

Conservation Partners for the National Reserve System

Program: a Western NSW focus

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Abstract

This project is a Caring for Our Country initiative between the Australian and New South Wales Governments which aims to increase the involvement of private and other public landholders in the National Reserve System (NRS) through voluntary establishment of Conservation Agreements over places of high natural and cultural heritage conservation value. The project seeks to encourage all private and other public landholders with high conservation value areas on their properties to contribute to the continuing development of a 'Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative' (CAR) network of protected areas across NSW. The goal is to conserve examples of the full range of ecosystems and which shows Australia's great diversity of wildlife and unique natural heritage. Currently only 8% of the total land area of NSW is protected in public national parks and reserves. This means that 92% of the land area of the state is on private and other public lands. There is an opportunity for private and other public landholders to protect significant natural and cultural heritage on their land. The focus of effort is in bio-regions currently under-represented in protected areas in western areas of the state with less than 5% of their natural areas remaining, and strengthening connectivity and resilience

Introduction

The project seeks to encourage all private and other public landholders with high conservation value areas on their properties to contribute to the continuing development of a 'Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative' (CAR) network of protected areas across NSW. The goal is to conserve examples of the full range of ecosystems which shows Australia's great diversity of wildlife and unique natural heritage.

Conservation Agreement covenants on private and non-reserved public lands are established under s69A-KA of the *National Parks & Wildlife Act 1974 (NSW)* to protect and conserve natural and cultural heritage values in-perpetuity. It also provides for greater control of activities unauthorised by the landholder such as access, shooting, trapping, picking and disturbance in conservation areas.

Conservation Agreement covenants meets the definition of International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Protected Area Category IV and current Protected Areas on Private Land criteria for the National Reserve System.

The Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) has a long established and well developed Conservation Partners Program to provide for the establishment, ongoing monitoring and support of private and other public landholders with statutory conservation commitments under Wildlife Refuges and Conservation Agreements in regions across the state. Strategic conservation priorities are developed in an integrated approach with the establishment and management of NSW public reserves.

The project takes an integrated approach with public reservation initiatives, non-government conservation organisation initiatives, and Indigenous Protected Areas establishment, and is co-ordinated with Wildlife Refuges and Property Registration options.

The project contributes to integrated strategic biodiversity and natural heritage protection and conservation approaches by:

- securing legal protection of private and other public lands to contribute to a CAR protected area system which is connected and resilient
- securing legal protection of high conservation value sites on Indigenous Protected Areas as requested by Aboriginal Owners
- conserving significant biodiversity and ecological communities on private and other public lands
- maintaining and improving the condition of wildlife habitat to promote conservation and recovery of wildlife in priority terrestrial and wetland environments
- tackling weeds and pest animals that threaten biodiversity and natural ecosystems
- improving knowledge and skills of land managers and participation in conservation management (including indigenous communities)

Focus Areas

The project focuses on bio-regions with less than 5% conserved in protected areas, namely:

- NSW South West Slopes Bio-region and the Lednapper district of the Mulga Lands Bioregion
- Central western slopes and plains, in particular poorly reserved bio-regions of the Cobar Peneplain and eastern areas of the Darling Riverine Plains
- Western NSW under-represented bio-regions such as the Broken Hill Complex and Mulga Lands bio-regions; and the Lachlan River, Upper Barwon River and Booligal Wetlands

The focus area in western NSW comprises all of the Western Division. Most of the rangeland areas of NSW fall within the Western Division where the tenure is predominately Crown leasehold land under the *Western Lands Act 1901*. The project has particular focus in the rangeland area of NSW as most of the bio-regions of Western NSW are under represented in national parks and reserves, conservation

organisation protected areas and private land in-perpetuity Conservation Agreements.

Figure 1. delineates the Western Region of NSW in red. The bio-regions contained within this delineation are identified as priority bio-regions.

There are currently a small number of in-perpetuity Conservation Agreement covenants and more than 70 Wildlife Refuges established in the Western Region of NSW. Wildlife Refuges are voluntarily proclaimed under s68 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NSW)* for the conservation of wildlife along with other compatible land use activities, and provides greater control of unauthorised access, shooting, trapping, picking and disturbance in wildlife habitats.

