



Credit: Richie Southerton



**CONSERVATION
COUNCIL** ACT REGION

Proposal for a

Western Conservation Landscape



Credit: Ken Piper

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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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Conservation Council of the ACT Region (the Conservation Council) has been advocating to the ACT Government to 'Save the Western Edge' of Canberra — to prevent urban development in the Western Edge Investigation Area (WEIA) and to ensure that the Western Edge is protected and sustainably managed into the future for its outstanding ecological, cultural, agricultural and recreational values.

This paper presents the Conservation Council's initial positive vision for the future management of the Western Edge. It proposes the development of a 'Western Conservation Landscape', in which lands within the Western Edge outside of the ACT's formal protected area network can support the conservation and restoration of biodiversity, be established as Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) and in certain cases, maintain additional uses such as sustainable agricultural production and recreational activity.

The paper outlines a series of management principles that could be employed by Government and land managers alike. It also highlights the significant and unique ecological values of a number of sites within the area, including the location of Box Gum Grassy Woodland and Natural Temperate Grassland ecological communities. Both are listed as critically endangered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Commonwealth) (EPBC Act) and the *Nature Conservation Act 2014* (ACT) (NC Act).

The Conservation Council considers that the creation of a 'Western Conservation Landscape' would provide a significant opportunity for the ACT Government to operationalise its proposed Nature Conservation Network, including through identifying Priority Conservation Areas and introducing voluntary stewardship programs on private leasehold land. In addition, led by Traditional Owners, there is a significant opportunity to establish an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) in the Western Edge, the first of its kind in the ACT. The establishment of an IPA could provide opportunities for employment

through an Indigenous Rangers Program, cultural revitalisation, cultural burning, and ceremony on Country.

Consistent with the principles of the draft *ACT Nature Conservation Strategy 2026-36*¹ (NCS), this paper does not suggest that the entire Western Edge, or any particular site, should be designated as nature reserves, although some sites may be considered for future formal protection. Rather, the principles promote a cross-tenure, landscape-scale approach that coordinates management across public land, Suburban Land Agency (SLA) land, and private leasehold land to protect and improve environmental values. There is a clear need to strengthen coordination of governance across the entire landscape, which currently comprises a complex mix of ownership and management arrangements.

A 'Western Conservation Landscape' also represents a critical opportunity to contribute to meeting the Australian and ACT Governments' commitments to protect and conserve 30% of Australia's landmass², and to give effect to Australia's international obligations as a Party to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. Such a proposal would also likely be eligible for Australian Government funding under the Australian Bushland Program.³

¹ ACT Government. (2026). *ACT nature conservation strategy - Building a Network for Nature*. ACT Government.

² Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. (2024, November 4). *National roadmap for protecting and conserving 30% of Australia's land By 2030*. <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/land/achieving-30-by-30/national-roadmap>.

³ Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. (2026, March 27). Australian bushland program. <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/land/australian-bushland-program>.



Credit: Trent Housenloge

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BACKGROUND

The Western Edge is a 9,800-hectare connected landscape largely undisturbed by urban development. It includes the Murrumbidgee River to the west, a known major movement corridor for fauna including migratory birds, in addition to critically endangered ecological communities and habitats for known threatened, rare and declining species.

This landscape is also readily accessible from much of central Canberra's urban area, from Belconnen to Tuggeranong, offering exceptional natural recreation and exploration opportunities as well as unparalleled vistas and dark night skies to the west. It's First Nations heritage values are not covered in this paper, though these are likely to be highly significant. Over 318 Aboriginal places and objects have been identified within the Western Edge, many of which currently have no legal protections.⁴ This includes single-artefact sites and artefact scatters listed under multiple collective entries on the ACT Heritage Register, as well as culturally modified trees, cultural areas, and quarries.

Existing Land Tenures

The Western Edge is a mixed-tenure landscape of leasehold land, uses and management, including some large properties owned by the ACT Government, purchased by the Suburban Land Agency and its predecessor, the Land Development Agency, as a possible future urban land bank and environmental offset sites (see Figure 1). It is understood that the ACT Government-owned properties continue to operate as agricultural enterprises. There are also blocks of private leasehold land, institutional holdings such as the ANU's 'Spring Valley Farm' (leased from the ACT Government), and recreation areas such as Stromlo Forest Park. The area contains the newly gazetted addition to the Lower Molonglo Nature Reserve (NR), Bluetts Block, Stony Creek NR, and a number of recreation reserves, including at Uriarra Crossing. Canberra Equestrian Centre, Camp

Cottermouth and Pegasus Riding School are also within the area. The area is immediately adjacent to several existing nature reserves on the current fringes of the city, including Woodstock NR, Kama NR, Narrabundah Hill NR, Cooleman Ridge NR and Urambi Hills NR.

Agricultural Productivity

A significant part of the Western Edge landscape has a history of rural land use, with some areas continuing to be dedicated to food and fibre production. For instance, Huntly is a representative element of the rural setting of the National Capital, an example of a twentieth-century grazing property listed on the ACT Heritage Register.⁵ The property retains a substantial stone homestead and ancillary structures and contributes to the understanding of agricultural history within the ACT's western rural landscape. Today, productive agricultural properties, such as Wagtail Park, running approximately 1,200 merinos across 300 hectares, support the livelihoods of local families and are crucial for local food and fibre production in the ACT Region.⁶

⁴ GML Heritage Pty Ltd. (2020). *Western Edge Investigation Area – Cultural Heritage Assessment*. GML Heritage.

