



Submission – Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve Draft Master Plan

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The Conservation Council ACT region is the peak non-government environment organisation for the Canberra Region, and has been the community's voice for the environment in the Canberra region since 1979.

We represent the interests of community conservation organisations in the region as well as the broader environmental interests of all the citizens of the ACT.

Our mission is to achieve an ecologically sustainable and zero net carbon society through advocacy, education, research and engagement with community, the private sector and government.

The Conservation Council is active in a number of campaign areas. Our current focus includes:

- **Biodiversity Conservation** – protecting our unique ecological communities and the Bush Capital
- **Climate Change** – a regional, national and global challenge
- **Planning** – the right things in the right places
- **Transport** – connecting people and places
- **Waste** – being efficient through closed-loop systems
- **Water** – smart use of a scarce resource
- **Governance** – for a Smarter, Sustainable Canberra

Overview

The Conservation Council ACT Region welcomes the release of the Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve Draft Master Plan. However we need to acknowledge it is difficult to comment on some aspects of the Master Plan in isolation from an understanding of the shape and / or form of urban development around the reserve, with particular emphasis on East Lake. Any increase in the size of the urban area near the Jerrabomberra Wetlands will lead to the standard "edge" effects and these need to be addressed. We feel insufficient detail or consideration is given to these issues in the Master Plan or the Plan of Management (2010).

The Conservation Council in consultation with the Bush on the Boundary Reference Groups has developed principles to guide the management of key issues on the interface between urban development and areas of ecological significance. We recommend these principles be applied in the Master Plan. They are included at Attachment One.

***Recommendation 1.
Bush on the Boundary principles should be applied for the interface between the existing and future urban form and the Nature Reserve.***

Purpose of the Master Plan and impacts on the Nature Reserve

The purpose of the Master Plan needs to be more clearly articulated with particular reference to enhancing the ecological values of the Nature Reserve. The Master Plan states its aim is to: "articulate concepts and designs that will lay the strategic framework for capital improvements at Jerrabomberra Wetland". However it presents the opportunities for eco-tourism and increased recreational use in isolation from the potential impacts these may have on the ecological values of the Nature Reserve. Although the Master Plan does highlight the ecological values and significance of the wetlands it does not adequately address the impacts of various proposed new infrastructure on these values.

The Conservation Council is not opposed to a visitor's centre or greater recreational or education facilities near the reserve more it is mindful that these must not be at the expense of the fundamental purpose of the Jerrabomberra Nature Reserve which is conservation.

***Recommendation 2.
The Nature Reserve needs to manage to protect and enhance its ecological values. Recreational areas, cycling paths and infrastructure should be located outside the reserve or at the reserve edges such as to minimize ecological impacts within the reserve. The Master Plan should reflect this.***

Location of Visitor Centre / Recreational and Tourism Use

The Conservation Council is concerned that the focus on the Master Plan is on recreational use, tourism and education. As per the Statutory Management Plan the key objective should be on the conservation values of the reserve.

The Conservation Council recommends any facilities / pathways within the reserve area should be low key and focussed on education and interpretation.

The Conservation Council supports the proposed Visitor Centre on Dairy Flat Road. However mechanisms do need to be considered for access, amenities and information regarding the reserve near the proposed urban development at East Lake.

There is a high likelihood that the Visitor Centre will not be built before local residents commence accessing the Wetlands. Therefore provision for the latter needs to be considered more comprehensively and infrastructure provided sooner, in order to ensure appropriate visitor access and usage patterns are established in the East Lake transition zone.

Recommendation 3.
Recreational, education and tourist activities should generally be located outside the Nature Reserve, and /or only undertaken inside the reserve if they are compatible with maintenance and enhancement of the ecological values of the reserve.

East Lake Transition Zone

The Master Plan indicates East Lake Development 'interface' or 'transition zone' will intrude into the Nature Reserve to varying distances (page 22-23).

