴ Legislative Assembly for the ACT Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services. *Inquiry into the Territory Plan and Other Associated Documents*. Accessed via: https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/2416190/Inquiry-into-the-Territory-Plan-and-other-associated-documents-report-CURRENT-version.pdf

¹⁵ Conservation Council ACT Region and Friends of Grasslands, 2022. *Building a Biodiversity Network Across the ACT*. pp.19

Implement ecological management in all Conservation Areas

9. Commence ecological management of Conservation Areas, and within key landscape connectivity areas.
10. Adequately resource the restoration of native vegetation and habitat to improve ecological condition.
11. Adequately resource and train rangers and land managers, rural lessees and Parkcare and Landcare volunteers to collaboratively manage Conservation Areas across the ACT.
12. Ensure alignment of government programs, such as the Urban Tree Planting Program, with appropriate biodiversity outcomes.

Protect priority Conservation Areas

13. No industrial or urban development in Conservation Areas including the Western Edge Investigation Area.
14. Ensure protection from disturbance or loss for all Conservation Areas across the Territory, including within the Western Edge Investigation Area.
15. Provide Nature Reserve status to Ngununggula/ Bluetts Block.
16. Where relevant, Incorporate Conservation Areas that are adjacent to existing reserves into those reserves, including Ainslie Volcanics and Glenloch grasslands.
17. Develop a Conservation Management Plan for Central Molonglo.
18. When ceded to the ACT Government, provide reserve status for Lawson Grasslands.

Best practice environmental governance

How environmental laws and policies are administered by the ACT government and environmental statutory office holders is critical to achieving strong environmental outcomes.¹⁶ It is therefore essential that there are best practice environmental governance arrangements in place to ensure that fundamental accountability principles, including independence, are upheld in relation to environmental management.

1. Remove Environment from the Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate to create a separate directorate responsible for land management, modelled on the previous Environment ACT agency.
2. Establish the Environment Protection Authority and the Conservator of Flora and Fauna as independent statutory bodies.
3. Review and consolidate all actions from ACT Government action plans, conservation strategies and plans of management to reduce duplication and confirm key priorities. Subsequently, fully fund and implement these priorities, applying specific timeframes to improve accountability.
4. Implement an education program about ecological management on public and private land, including tree retention, for community, arborists and relevant ACT Government staff across directorates.
5. Prepare, fund and implement emergency management plans for flora and fauna in response to extreme weather events.

¹⁶ GreenLaw, 2023. *Final Report: Environmental Governance in the ACT*. Available at: <https://www.actsoe2023.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Environmental-Governance-in-the-ACT.pdf>

Sustainable funding for biodiversity conservation

Ongoing, secure and appropriate funding and subsequent resource allocation is imperative to achieve success with conservation efforts. Funding must be sustained across government and non-government sectors and deliver the protection and restoration of biodiversity, as well as servicing overall environmental protection and water management.

The ACT already has an impressive suite of conservation strategies that, if funded and fully implemented, would contribute to positive biodiversity outcomes. These include the Native Grassland Conservation Strategy, the Native Woodlands Conservation Strategy, the Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy and the ACT Pest Animal Management Strategy. To ensure adequate protection of biodiversity and ensure that areas of conservation value are managed effectively, the ACT must commit to fund and fully implement all existing conservation strategies and action plans in a timely manner. This should be supported by the delivery of publicly accessible annual reports that outline the outcomes of these strategies against set performance indicators.

A long-term sustainable funding model should also be developed to ensure consistent, ongoing funding across all sectors to improve biodiversity conservation outcomes. This funding model should address the Government commitments to improve the ACT's biodiversity outcomes and should also support ongoing stewardship of leasehold land and community conservation initiatives, as detailed below. The model should have flexibility in its structure to allow for adaptation in response to a changing landscape and climate into the future.