⁵ ACT Heritage Council. (2004). *Entry to the ACT Heritage Register*. ACT Heritage Council.

⁶ Bushnell, I. (2026, June 18). *Woolgrower upset at bid to make West Belconnen green waste site permanent and much bigger*. Region.Com.Au. <https://region.com.au/woolgrower-upset-at-bid-to-make-west-belconnen-green-waste-site-permanent-and-much-bigger/975152/>.

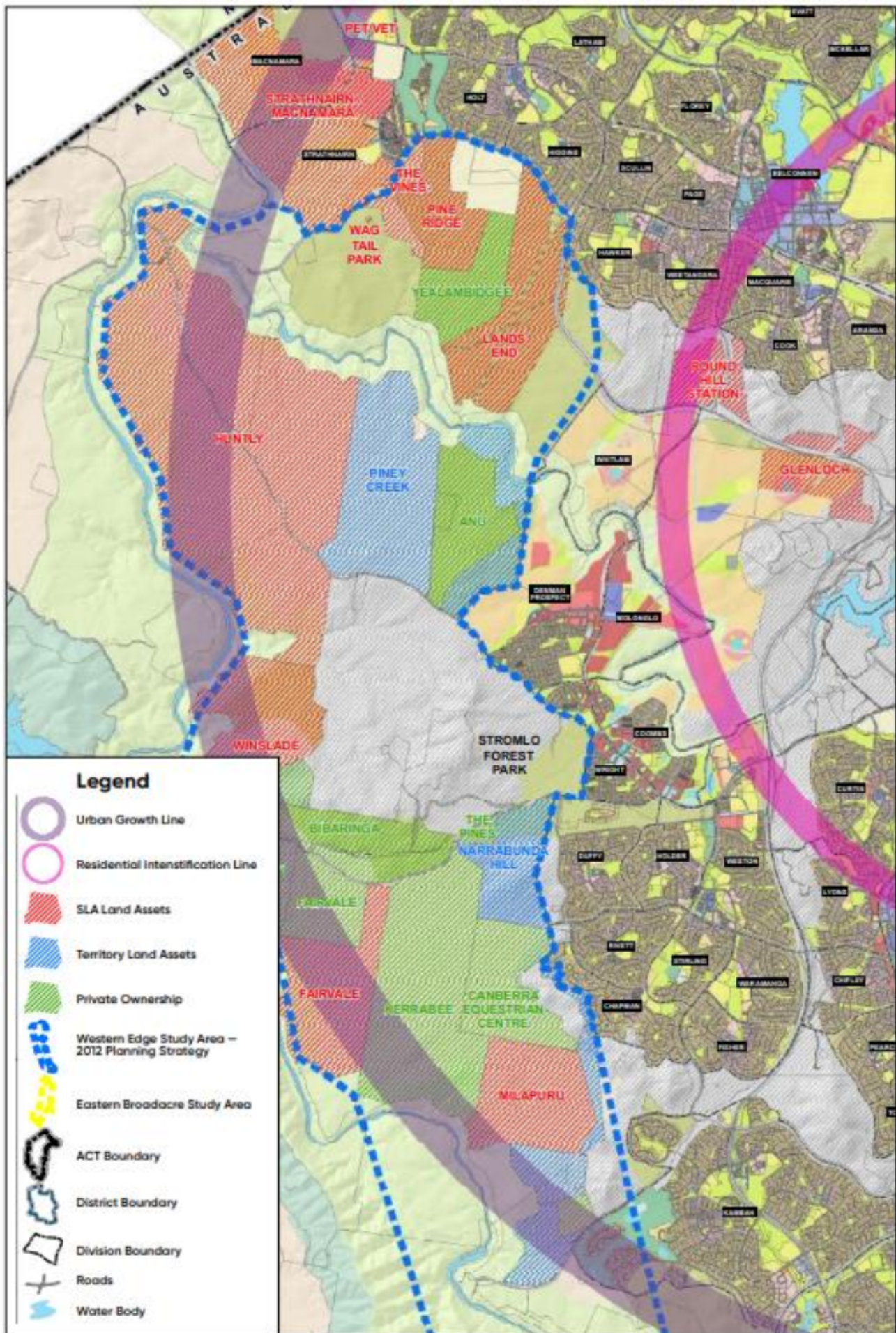


Figure 1 – Close to the Edge (Figure 7.11, p.149)

Ecological Values

The ecological values of the Western Edge are known to be significant, particularly in the northern area, from preliminary ACT Government investigations, in addition to other available data. A report commissioned by the ACT Government in 2021, by consultants Capital Ecology, provided a preliminary assessment of the ecological values of the WEIA, and presented recommendations for further investigation and more detailed studies. This report was based on available data and limited field assessment.⁷ The report identified that the WEIA includes:

- Significant riparian corridors along the Molonglo and upper Murrumbidgee rivers.
- A diversity of ecological communities, including approximately 1916 hectares Box-Gum Grassy Woodland and 210 hectares of Natural Temperate Grassland, both listed as critically endangered under the EPBC Act and the NC Act.⁸
- Five threatened flora species, including Hoary Sunray, *Leucochrysum albicans* var. *tricolor*, listed as endangered under the EPBC Act and Austral Toadflax, *Thesium australe*, listed as vulnerable under the EPBC Act and NC Act; and 47 rare and uncommon flora species. Due to limited surveys, the report concludes that it is likely that threatened and 'rare and uncommon' flora occur more widely within the WEIA than what has been recorded.⁹



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⁷ Capital Ecology (2021). *Western Edge Investigation Area – Preliminary Ecological Review. Final 02 – March 2021*. Prepared for Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, ACT Government. Authors: S. Reid and R. Speirs. Project no. 2960.

