

WOODLAND WATCH (WESTERN AUSTRALIA)

Community conservation of tall eucalypt woodlands

Western Australia:

Region: Wheatbelt regions

Affiliated Regional NRM Group: Avon Catchment Council;
Northern Agricultural Catchment Council.

Background

Woodland Watch is a World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Australia project, based in the wheatbelt regions of Western Australia.

The project has targeted landholders with good quality tall eucalypt woodlands, particularly those containing woodlands grossly under-represented in the conservation estate.

It has led to the protection of thousands of hectares of bushland through conservation covenants, revolving funds, local Shire rebates, Land for Wildlife and voluntary management agreements.



The core assumptions underlying the project are that:

- eucalypt woodland communities have been extensively cleared (approximately 3% of their original range remains in the Western and Central Wheatbelt) and are poorly represented in existing conservation reserves;
- there is insufficient data about the different woodland types, their floristic composition and their distribution, particularly on private land;
- a suite of options for management and conservation on private land, as well as increased representation in the National Reserve System, will be necessary to protect these ecosystems for the future;
- examples on private land need to be identified before management options can be negotiated;
- many woodland remnants have severely disrupted ecological processes, are no longer viable ecosystems and therefore, require adaptive management to survive into the future.

Project objectives are to:

- clarify what distinct types of tall eucalypt woodland communities exist on private and non State-agency land in the heavily cleared western wheatbelt, through a desk-top survey and consultation with the community;
- conduct botanical surveys of up to 40 different woodlands, identified in the process above;

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- raise awareness amongst rural and urban communities of the diversity of woodland types, their intrinsic values, their current and future health, and long-term management options and incentives;
- negotiate the long-term conservation (including sound management plans for their long-term health) of the best examples of different types of woodland in the western wheatbelt (a total of at least 10 woodlands), especially those that are threatened;
- assess each identified community as to conservation status, enter any threatened ecological communities (TECs) onto the State TEC data base and nominate them for listing under the Commonwealth Endangered Species Protection Act.

Project implementation:

- identify poorly conserved woodland associations from literature sources, vegetation data bases, and spatial information (remote sensing and GIS) held by CALM staff, WA Department of Agriculture, CSIRO, LCDCs, local naturalists and landholders;
- consult with regional networks such as Bushcare Support Officers, Community Landcare Co-ordinators, Land for Wildlife Officers, Local Governments and the Threatened Species Network co-ordinator in order to gain additional information about woodland locations and to increase public support for the identification and conservation of tall eucalypt woodlands;
- conduct woodland field days to raise the profile of the diversity of different woodland types, and discuss management and conservation options;
- conduct field surveys with the agreement of land managers, to confirm the vegetation associations, condition, distribution, boundaries and condition of particular woodland communities identified above;
- assess each woodland community surveyed for its conservation significance and negotiate conservation incentive schemes, and landscape-scale recovery options in direct liaison with landholders, for conserving and / or rehabilitating woodlands.

Achievements to Date:

- ❖ 85 landholders with high-quality woodlands actively participating in the project.
- ❖ 87 high-quality woodland sites identified and assessed.
- ❖ 87 flora surveys conducted, with 3,143 new plant specimens lodged and vouchered at the Western Australian Herbarium.
- ❖ Discoveries of possibly 13 new species, 12 new populations of rare or priority flora species, and range extensions for numerous other species.
- ❖ Woodland Watch flora survey data lodged on CALM's Florabase Website for free and open public access to all data.
- ❖ 40 landholders have either implemented or initiated conservation covenants, Land For Wildlife agreements or other voluntary conservation agreements.
- ❖ 4,626 hectares (11,565 acres) of bush placed under conservation agreements:
 - 2,135 hectares in conservation covenants (20 landholders);
 - 3,143 hectares in Land For Wildlife (25 landholders).
- ❖ 13 local authorities involved in the project and developing programs aimed at increasing local environmental awareness, management and conservation outcomes (eg: the Shire of Beverley has reclassified 14 local reserves to include 'for protection of flora and fauna').

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- ❖ Liaison with six community conservation groups assisting local authorities to develop conservation policies and management plans.
- ❖ Organisation and successful conduct of Western Australia's inaugural BioBlitz (24 hour rapid biodiversity assessment) of the 1,833ha Lake McDermott Reserve, Bencubbin.
- ❖ Positive changes to attitudes among numerous rural landholders regarding native vegetation on their land.
- ❖ Working partnerships developed and strengthened between WWF and other stakeholders, including the Western Australian Herbarium, the WA Department for Conservation and Land Management, the Avon Catchment Council, Greening Australia (WA), National Trust (WA), North Eastern Wheatbelt Regional Organisation of Councils, Alcoa and community groups.
- ❖ Improved community awareness of the importance of woodlands and increased appreciation and desire for their protection, through:
 - 68 presentations by Woodland Watch staff;
 - 16 displays at agricultural field days, conferences and other activities;
 - 40 published newspaper / magazine / newsletter articles;
 - 6 radio interviews with Woodland Watch staff;
 - 7 Woodland Watch newsletters.

Information Used:

National data sets:

- ❖ Commonwealth Endangered Species Protection Act.

State data sets:

- ❖ State threatened ecological communities data base;
- ❖ GIS data bases held by CALM WA, Department of Agriculture, CSIRO;
- ❖ State Herbarium standards;
- ❖ CALM Florabase.

Regional data sets:

- ❖ Land Conservation District Committee data bases and GIS data;
- ❖ Bushcare Support data;
- ❖ Land for Wildlife data;
- ❖ Community Landcare Co-ordinators' data;
- ❖ Local Government data bases;
- ❖ Threatened Species Network.

Market and Non-Market Mechanisms for Biodiversity Conservation:

Economic instruments (financial mechanisms):

- ❖ Revolving funds.
- ❖ Local Shire rebates.
- ❖ Corporate sponsorship.

Community measures (motivational mechanisms):

- ❖ Data base searching and spatial information interrogation.
- ❖ Botanical surveys.
- ❖ Consultation with landowners and community members.
- ❖ Local champions.
- ❖ Icon and focal species approaches.
- ❖ Local extension staff, providing planning, technical support and skills development.
- ❖ Access to external information and extensive monitoring of biodiversity targets.
- ❖ Education and awareness.
- ❖ Non-binding, voluntary conservation schemes, such as Land for Wildlife and WWF's Woodland Watch Conservation Agreement.
- ❖ Conservation covenants, such as those offered by the WA Department of Agriculture, the WA Department of Conservation and Land Management and the National Trust of Australia (WA).

Critical Success Factors:

- ❖ Focus on good quality areas of bush under private and Shire ownership or management.
- ❖ Active and effective project champions.
- ❖ Strategic identification of priority areas.
- ❖ Face-to-face work with landholders makes conservation science readily accessible.
- ❖ Strong extension support and technical advice provided.
- ❖ Brokering of a range of conservation options to landholders, including voluntary conservation schemes, conservation covenants and sale of land through Bush Bank, Bush Brokers, Australian Bush Heritage Fund or government inclusion in the national reserve system.
- ❖ Good integration with other biodiversity agencies and organisations.
- ❖ Project is establishing a significant base of information that is available to other projects.
- ❖ Strong promotional component within the project.
- ❖ Significant uptake of conservation options by owners and managers.

Further Reading:

- www.wwf.org.au

Contact for Further Information:

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