1. Adequate resourcing and training of rangers, and land managers to manage off-reserve areas across the ACT. This would be supported by also adequately funding Parkcare and Landcare to assist land managers.
2. Significantly increase Parks and Conservation staff levels and resources.
3. Develop a sustainable funding model that can deliver protection and enhancement of biodiversity in the ACT

Consistent and ongoing management of pest plant and animals

To ensure Canberra's nature, people and culture can flourish, our urban landscapes need to host biodiverse and resilient green spaces. However, invasive plant and pest animal species represent significant threats to biodiversity conservation.¹⁷ Unabated, these invasive species will erode the sustainability of Canberra's urban landscape.

As the impacts of a changing climate continue and worsen the ACT must be prepared for Biosecurity threats. Fundamentally, the threat posed by invasive species is one of scale. It follows that ensuring adequate staffing is the best way to address the threat of invasive species. Funding of new staff needs to be on an ongoing basis to ensure forward momentum is not jeopardised. The ACT has a responsibility to rapidly respond to biosecurity threats

¹⁷ Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, (2019). *ACT State of the Environment - 2019 Report*, (p.254, 207).

accelerated by climate change.

Volunteers are relied on heavily for the management of invasive plants, restoration, involvement in citizen science projects, education and advocacy for the environment. Key environmental volunteer groups include LandcareACT and the three member Catchment Groups. Together these organisations support individual groups including National Parks Association of the ACT, Friends of Grasslands, and Parkcare and urban Landcare groups. This work should be acknowledged as a crucial component of managing the bush capital's ecosystems and habitats. Investment is required for these organisations not just to cover ground costs but to increase their capacity, and upskill their volunteers.

Invasive pest species, such as the European rabbit and European red fox, remain a key threat to biodiversity in Canberra Nature Park, despite pest management strategies being in place. The impacts of these feral animals are particularly evident where Parkcare groups have erected grazing exclosures, where biodiversity outcomes inside the exclosures are more successful than those outside.¹⁸ Building an understanding of predator proof exclosures and native animal reintroduction trials, such as those occurring at Mulligan's Flat and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve¹⁹, will help inform whether they can play a role in reducing the impact of invasive species and should be expanded as a conservation tool in the ACT. Management of current exclosures should also be improved to ensure they are resourced and maintained to deliver environmental benefit.

Cats are known to roam and hunt both day and night. With approximately 75% of Canberra's suburbs located within 1km of threatened fauna habitat and almost half of the cat-owning population allowing their domestic cats to roam unsupervised in daylight¹⁴, the risks to Canberra's biodiversity are significant. Studies indicate that domestic cats alone prey on 61,000 native birds, 2,000 native mammals, 30,000 native reptiles and 6,000 native frogs each year in the ACT.²⁰ While the ACT has implemented cat containment across new residential areas, and a 'grandfathered' approach in remaining areas - the proximity of housing to nature reserves across the city requires that cat containment be city-wide so as to reduce impacts on native wildlife. Cat containment should be part of a package of responsible pet ownership measures that includes registration and education, and which improves protection for native wildlife and also for less injuries and disease for cats.²¹

1. Ensure there is adequate and secure funding to manage invasive species, including for increased staffing and expertise of ACT Government land managers, resources to

¹⁸ ABC News, (2015). '[Eastern Bettong numbers booming inside fenced-off reserve in Canberra](#)', News Article, 12 February.

¹⁹ ACT Government, 2019. Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve: Endangered Species Breeding Programs, accessed 8 May.

²⁰ Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate 2019, [Draft ACT Cat Plan 2019-29](#), ACT Government, Canberra.

²¹ Eyles, K. & Mulvaney, M. (2010). *Responsible pet ownership and the protection of wildlife: Options for improving the management of cats in the ACT*, (p.26).

detect and manage new threats, and for trials for improved long-term control and maintenance of naturalised species.

2. By the beginning of 2026, implement and enforce full cat containment where all cats, no matter the age or suburb, are contained territory wide.
3. Consider trial programs of predator-proof enclosures that can be utilised for small mammal reintroduction across Canberra Nature Park.