⁸ Capital Ecology (2021), pg 13

⁹ Capital Ecology (2021), pg 21

- Habitats for a range of threatened and declining bird species, including Little Eagle, *Hieraaetus morphnoides*, Rainbow Bee-eater, *Merops ornata*, Gang-gang Cockatoo, *Callocephalon fimbriatus*, Superb Parrot, *Polytelis swainsonii*, Brown Treecreeper, *Climacteris picumnus*, Hooded Robin, *Melanodryas cucullata*, Scarlet Robin, *Petroica boodang*, Varied Sittella, *Daphoenositta chrysoptera*, and Diamond Firetail, *Stagonopleura guttata*.¹⁰
- Significant records of the Pink-tailed Worm-lizards, *Aprasia parapulchella*, listed as vulnerable under the EPBC Act and NC Act, and the Golden Sun Moth, *Synemon plana*, (EPBC Act and NC Act vulnerable).¹¹
- Critical ecological connections across the landscape.

Additional threatened species not identified by the Capital Ecology report included Turquoise Parrot, *Neophema pulchella*, Painted Honeyeater, *Grantiella picta*, White-winged Triller, *Lalage tricolor*, and Speckled Warbler, *Pyrholaemus sagittatus*. Several significant regionally rare and declining species are also known to occur in the Western Edge area, including Painted Buttonquail, *Turnix varius*, Chestnut-rumped Heathwren, *Hylacola pyrrhopygia*, and Dusky Woodswallow, *Artamus cyanopterus*.

Also of importance are the extensive areas of undeveloped lands around critical pockets of the critically endangered Box-Gum Grassy Woodland and Natural Temperate Grassland (both listed under the EPBC Act and NC Act), which although having suffered from past mismanagement through clearing and

overgrazing, are now regenerating at various rates. It is notable that excellent samples of both of these critically endangered ecological communities retain considerably high conservation values in areas that ecologists from the Conservation Council have visited at Bluetts Block, Stromlo Woodlands (part of Stromlo Forest Park) and parts of ANU's Spring Valley Farm. This points to the enormous biodiversity potential and significance of the Western Edge area in the long term, given sound, scientifically informed management.

The 2025 report by the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability & Environment, 'Close to the Edge', provided a summary of the threatened communities and species found in the WEIA, and the potential impacts of future urban development. The report concluded:

*"Were it to occur, urban expansion within the Western Edge Investigation Area could be expected to bring extensive habitat loss, fragmentation and edge effects, all of which pose significant threats to the area's biodiversity."*¹²

The report further stated:

*"Critically, it is not the loss of one habitat type or keystone structure or species that threatens the ecological integrity of the area. It is the disruption of the entire landscape and the interrelationships and connections between different habitat types, including those which are not considered 'high priority' from a nature conservation perspective."*¹³

¹⁰ Capital Ecology (2021), pg 26

¹¹ Capital Ecology (2021), pg 46

¹² Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. (2025). *Close to the edge* (p. 147). ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.

¹³ Close to the Edge (2025), pg 147

Recognising the cumulative impacts of biodiversity loss and habitat fragmentation that could result from urban development in the Western Edge, it is in this context that the Conservation Council is proposing a 'Western Conservation Landscape'.

Additional data from online sources and field assessments on a small number of the WEIA blocks has been collected and consolidated by member groups of the Conservation Council, including Friends of Grasslands and Canberra Ornithologists Group, working with the Council's Biodiversity Working Group. The Conservation Council is also conducting ongoing Gula (Koala) habitat transect surveys in the WEIA.¹⁴ Brief summaries are included in Appendix 1.

Planning Vision – Canberra's Open Space System

The Metropolitan Plan within the National Capital Plan (NCP) clearly shows the Western Edge as a core part of the National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS). A mixture of river corridors, hills and ridges, and rural areas forming part of the open space setting for the Nation's capital and defining the edge of the metropolitan area.¹⁵

Since 1977, the need for a highly integrated open space system with both rural and urban components has been identified, to protect the river corridor and to provide a recreational resource for the city.¹⁶

The Principle for River Corridors in the current NCP is to:

*"Protect and enhance the environmental quality, landscape setting and the natural and cultural resources of the Murrumbidgee and Molonglo River Corridors. The Murrumbidgee River Corridor is to be conserved as an important national resource and a key open space element which provides a definable edge to the developed urban areas."*¹⁷

In a contemporary context, the ecological and recreational value of these landscapes, set aside on the western edge of the city, creates the opportunity for the Nation's Capital to exemplify a defined urban edge based on integrating the ongoing protection and conservation of threatened ecosystems and unique species. These landscapes are also an important recreational resource for the city's growing population and visitors in a rural setting unique to this city. As Seddon noted, other large cities in Australia relate to the sea and have coastal landscapes for their recreation, while for Canberra it can be argued that the challenge remains "to find a satisfactory comparable relationship with a highly sensitive system of inland rivers and hills." A 'Western Conservation Landscape' could provide the key.

¹⁴ Conservation Council ACT Region. (2026, March 4). Gula Research in Canberra. Conservation Council ACT Region. <https://conservationcouncil.org.au/nature-waterways/gula-in-canberra/>.

¹⁵ National Capital Planning Authority. (1990). *National capital plan* (pt 3, figure 2). Australian Government.

