



Summary Paper: Building a Biodiversity Network Across the ACT

The Territory's natural values are not adequately conserved

As the 'bush capital', Canberra is fortunate to host a mosaic of natural areas in and around the city. Many of these natural areas are protected under the ACT's extensive reserve system. But this system does not adequately protect all of the Territory's natural values, leaving many unprotected and at risk of mismanagement.

The reserve system is biased against low-lying ecosystems and small areas of natural vegetation:

- 67% of the ACT's Natural Temperate Grassland remnants occur outside the reserve system despite their status as critically endangered¹.
- Many threatened woodland remnants also occur outside of the reserve system, including 80% of Box-Gum Woodland.²
- Many small but significant areas outside the reserve system occur along roadsides, in urban open space, in green corridors between houses, or in rural or urban leases.

While they may be small in size, these sites can have environmental significance as they support threatened ecosystems, provide habitat for native species, and/or facilitate connectivity across the landscape. However, areas with conservation value that occur on tenures outside of the reserve system are not primarily maintained for their natural values, which can put those values at risk.

Conservation must occur across all tenures

The Conservation Council's Biodiversity Working Group and Friends of Grasslands are proposing that a Biodiversity Network is established to protect remnants of natural value that are not reserved, whereby these remnants, together with those in reserve, will be unified into a single legal and management framework. The proposal is based on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN's) Protected Area Network category, 'other effective area-based conservation measures' (OECMs).³

¹ ACT Government, ACT Native Grassland Conservation Strategy and Action Plans, p21.

² Calculations from ACT Government, Canberra Nature Park Reserve Management Plan, 2021.

³ IUCN, *Recognising and reporting on other area-based effective conservation measures. Protected Area Technical Report Series No. 3*, 2019

Downstream benefits include climate resilience, increased human health and wellbeing, greater opportunities for fostering identity and connection to the natural landscape, improved natural functionality of the environment, and a basis for planning to prevent continuous loss of biodiversity.

The Biodiversity Network will facilitate best practice conservation on and off reserve

In a collaborative arrangement between government, landholders, first nation representatives, community and scientific organisations:

1. Map and describe conservation areas outside the reserve system;
2. Provide protection to conservation areas through:
 - Incorporating remnants into adjacent reserves; or
 - Creating conservation areas on leased and unleased land outside the reserve system which are exempt from development but may be used for other compatible land uses.
3. Implement coordinated, consistent and best practice ecological management across land tenures; and
4. Improve engagement, cooperation and support between land managers, community, special interest groups and associated management and research professions.

The proposed new Territory Plan for the ACT, in the context of the 2022 Planning Review, is a strategic opportunity to provide legislative protection for Conservation Areas on unleased and leased urban and non-urban land.

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