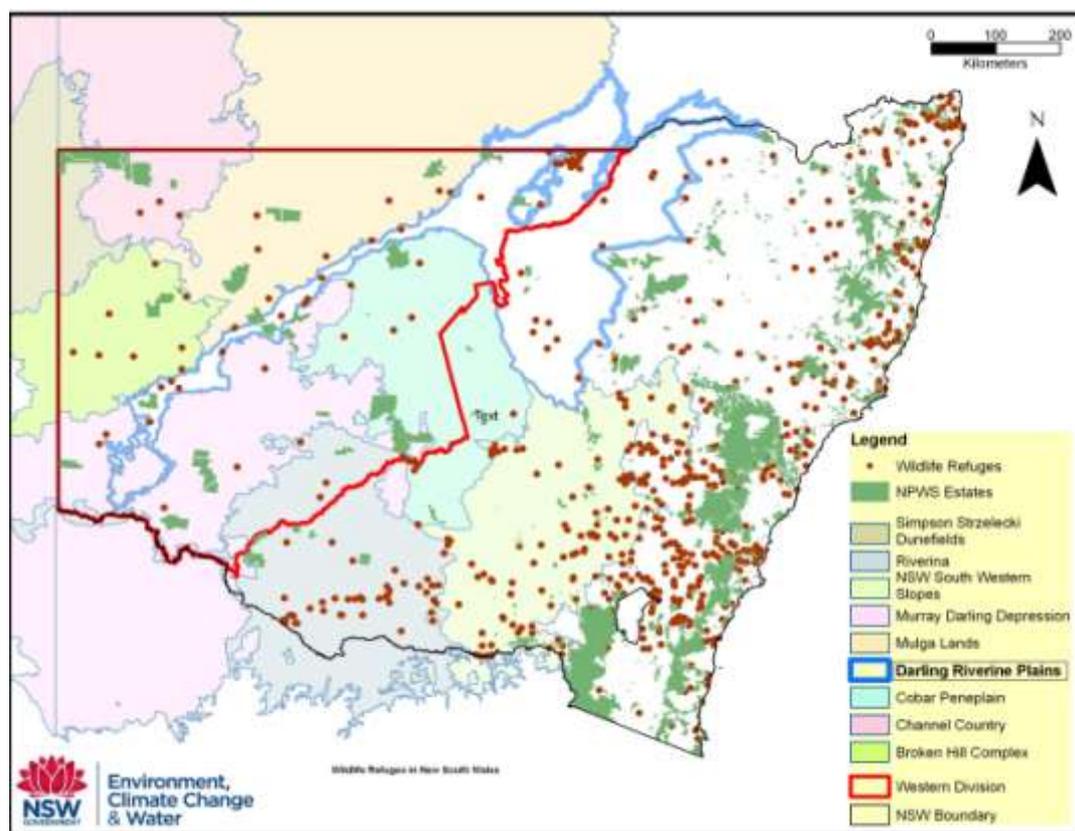


Figure 1. Wildlife Refuges and National Parks and Reserves in the Western Division of NSW.

Benefits to participating landholders who voluntarily enter into a Conservation Agreement

Protecting significant natural and cultural heritage through a Conservation Agreement is not only a great investment in the environment, it also helps to ensure the long term protection and management of special places on the property.

Conservation Agreements are totally voluntary to enter into and are negotiated with the landholder on a private individual basis, using a standard framework to address the key terms of the arrangement.

Conservation Agreements are eligible for Western Land rate relief and tax concessions in recognition of the conservation commitment of the landholder. In addition, land within a conservation area may be eligible for funding through grants from the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, Catchment Management Authorities, NSW Environmental Trust or the Caring for Our Country programs.

Conservation Agreements enable landholders to protect and conserve special places of natural and cultural heritage value on their property permanently while retaining management and ownership. Landholders have the added security of knowing that the Conservation Agreement remains in place for future owners, so that their investment and commitment to conservation will be protected beyond their ownership.

The Conservation Agreement is entered into between a landholder and the Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water. It can include all or part of an individual lease or property and exist on freehold or land leased from the Crown (with consent from that Minister).

Monitoring and support arrangements are in place through the DECCW Conservation Partners Program using tailored monitoring schemes, standardised information

management systems and databases are used to enable accurate and timely landholder contact, monitoring and reporting on efforts and achievements.

Where rangeland research can assist this program

Research has been undertaken that can inform and assist this work in rangelands.

The following areas of information relate to the establishment and monitoring of Conservation Agreements and Wildlife Refuges in the rangeland environment:

- Recommended grazing regimes suitable to conserving native biodiversity
- Total grazing pressures and its effect on conserving native biodiversity
- Flora and fauna monitoring methods
- Influence of artificial watering points on flora and fauna
- Protection and restoration of arid zone riparian and in-stream areas
- Specific habitat requirements for native species
- Aboriginal people and cultural heritage protection
- Landscape scale conservation methods

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