¹⁶ Seddon, G. (1977). *An open space system for Canberra* (Technical Paper 23). National Capital Development

Commission.

¹⁷ National Capital Authority. (2021). *National Capital Plan 2021–2023*. Australian Government.



Credit: Trent Housenloge

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MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES FOR A WESTERN CONSERVATION LANDSCAPE

The Conservation Council proposes the governance and management of a 'Western Conservation Landscape' could be based on the following principles.

Some of the proposed actions and principles could be feasibly implemented through existing ACT Government programs, for instance, the Natural Resource Management program, in partnership with community organisations such as Landcare, or as part of the implementation of the new Nature Conservation Strategy.

1. Cross-tenure conservation

Effective conservation of the Western Edge requires a cross-tenure, landscape-scale approach that coordinates management across public land, SLA land and privately managed properties. This reflects the reality that many threatened species, ecological communities and ecological processes extend beyond formal reserves. A cross-tenure approach is also consistent with the ACT Government's proposed Nature Conservation Network and the identification of Priority Conservation Areas, which could be located in the Western Edge.

The 'Close to the Edge' report reinforces the need for cross-tenure conservation in the Western Edge, concluding that ecological risk arises from disruption of "the entire landscape and the interrelationships and connections between different habitat types" rather than isolated site impacts.¹⁸

Various properties under different tenures and ownership would be managed 'independently', with consideration of key environmental values, in some instances alongside sustainable agricultural production, recreational activities, or other compatible land uses.

¹⁸ Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. (2025). *Close to the edge*. ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.

2. Establish Indigenous Protected Areas

IPAs provide a nationally established mechanism for conservation management. Each IPA is initiated and led entirely by Traditional Owners, with funding support from the Australian Government (see Appendix 2). Complementing an IPA, the Indigenous Rangers Program provides an operational mechanism for on-ground delivery. The program supports activities such as fire management, invasive species control, biodiversity monitoring, and cultural heritage protection, combining Traditional Owner knowledge with scientific approaches.

An IPA in the Western Edge would be the first of its kind in the ACT, and allow the community to access and entirely lead the management of land on their own terms, providing potential opportunities for employment, practices such as cultural burning, and ceremony.

A key feature of the IPA model is its flexibility across land tenure. IPAs can be established over any land tenure and do not change the underlying ownership of the land, provided there is agreement from all parties with legal rights and interests. In the Western Edge, a number of SLA owned sites would be ideally suited for establishing an IPA.

3. Establish conservation stewardship programs on rural leasehold land

Foreshadowed in the Draft ACT Nature Conservation Strategy 2026–2036 (Target 6b – A stewardship scheme for rural lands), conservation stewardship programs could be made available to



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rural lessees to fund conservation actions on rural leasehold land or to establish certain sites as conserved areas.

As the ACT does not currently have a legislative framework to enable the establishment of conservation agreements with rural lessees, or that enables the provision of incentives to undertake conservation management actions, this would likely require legislative amendments to the *Nature Conservation Act 2014* (NC Act) or the *Planning Act 2023*, or the enactment of new legislation. Such covenants should also provide incentives to rural landholders, and address concerns around security of tenure and their ability to continue operating their enterprise.

It is noted that currently, conservation obligations via an agreement in the ACT are limited to land management agreements (LMAs), which apply across a single rural leasehold. LMAs are compulsory for ACT rural leases under the

Planning Act 2023 (ACT). The Conservator of Flora and Fauna 'may' make guidelines setting out the requirements for LMAs. However, LMAs have presented persistent issues with currency, enforcement, and the depth of obligations they impose.

The ACT Government could also seek to partner with philanthropic conservation organisations, such as Bush Heritage Australia or the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, to explore the possibility of establishing conservation reserves within the Western Edge.

Conservation agreements could also be negotiated with the Commonwealth under the EPBC Act, through which the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment, the ACT Government and leaseholders could agree to conserve and protect biodiversity in an area of land (a voluntary conservation covenant).

4. Implement management plans for SLA land

Sites where the SLA is the leaseholder, including those foreshadowed as potential conservation or future offset areas within the 'Western Conservation Landscape' should be managed under formal Conservation Management Plans or Plans of Management that identify ecological values, threats, management objectives, monitoring requirements and review cycles.

In the ACT, Plans of Management are the primary mechanism for guiding long-term management of public land and are intended to set out how an area will be managed, protected and used over time. Capital Ecology recommended management plans and monitoring programs for blocks of public lands to ensure significant ecological values are maintained.¹⁹

5. Build on existing community stewardship

Conservation management actions undertaken in the Western Edge should recognise and build upon the existing and previous restoration work undertaken by community groups and non-government organisations, including Landcare, Catchment Groups and Park Care Groups, and partner with these groups. For example, the Southern ACT Catchment Group, Friends of Urambi Hills, Cooleman Ridge Parkcare Group, and Friends of Bluetts Block are volunteer community groups undertaking restoration at sites within the Western Edge.

¹⁹ Capital Ecology (2021), pg 68

6. Targeted restoration actions to maintain and enhance conservation values at specific locations

Sites should be identified where targeted restoration actions could be implemented to maintain and enhance conservation values. This includes measures such as protecting mature trees and tree hollows in areas of potential Superb Parrot nesting and foraging habitat, planting the next generation of suitable breeding trees (the local eucalypts Yellow Box, *Eucalyptus melliodora*, and Blakely's Red Gum, *E. blakelyi*), and establishing trees suitable for foraging habitat (particularly the local wattles, *Acacia* sp.). Also useful would be the introduction of coarse woody debris in appropriate locations to enhance habitat for the Brown Treecreeper, see *Appendix 1*. All management and habitat restoration actions should be designed with bushfire risk in mind, requiring careful consideration and the development of appropriate guidelines.