Support community environmental management

In the ACT, community environmental volunteers play an important role in protecting and rehabilitating the environment. Community volunteers are supported and coordinated by non-government organisations, particularly the ACT Catchment Groups (Southern ACT, Molonglo and Ginninderra) and their peak-body Landcare ACT, and build partnerships between communities, businesses, researchers and government. However, it can be challenging for groups to plan in advance and facilitate ongoing efforts without secure and ongoing funding. Significantly the maintenance of ACT waterways, parks, reserves and urban green spaces is heavily dependent on volunteer labour, small not for profit organisations and critically low numbers of Parks and Conservation and Transport Canberra City Services staff. There has not been an investment in community organisations which contribute heavily to the maintenance and rehabilitation of our local biodiversity.

The ACT community also significantly contributes to our understanding of local ecosystems and their health, through the collection of data via citizen science programs such as Canberra Ornithologists Group, Frogwatch, Waterwatch, Vegwatch and the Wild Pollinator Count but also through insight gained through work or life experiences. Whilst the ACT Government has previously shown support for citizen science projects including through the provision of short-term funding, funding is not consistent. Well-resourced citizen science programs will enhance local partnerships between community and Government to deliver better conservation outcomes. It is especially important that the government supports the collection of data by citizen science groups with long-term monitoring programs and specialist expertise to undertake the analysis of data.

When the community is able to engage in and learn about their local natural environment, it empowers them to contribute and take on a stewardship role. The ACT has an excellent citizen science platform, Canberra Nature Map, with approximately 3,000 members and more than 1.2 million records, to which the community adds data. Canberra Nature Map has supported biodiversity conservation in the ACT by storing decades worth of data on local biodiversity populations. Such initiatives cost governments little, but government support can make a considerable difference to their effectiveness. Adequate funding support of Canberra Nature Map would ensure that the software can be maintained into the future. Including data about species population monitoring, vegetation condition and vulnerable areas on ACTmapi would also assist with greater community access to transparent, accessible and relevant information and reports about conservation management.

The successful Adopt a Park program allows the community to get actively involved in the conservation, presentation, and maintenance of Canberra's public urban open spaces, and plays an important role in enhancing biodiversity connectivity across the landscape. Twenty six projects were successful in the latest round of grants, which will contribute to the improvement of the ACT's neighbourhood parks through weed and erosion control,

tree-planting and training events.²² Programs such as this build community capacity and are a 'value-add' investment for Government.

1. Provide secure, long-term operational funding for Landcare ACT and member Catchment Groups.
2. Fund, support and enhance community-led environmental programs including Canberra Nature Map, Vegwatch, Waterwatch, Frogwatch and Fauna monitoring programs.
3. Provide additional Transport Canberra City Services (TCCS) rangers to support urban community on-ground programs.
4. Improve the functionality of ACTmapi to enhance community access to information that details locations of conservation areas and their conservation management and identifies planning proposals.

Improve biodiversity in urban areas

Urban open spaces are crucial in creating places that are valued and utilised by ACT residents. Urban open space occupies approximately 20% of the urban area in the ACT and represents an under-utilised resource in terms of climate regulation, health and wellbeing and biodiversity enhancement. 22% of threatened flora are within the urban open space system.²³

Restored urban greenspace provides opportunities to enhance native plantings within the existing urban footprint. As part of the Urban Forest Strategy, the ACT Government committed to plant 54,000 trees by 2023-24 to support climate resilience and connectivity across the landscape²⁴. However, these plantings will not enhance biodiversity outcomes if the species planted are not diverse or planted in appropriate locations or suitable habitats (such as natural grasslands). While deciduous trees may be better utilised as street trees in many suburbs, native trees and shrubs in urban parks and nature corridors will help to provide habitat and food for wildlife. Utilising native trees, shrubs and groundcover can also reduce the need for maintenance activities such as mowing, something that results in the further spreading of invasive weeds and is an expense for the Government.

Residents and developers can be encouraged to plant native species, including pollinators, that would further enhance biodiversity across our urban greenspace. The Yarralumla Nursery, when propagating and purchasing plants to become available under the Plant Issue Scheme, should ensure that bee-friendly (forage) plants free from neonicotinoid pesticides with various flowering seasons are available and clearly labelled for developers and gardeners, so they are able to access plants that will support local wildlife. Other commercial nurseries should be encouraged to provide similar plants.

