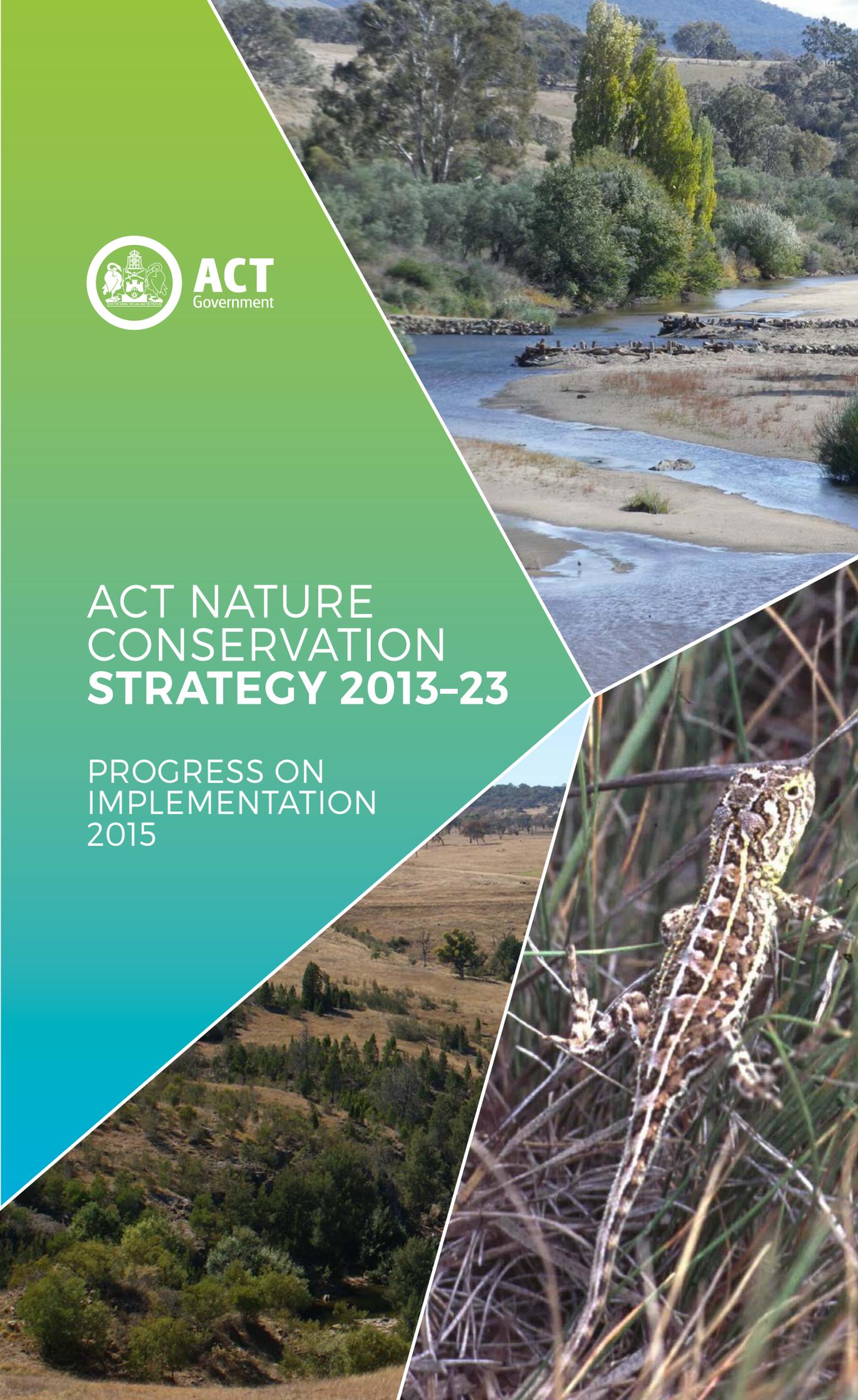




ACT
Government

ACT NATURE CONSERVATION **STRATEGY 2013-23**

PROGRESS ON
IMPLEMENTATION
2015



IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACT NATURE CONSERVATION STRATEGY (2013–23)

OUR STRATEGY

The ACT Nature Conservation Strategy 2013–23 (Strategy) guides the protection and management of biodiversity in the ACT and region over the next decade.

It articulates a vision for 'biodiversity rich, resilient landscapes stretching from the inner city to the mountains, where well functioning ecosystems can meet the needs of people and the environment'.

This desired future is to be achieved through the Strategy's five key strategies and 33 actions. The key strategies are to:

- Enhance habitat connectivity and ecosystem function
- Manage threats to biodiversity
- Protect species and ecological communities
- Enhance biodiversity value of urban areas
- Strengthen community engagement

IMPLEMENTATION

The Strategy is being implemented through two five-year implementation plans. Implementation Plan 1 (2013–18) identifies milestones for each of the 33 actions. A progress report on implementing each of the 104 milestones in Implementation Plan 1 to end 2015 is now available.

See the progress report, Strategy and Implementation Plan 1 at www.environment.act.gov.au/cpr/conservation-strategies/nature_conservation_strategy

At December 2015, all milestones in Implementation Plan 1 had been progressed: 28 milestones were completed, 68 were on track and 8 were behind schedule.

Progress has been characterised by strong collaboration between government, the community, land managers and researchers. Although some milestones are behind schedule due to unexpected delays in national reforms and the need to ensure plans are informed by best available information and community consultation, all are expected to be completed.