Best practice guidelines for the restoration and regeneration for Box-Gum Grassy Woodlands are readily available from the Australian National University's Sustainable Farms initiative, in which researchers work closely with Landcare and with farmers to understand how improving natural assets on farms can support biodiversity and sustainable agriculture.²⁰ Under preparation is the Ecological Species Selection Guide, which has a focus on lowland plant communities. The Western Edge would be an ideal site to demonstrate the value of

²⁰ Australian National University. (n.d.). *ANU sustainable farms*. Retrieved September 29, 2026, from <https://www.sustainablefarms.org.au/>.

protecting paddock trees and restoration of grassy woodlands. It is noted that for some blocks of SLA-leased land, extensive restoration would be necessary for these sites to be determined as environmental offsets in future, which is understood to be the Government's likely intention.

There may also be capacity for woodland refuges to be established and managed for conservation objectives on suitable blocks or patches of land. This could build on the Mulligans Flat Sanctuary protected area model, taking advantage of the Mulligans Flat Sanctuary research learnings, growing populations of conservation bred animals, while expanding the opportunities for research, education and community participation. Such refuges, with financial support, could be managed by private and community interests.

7. Priority protection of mature trees (eucalypts) across the landscape

Management should prioritise the

protection and regeneration of mature eucalypts across the Western Edge, which are keystone ecological structures in agricultural landscapes and provide critical ecosystem functions that warrant their priority protection. This includes the provision of critical habitat, particularly for hollow dwelling and nectar feeding species, enabling connectivity and enhancing water infiltration.

8. A whole-of-landscape plan of management for invasive weeds

A landscape-scale plan is needed to guide targeted management actions at individual sites, addressing non-native invasive grasses, broadleaved weeds and woody weeds. For example, infestations of Blackberry, *Rubus fruticosus*, could be addressed through phased removal and replacement with nodes of suitable locally indigenous shrubs, to provide habitat and cover for small birds and other fauna.

A whole-of-landscape plan of management for weeds could also guide

Credit: Ken Piper



actions to contain or limit the spread of highly invasive African Lovegrass, *Eragrostis curvula*, which presents a significant bushfire risk, and has the potential to colonise, dominate and transform the landscape, and impact negatively on agricultural and environmental values.²¹

9. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation

The consultants' reports have identified the need for further and ongoing research and monitoring, in particular for regeneration and connectivity. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation should be undertaken with clearly stated management objectives, and should be management adjusted, as necessary. Data collected should be available centrally and publicly, and with public reporting of conservation outcomes.

The ACT Government would benefit from harnessing the expertise of Canberra's scientific and research community in such activities. For example, researchers at the Australian National University are significantly involved in the restoration and monitoring of Box-Gum Grassy Woodland sites across south-eastern Australia including Mulligans Flat Sanctuary. Also, CSIRO researchers through the Applied Genomics Initiative are global leaders in the rapid genomic analysis of rare and threatened species, the foundation for population genomics, diversity and the analysis of connectivity. Volunteer groups, including from Friends of

Grasslands, local Landcare groups, and the Southern Tablelands Ecosystem Park at the National Arboretum have also amassed considerable experience in restoration of grassy ecosystem sites.

Given that the ACT contains one of the largest contiguous Box-Gum Grassy Woodland area remaining nationally, the Western Edge represents a prime landscape-scale regeneration study site, and would be a valuable ACT contribution to national biodiversity conservation for this critically endangered ecological community (CEEC). Development of partnerships including groups discussed above would be of considerable interest to researchers, Landcare and restoration groups, and land managers across south-eastern Australia.

²¹ Conservation Council ACT Region (2026) *African Love Grass Management in the ACT*. Retrieved September 29, 2026, from <https://conservationcouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/ALG-Management-Principles-NCF-21-May-2026-2.pdf>.



Credit: Geoffrey Dob

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APPENDIX 1 – SUMMARY OF KEY WEIA FLORA AND FAUNA VALUES

The 'Close to the Edge' (2025) report found the WEIA supported:²²

- 12 threatened bird species, including the Superb Parrot (Commonwealth & ACT listing).
- A large area of confirmed Superb Parrot breeding habitat (513ha) as well as two of the three known Superb Parrot breeding locations in ACT.
- A substantial number of current and historic nest sites of the threatened Little Eagle.
- Woodland habitats which support several threatened bird species, including habitats for the Brown Treecreeper, Scarlet Robin and Diamond Firetail identified in a bird survey in 2023 by Greening Australia.²³
- Habitats (known and potential areas) for the threatened Pink-tailed Worm-lizard.

It is worth noting, the report from the Greening Australia bird survey, indicated the Scarlet Robin (ACT threatened) was recorded in 21 of 52 point counts across 15 woodland patches. This indicates the lands on the western edge are valuable lowland habitats in autumn/winter for the Scarlet Robin, a partial altitudinal migrant.

Additionally, there are records of several other threatened, rare and regionally uncommon bird species, as well as several others that are recognised as declining.