The rationale for this is that "at this stage of planning for the East Lake development, it is not possible to be definitive as to what will occur outside the Reserve boundary".

This typifies planning for urban development at the expense of conservation.

The Master Plan should not be compromised simply because a plan of development for East Lake is not on the table. The interface zone should be planned now on ecological principles and the East Lake development should manage around those.

There must be a clear delineation between the transition zone and the Nature Reserve This has implications for dog-control, fire management and general management. Any bushfire buffer zone must be located outside the Nature Reserve.

In addition it needs to be clear to users when they enter the Nature Reserve and the subsequent change in obligations as park users. Likewise consideration needs to be given to access points and ideally these should be limited, clear signage on entering the Nature Reserve, as well as a dog proof fence on the nature reserve boundary on this side.

The Conservation Council supports the developer being responsible for paying for the building and maintaining infrastructure in the interface zone, as well as signage for the Nature Reserve boundary.

Recommendation 4.
Recreational facilities – i.e. picnic tables and walking / cycling paths be located outside the Nature Reserve.

Recommendation 5.
Greater consideration be given to access points into the Nature Reserve being limited with any having very clear signage

Recommendation 6.
Consideration be given to a dog proof fence on the East Lake / Nature Reserve interface paid for by the developer.

Recommendation 7.
Any bushfire buffer zones must be outside the Nature Reserve

Domestic Animal Control

The Conservation Council fully supports the proposal for signage and community awareness that domestic animals are not allowed in the reserve (page 41). However these measures need to be accompanied by provision of a dedicated dog-of-leash area well away from the reserve. In addition the proposed urban development at Eastlake must be listed as a cat containment zone. Consideration should be given to declaring other nearby urban areas as cat containment zones.

Recommendation 8.
A dedicated dog-off-leash area must be established away from the nature reserve and existing and proposed urban areas around the reserve should be declared cat containment zones.

Weed and feral animal control

The Conservation Council fully supports the proposals for management of noxious weeds and feral animals (page 40-41). However these need to be informed by ongoing ecological advice so that removal of pest plants in particular is done in manner that does not negatively impact on soil stability or remove important habitat for species. This is acknowledged in the Master Plan however it does not detail how these programs will be developed, monitored or resourced.

An ongoing issue in the ACT is the lack of systemic and strategic pest plant and pest animal controls. The stop / start nature of these programs means that valuable time and resources to address these issues often become wasted when resources are limited to time specific programs.

Recommendation 9.
Weed and feral animal control need to be based on a sound ecological advice with ongoing monitoring and ongoing resourcing.

Biodiversity Monitoring and Indicators

The Strategic vegetation and habitat plan is welcomed. However it lacks a specific

monitoring program or indicators of performance.

The Master Plan should outline a clear monitoring program against identified indicators and a public reporting process on these.

Recommendation 10.
The Master Plan should outline a clear monitoring program against identified indicators and a reporting process on these.

Funding Arrangements

The Capital Woodlands and Wetlands Conservation Trust is a relatively new structure. Standard management for the Nature Reserve still resides with Park, Conservation and Services (TAMS). Funding through private partnerships to the Trust is intended to enhance research and scientific data rather than to cover standard management of the Reserve. It can be argued that as with other Nature Reserves in the ACT funding is inadequate to ensure appropriate weed and feral animal control. This is the case even with the significant voluntary contribution made by ACT Parkcare and Landcare groups.

The ACT Government has agreed to put \$2.341 for the development and implementation of the Master Plan (page 5). It is assumed this is for the initial capital infrastructure.

It is unclear of ongoing financial contributions to the necessary land management arrangements and requirements proposed in the Master Plan.

Resolving this should include a statement that clearly sets out the standards TAMS undertakes to work to, in order to then identify the cost of management that is over and above government funding and therefore open for funding from the Trust.

Recommendation 11.
Funding arrangements for ongoing monitoring, research and management for the Nature Reserve be made and be transparent.