²² Transport Canberra and City Service, (n.d), *Volunteering*, ACT Government, Canberra.

²³ Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, 2023. *ACT State of the Environment 2023* (p.171).

²⁴ Transport Canberra and City Services, 2024. *Urban Forest Strategy*, ACT Government, Canberra.

Mature eucalypts in the ACT are culturally, and environmentally, important. Large, mature native trees are unique features of the landscape that play a crucial role in connectivity across our urban forests, and provide nesting habitat and food for wildlife.²⁵ They can also have high cultural significance, especially for First Nations people. However, mature trees are still being felled for greenfield urban developments and within established suburbs of the ACT.²⁶ In 2018, ‘the loss of mature native trees (including hollow-bearing trees) and a lack of recruitment’ was listed as a key threatening process in the ACT²⁷, and the [Loss of Mature Native Trees Key Threatening Process Action Plan](#) was released in November 2023. Trees also form the skeleton for corridors across the landscape, utilised by fauna, from kangaroos to invertebrates, but also enabling healthy pollination of plants. Fragmentation has been identified as a key threatening process. The ACT should mandate quantitative tree risk assessments to ensure that mature trees are only removed where mitigation and avoidance strategies have failed, and prioritise the restoration of greenspace around existing mature trees to continue to maintain them in a way that ensures the safety of ACT residents and the ongoing health of the tree. This will allow for greater coexistence of communities with mature trees and ensure that their cultural and environmental values are retained.

1. Plant ecologically appropriate native trees, shrubs and groundcover in urban parks to support connectivity and habitat for wildlife and pollinators, and reduce the need for mowing.
2. Upskill and resource TCCS staff to undertake ecologically informed plantings of trees, shrubs and groundcover.
3. Mandate the use of quantitative tree risk assessment for mature trees in the ACT and only remove trees where risk is above internationally accepted levels and where this risk cannot be mitigated by actions such as landscaping and tree management.
4. Ensure urban greenspace is developed in sympathy with maintaining existing mature trees and in a way that ensures community safety and facilitates tree health.
5. Implement a tree retention and management education program on public and private land for community, arborists and relevant ACT Government staff.

Support the protection of Native Forests in our region

Native forests in the ACT region provide habitat to threatened listed species including the spotted-tailed quoll, swift parrot and greater glider.²⁸ Forests are critical to the survival of our planet: they clean the air we breathe, purify water, store vast amounts of carbon, and reduce the local temperature. Despite their critical importance, native forests in our region, including near Braidwood and at the South Coast of NSW, are being destroyed. Logging of our native forests, which are already under pressure from climate change and invasive species, is

²⁵ Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, (2019). *ACT State of the Environment - 2019 Report*, (p.85. 200).

²⁶ Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, (2019). *ACT State of the Environment - 2019 Report*, (p.85. 200).

²⁷ Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (2019), *Key Threatening Processes*, ACT Government, Canberra.

²⁸ Chris Taylor, David B. Lindenmayer, 2020. *Temporal fragmentation of a critically endangered forest ecosystems*. Accessed via: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/authorised-by/Lindenmayer/David+B>.

pushing Australia's unique forest dwelling wildlife to extinction.²⁹ Once our old forests are destroyed, they'll be gone forever. The ACT has both a responsibility and an opportunity to support the protection of native forests within our region.

Help protect native forests in our region and uphold the right to a healthy environment:

1. Phase out wood-burning heaters in urban Canberra by 2030, in line with the Right to a Healthy Environment.
2. Ban the advertising, sale and installation of new and replacement wood heaters from January 2025.
3. Require all firewood sold in the ACT to meet forest certification (Forest Stewardship Council) standards.
4. Declare ACT Government support for an end to native forest logging nationally.

²⁹ D. B. Lindenmayer, W. Blanchard, D. Blair, L. McBurney, C. Taylor, B. C. Scheele, M. J. Westgate, N. Robinson, C. Foster, 2020. *The response of arboreal marsupials to long-term changes in forest disturbance*. Accessed via: <https://zslpublications.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/acv.12634>