There are many uncommon, threatened, rare and declining plant species that have been recorded. There is an extensive stand

of Drooping She-oak, *Allocasuarina verticillata*, which is potential habitat for the Glossy Black-Cockatoo, *Calyptorhynchus lathami*, listed as vulnerable under the EPBC Act and NC Act. There are recent and historical records of the declining Rosenberg's Monitor, *Varanus rosenbergii*, in areas abutting the WEIA. All this is referenced in the Capital Ecology report.

As ultimately described in a separate report prepared by consultants SMEC for the ACT Government, there are 'very few areas in the WEIA that do not have some degree of ecological significance.'²⁴

The following is a summary of known information about some sites within the WEIA. This is intended to be a snapshot, not fully comprehensive on all environmental values, and could be added to, especially as more relevant data becomes available.

Molonglo River Nature Reserve, Bluetts Block Section

Located on the western edge of the suburb of Denman-Prospect, Bluetts Block was recently added to the West Molonglo Nature Reserve. Bluetts Block covers approximately 340 ha. Bluetts Block has diverse biodiversity, the CEECs, Box-Gum Grassy Woodland and Natural Temperate Grassland, rare local plants including a rich orchid flora, and habitats for threatened, declining and regionally rare woodland birds and the Pink-tailed Worm Lizard. 148 species of birds have been recorded.²⁵ The block contains heathland,

²² Close to the Edge (2025), p147-148

²³ Greening Australia. (2023). *Western Edge Woodland Bird Surveys - Report for the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate*. Greening Australia Ltd.

²⁴ ACT Government. (2023). *Capability and suitability assessment*. https://www.planning.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/2982477/capability-and-suitability-assessment.pdf.

²⁵ eBird. (n.d.). *Australian Capital Territory, Australia*. <https://ebird.org/region/AU-ACT>.



Credit: Richie Southerton

a vegetation community not well represented in the ACT. Mammal fauna includes Common Dunnart, *Sminthopsis murina*, and an Antechinus species, *Antechinus sp.*

Bluetts Block is considered a critical landscape corridor connection between the Murrumbidgee River, across to the Molonglo River corridor, to Kama NR, Central Molonglo, the Pinnacle NR and beyond.

Spring Valley Farm & Piney Creek

The ACT Government owns assets on the Uriarra Road, and ANU has a lease on Spring Valley Farm.

This is a known Superb Parrot breeding habitat, one of only three breeding colonies in the ACT. Some surveys by ACT Government for Superb Parrots have occurred, but not in recent years. The Friends of Bluetts Block are seeking some



of the land on the eastern side of Spring Valley Farm to be incorporated into the reserved Bluetts Block, so to reduce the boundary-to-area ratio that currently stands for the narrow Bluetts Block site. There may be potential for breeding habitat enhancement for Superb Parrots. There are areas of Natural Temperate Grassland on Spring Valley, and a known population of Pink-tailed Worm-lizard. Similar adjacent habitat to that which occurs on Bluetts Block is likely to carry the same bird fauna, including the threatened, regionally rare and declining species.

Huntly

Huntly is a large grazing property (1605 ha) on the Uriarra Road, which is mostly cleared of the original native groundlayer and understorey, but retains old-growth paddock trees with many hollows. The land is owned by ACT Government, which purchased it as possible future urban land release.

The Capital Ecology report identified a large part with Superb Parrot breeding habitat. Superb Parrots are known to breed on adjacent blocks to the east of Huntly, such as Spring Valley Farm.

The Capital Ecology report recommended targeted Superb Parrot breeding surveys for land to the west and south-west of Spring Valley Farm.²⁶

There is potential for restoration planting (and enabling assisted natural regeneration) to ensure the next generation of breeding trees for Superb Parrots, with the locally indigenous Blakely's Red Gum that produces the kinds of hollows preferred by the Superb Parrot, as well as planting nodes or strips of native species for foraging habitats (e.g. locally indigenous wattles).

Stromlo Woodlands

Stromlo Woodlands is the name given to land incorporated within the Stromlo Forest Park boundaries on its western edge, west of Uriarra Road. It includes the Uriarra Travelling Stock Reserve. These blocks have good connectivity to other valuable habitats (including Bluetts Block and the Murrumbidgee River corridor via Stony Creek), with a gully-line a known movement corridor for seasonally migrating honeyeaters.

An initial assessment of ecological values and a plant list were carried out in spring 2025.²⁷ Subsequent site visits have substantially added to that list. This area is assessed as a high value patch of bushland that supports a floristically diverse Box-Gum Grassy Woodland CEEC.

The woodland has some large old-growth Yellow Box, Blakely's Red Gum and Apple Box, *Eucalyptus bridgesiana*. There are Dry Forest communities on the steeper slopes, with old-growth Scribbly Gums, *E. rossii*, and Shrubby Woodland community on the ridges dominated by Mealy Bundy, *Eucalyptus nortonii*. The ground-layers of Box-Gum Grassy Woodland and Dry Forest communities have a particularly diverse native flora, including many declining grassland forb species.

It is likely these blocks have never been cleared and it is highly likely that some of the open grassy areas are part of the Natural Temperate Grassland CEEC. The blocks appear to have history of only light grazing, and any grazing by stock likely ceased a long time ago. Existing natural regimes with grazing by native herbivores, appears to be managing the biomass of the ground-layer vegetation.

These woodlands are recognised as an important habitat for woodland bird species, and a substantial bird list has been compiled by Canberra ornithologists and recorded on eBird.²⁸ A total of 129 species of birds has been recorded, of which are 8 threatened species and 22 woodland decliners. The regionally rare Chestnut-rumped Heathwren has been recorded here, as well as on Bluetts Block nearby.