Attachment One: Bush on the Boundary Principles

Connectivity

Since ecological landscape functioning depends upon the maintenance of opportunity for connectivity (permeability), there should be no loss of existing connections, and opportunities for enhancing connectivity should be identified and implemented (see Mature Trees).

The use of designed vegetation plantings to enhance connectivity should be encouraged and funded.

Mature Trees

In designing new suburbs, every effort should be made to retain remnant large mature trees (and associated vegetation) in the public land estate, and to implement appropriate tree management regimes to maintain their health and vigour, and their ecological contribution to landscape conservation.

Water

All urban and road runoff should be managed in a manner which enhances ecosystem functioning (flows and quality) and minimises impacts upon aquatic systems and wetlands.

Opportunities should encouraged to utilise residential and road runoff to facilitate management of the Urban Forest.

Fire Management

All asset protection zones must be incorporated within the urban footprint of the development.

Where bushfire protection activities must occur within the conservation reserve system, hazard reduction techniques should always consider the long-term health and vigour of the extant (?) ecosystems.

Invasive plant species

All Community engagement programmes in peri-urban areas should include resident education on the problems associated with potentially invasive species and the selection and care for appropriate species.

Domestic Animal Management

All new suburbs should have cat containment as an automatic suburb-wide regulation.

All existing suburbs across the ACT should have cat containment introduced on a rolling basis.

If unregistered/unchipped cats are found they must be moved to the Pound.

All suburbs should have area(s) of land outside the conservation reserve system set

aside for the walking of dogs both on- and off-leash.

TAMS should fund the provision of informative signage and community education in environmentally sensitive areas

Rural Leases

Where the adjacent naturally vegetated land is part of a rural lease, the potential for applying a Conservator's Direction should be evaluated and implemented.

For areas of higher conservation value, the introduction of a system of Conservation Leases (including both voluntary and mandatory) should be introduced and funded by the ACT Government.

Greater monitoring of conservation conditions on existing leases should occur through a rigorous compliance process.

Roads & Infrastructure

As a principle, infrastructure developments (with the possible exception of water reservoirs) should never be located within the conservation reserve system

Where such infrastructure currently exists, opportunities for relocation should be explored at appropriate times, and management of the easements must incorporate conservation objectives.

Access & Recreation Use

The conservation reserve system is primarily designed for the conservation of nature, therefore any recreational use should (a) be passive, (b) be oriented towards furthering appreciation of nature, and (c) be designed in a manner which ensures minimal environmental impact. For areas of particular concern or sensitivity, a policy of limited public access should be employed. There should be a transparent process to engage the community in determining appropriate access.

All new developments must have recreational infrastructure built into overall urban design, viz opportunities for cycling, walking, dog exercise parks.

Residential and Industrial Development

The design of new residential and industrial estates should, at the very earliest opportunity (i.e. at the Spatial Plan level), recognise, and make provision for, the retention and enhancement of existing ecosystems and the maintenance of ecosystem functions.

Design principles for suburbs located on the bush-urban interface should ensure that pressures on the adjacent natural lands can be managed within reasonable budgetary constraints – with special reference to access, pet animals, fire and stormwater management.

Herbivore grazing pressure

The management of peri-urban bushland must actively manage grazing pressures from a range of both native and introduced species.

Consultation

Consultations with residents should always involve of the developer – who should be required to fund the provision of materials and education kits to residents, covering such matters as planting guidelines, bushfire protection requirements, pet containment, waste dumping etc.

Developers should fund the establishment and operations of an ACT-wide technically-based bush regenerator team to provide support to local groups.

Establishment of Parkcare/Bushcare/Friends groups should be undertaken by TAMS at the very early stages of development.

Access to information/data

Early disclosure of detailed information relating to proposed new urban developments should be made to the Conservation Council, any BoB Reference groups and to the ACT's Catchment Groups. These groups should be afforded opportunities to participate in estate development planning.