There are some patches of Blackberry, St John's Wort, *Hypericum perforatum*, and African Lovegrass that are not being managed. While blackberries provide some structure and cover for native birds and other fauna, a plan for phased control and replacement with native shrubs needs to be developed and implemented.

²⁶ Capital Ecology (2021), pg 27

²⁷ Rainer Rehwinkel vegetation/flora survey, 2025

²⁸ eBird. (n.d.). Australian Capital Territory, Australia. <https://ebird.org/region/AU-ACT>.

Establishing a Landcare or Friends group is likely a good option for assisting in management, but ultimately, the land-manager or leaseholder has the duty of care to carry out weed management.

Winslade

Winslade is a large property, accessed from the Cotter Road, previously a lease holding (around 486 ha), purchased by the ACT Government as a land bank for future urban and offsets site. This is a productive grazing property, divided into small areas of mostly exotic pasture grasses and legumes, with scattered mature paddock trees, remnants of the Box-Gum Grassy Woodland CEEC. The property includes a 100 ha “Bush Block”, and a network of planted and fenced tree-lanes (with locally indigenous and non-indigenous wattles and other species), and some fenced woodlots that contain regenerating trees of the Box-Gum Grassy Woodland. The property abuts Huntly to the north, Stromlo Forest Park to the east, and is close to the Murrumbidgee River corridor.

A field survey was undertaken in early November 2025, based on a rapid assessment method.²⁹ The report’s summary of values included:

- Landscape and stepping stone connectivity, between the Murrumbidgee River and areas beyond through to Stromlo Forest Park and adjacent remnants (Spring Valley Farm, Stromlo Woodlands, Bluetts Block).
- Old growth paddock trees providing

habitat for many species, including hollow-dependent species.

- Potential habitat for Superb Parrot.
- The presence of a diverse sample of Box-Gum Grassy Woodland CEEC, and potential presence of Natural Temperate Grassland patches requiring further survey.
- A diverse bushland remnant (the Bush Block), with at least two distinct and possibly three vegetation communities (Box-Gum Grassy Woodland CEEC, Dry Forest and potentially Natural Temperate Grassland CEEC).

There is a significant mid-storey layer of Sweet Bursaria, *Bursaria spinosa*, in the Bush Block. This is a spiny flowering shrub that provides good refuge and breeding cover for woodland birds, and the summer flowers are a resource used by insects, which provide a food resource for small insectivorous birds.

The combination of the old-growth paddock trees over productive pastures, the planted tree-lanes, and the varied habitats in the Bush Block, is considered to provide many habitat niches for a diversity of birds.

Targeted bird surveys have been undertaken on the property in November 2025, December 2025 and April 2026, particularly in the Bush Block.³⁰ A bird list has been compiled which could be added to over time. These surveys and incidental records from the November 2025 field assessment have recorded 70 species of birds, with 4 threatened species including a Superb Parrot flying across the block and Scarlet Robin, Flame Robin, *Petroica phoenicea* (a species of conservation

²⁹ Rainer Rehwinkel (6 November 2025), *Rapid Assessment of Conservation Values of Winslade*, Cotter Road, a confidential report to the Biodiversity Working Group/Conservation Council

³⁰ Jenny Bounds, Canberra Ornithologists Group: bird list/spreadsheet held by Conservation Council

concern), and 18 species of declining woodland birds.³¹

The April 2026 (autumn) bird survey recorded migrating Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, *Caligavis chrysops*, White-naped Honeyeaters, *Melithreptus lunatus*, and Red Wattlebirds, *Anthochaera carunculata*, flying across the block and using the planted tree-lanes as migration-corridors.

The Brown Treecreeper (a NC Act vulnerable and woodland-dependent species), is known to have occurred on Winslade in the early 2000s, and were also known to occur on other properties off the Cotter Road.

Central Molonglo

The land south of Belconnen (Drake Brockman Drive), has a number of blocks,

including Lands End and Pine Ridge that are owned by the ACT Government. These two properties were purchased by the ACT Government for future urban and offsets sites. The Molonglo River and its nature reserve borders to the west, with Kama Nature Reserve to the south. There is particularly good connectivity from other WEIA lands. Scattered paddock trees and clumps of trees remain on the land north of the Kama reserve.

There is a known Superb Parrot breeding area within the Central Molonglo in and around the Land's End property, north of Kama. The Brown Treecreeper once occurred as resident, with breeding groups on leasehold lands in the Central Molonglo and a remnant population may still occur with recent records from Kama NR. Brown Treecreeper breeding groups may have become locally extinct in 2012, though its presence at Kama and The Pinnacle NR may indicate otherwise. The recent records of single birds in those nature reserves are possibly lone birds moving

Credit: Trent Houssenloge



³¹ Bounds, J., Davey, C., Taws, N., Evans, M. J., & Rayner, L. (2021). *Long-term trends in ACT woodland birds 1998–2019*. Canberra Ornithologists Group. <https://canberrabirds.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/21507-ACT-Gov-Long-term-Trends-in-ACT-Woodlands-Birds-FF-WEB-3.pdf>

across the landscape seeking breeding opportunities, and an unconfirmed breeding record.

The land in Central Molonglo has potential to be enhanced for both Superb Parrot and Brown Treecreeper, with targeted plantings and restoration, which would also benefit other species of birds and native animals.

Habitat enhancement for Brown Treecreeper could include the introduction of woody debris or logs (a science-based habitat enhancement practice which already occurs in ACT using eucalypt material from land clearing and tree removal). Also, maintaining a suitable mosaic ground layer with short grasses and bare or sparsely vegetated patches.

It should be noted that the ACT Government, under community pressure, made a decision several years ago that the Central Molonglo would not be developed for urban use. There has been recent news of early urban planning on land adjacent to Drake-Brockman Drive (purchased by the land planning agency).

Southern WEIA (south of Cotter Road)

There is a substantial area of rural land and river corridor in the southern WEIA.³² There is less public information or details available about the ecological values. This area has various blocks, including Milapuru and part of Fairvale owned by ACT Government, purchased as future urban land bank and potential offsets sites.

Capital Ecology indicated further studies

³² Capital Ecology (2021), Figure 2

should be undertaken in the WEIA (e.g. vegetation and connectivity mapping). Large areas of woodland habitats with remnant canopy, as well as connectivity were identified, the latter requiring further expert analysis.³³

The map of Box-Gum Woodland in the Capital Ecology Report ³⁴, shows a number of patches, including two large areas of that CEEC. It is also known there are extensive areas of Box-Gum Woodland further south on rural lands north of Tharwa (e.g. Lambrigg, Castle Hill).

There would appear to be good potential for restoration of habitats in some areas, including functional connections, and for future breeding habitat for Superb Parrot. A large area was identified in the Capital Ecology report as potential or future Superb Parrot breeding habitat, that requires survey.³⁵

The Greening Australia bird survey in 2023 included some woodland patches in this area. It is understood that Greening Australia undertook a second bird survey in 2025, and recorded a Swift Parrot, *Lathamus discolor* (critically endangered under the EPBC Act) in this area.³⁶ The 2025 study has not been published.

Potential Gula (Koala) Habitat

To date, the Conservation Council/ANU Gula (Koala) Habitat Viability Project has collected background material on habitat features, examined maps in QGIS overlay and conducted four transect surveys

³³ Capital Ecology (2021), pg 64

³⁴ Capital Ecology (2021), Figure 6

³⁵ Capital Ecology (2021), Figure 10 & pg 29

³⁶ Greening Australia 2026, pers. comm.

within the Western Edge precinct to assess habitat suitability for Gula (Koala, *Phascolarctos cinereus*).

The mapping displays nine vegetation types across the area that are dominated by Locally Important Koala Trees (LIKTs). Four patches are large and well connected, offering potential home range areas. Many smaller patches are interspersed, offering shelter and browse for a low-density Gula population moving naturally across open spaces for breeding purposes.

The detailed transects found all sites comprised of Box-Gum Grassy Woodland CEEC.

Species listed at transects (32 trees each):

- Shepherd's Lookout track: Yellow Box, *Eucalyptus melliodora* and Blakely's Red Gum, *Eucalyptus blakelyi*;
- Kama Woodland: Red Box, *Eucalyptus polyanthemos*, Red Stringybark, *Eucalyptus macrorrhyncha*, Scribbly Gum, *Eucalyptus rossii*, Yellow Box, and Apple Box, *Eucalyptus bridgesiana*;
- Winslade: Apple Box, Red Stringybark, *Eucalyptus macrorrhyncha*, Yellow Box and Blakely's Red Gum;
- East Molonglo Offset: Blakely's Red Gum, Yellow Box and Apple Box.

The Capital Ecology 2021 report is an additional reference, and there are useful maps available.



Credit: Richie Southerton

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APPENDIX 2 – INDIGENOUS PROTECTED AREAS

Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) provide a nationally established mechanism for conservation. Each IPA is initiated and led by Traditional Owners, with funding support from the Australian Government. The development, governance and management of IPAs are led by Traditional Owners. IPAs are recognised as part of the National Reserve System.

A key feature of the IPA model is its flexibility across land tenure. IPAs can be established over any land tenure and do not change the underlying ownership of the land, provided there is agreement from all parties with legal rights and interests.

Governance requirements for IPA establishment are equally significant. Proposals must be led by an eligible Indigenous organisation capable of demonstrating cultural authority, decision-making structures, and the ability to manage consultation, stakeholder engagement, and reporting. This includes clearly articulating how Traditional Owner authority is exercised and how competing or overlapping interests are addressed.

The Australian Government's Australian Bushland Program has previously allocated funding to support consultation and establishment of new IPAs, with the consultation phase focused on defining a vision for Country, engaging stakeholders, and developing a management plan.

The ACT currently does not have any IPAs in place. Due to the underlying legal tenures, any IPA in the ACT would likely be a multi-tenure IPA and require community and inter-governmental consent and collaboration.

The ecological case for an IPA pathway in the Western Edge is strong. The Close to

the Edge report identifies the presence of nationally threatened ecological communities and emphasises the importance of landscape-scale connectivity, particularly along the Murrumbidgee and Molonglo river corridors. The report further highlights that ecological integrity depends on maintaining interconnections across habitat types, rather than focusing solely on isolated areas. In this context, an IPA model offers a framework capable of integrating cultural land management with landscape-scale conservation.

Complementing an IPA, the Indigenous Rangers Program provides an operational mechanism for on-ground delivery. The program supports activities such as fire management, invasive species control, biodiversity monitoring, and cultural heritage protection, combining Traditional Owner knowledge with scientific approaches.



The Conservation Council would like to acknowledge and thank the volunteers and broader community members involved in the development of this proposal, with particular thanks to members of the Biodiversity Working Group