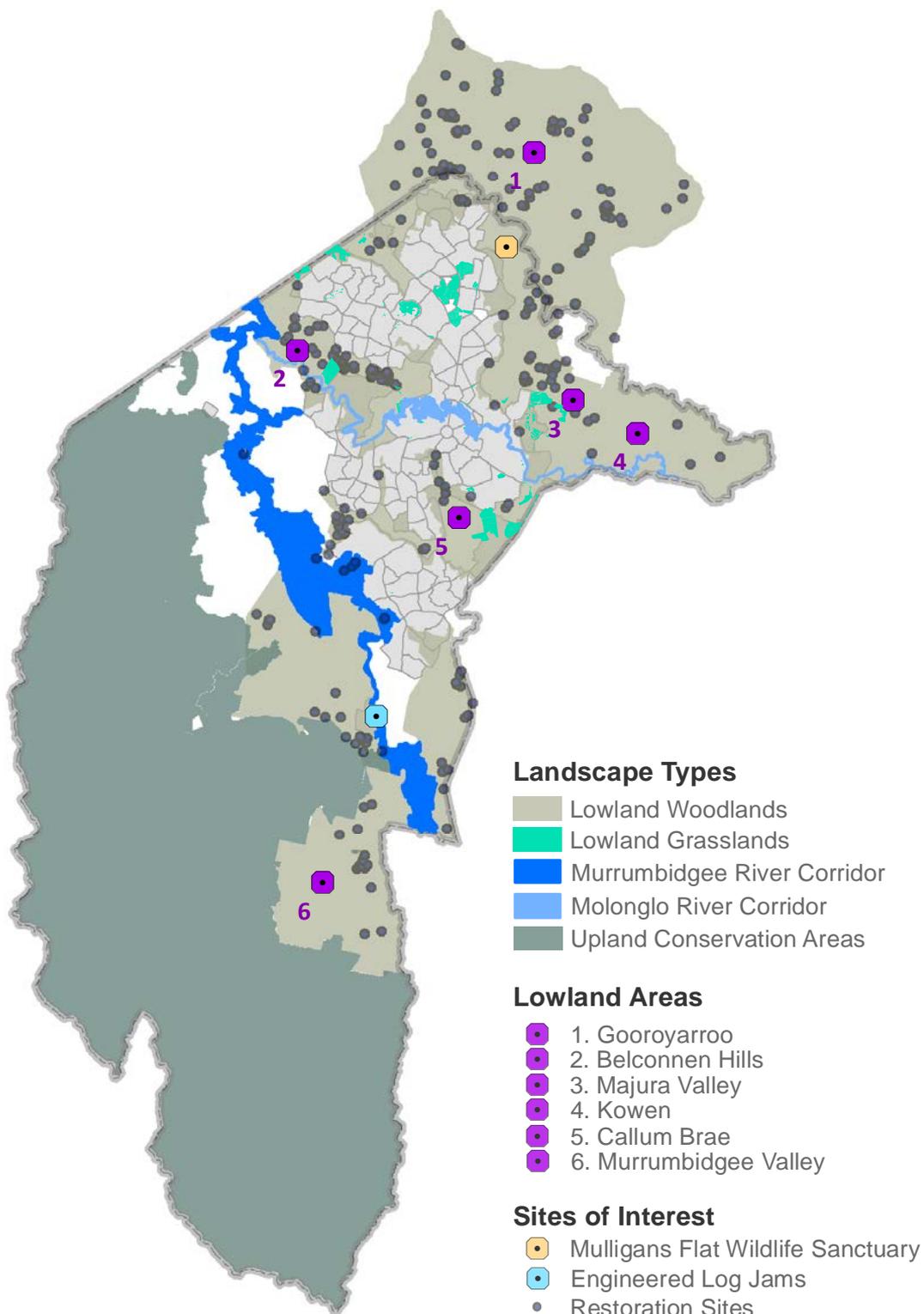
PROGRESS

Work undertaken so far has made a significant impact on our landscapes through on-ground restoration and rehabilitation. This has been guided by strong collaboration between the ACT Government, the Australian Government, the local and regional community, and research and academic institutions. Between 2013 and end 2015 there has been significant progress in:

- building our knowledge on soils, vegetation and hydrology
- restoring priority landscapes and enhancing regional connectivity
- community monitoring (citizen science) including through new phone applications to report plant and animal sightings
- conducting captive breeding, plant propagation and translocation of fauna species
- developing improved systems for management of biosecurity, including the threat of new weeds and pests
- engaging community through ParkCare and Landcare.

RESTORING PRIORITY LANDSCAPES AND IMPROVING CONNECTIVITY

The Strategy emphasised the importance of prioritising on-ground action to strengthen habitat connectivity and landscape resilience, including supporting flora and fauna to adapt to climate change. Over the past two and a half years significant on-ground investment has targeted restoration at sites to better connect woodlands and improve native grasslands. Connectivity has also been improved through restoration of aquatic habitat in the Murrumbidgee River Corridor.



CONNECTING LOWLAND WOODLANDS

ACT and Australian Government funding between 2012 and 2017 aims to consolidate and connect 60,000 hectares of the largest remaining box-gum grassy woodland landscape in Australia.

On-ground restoration and regeneration works have been undertaken in the following priority areas: 1. Greater Goorooyarroo 2. Belconnen Hills 3. Majura Valley 4. Kowen 5. Callum Brae and 6. Murrumbidgee Valley, as well as the Murrumbidgee River Corridor.

The 30,500 hectare Greater Goorooyarroo area represents some of Australia's largest, best-connected and floristically diverse box-gum woodland, a critically endangered ecological community. The ACT Government is working closely with Greening Australia Capital Region, NSW Government, rural landowners, the Aboriginal community and research institutions including CSIRO and ANU to develop a shared understanding of the area and its needs. Priorities being implemented are:

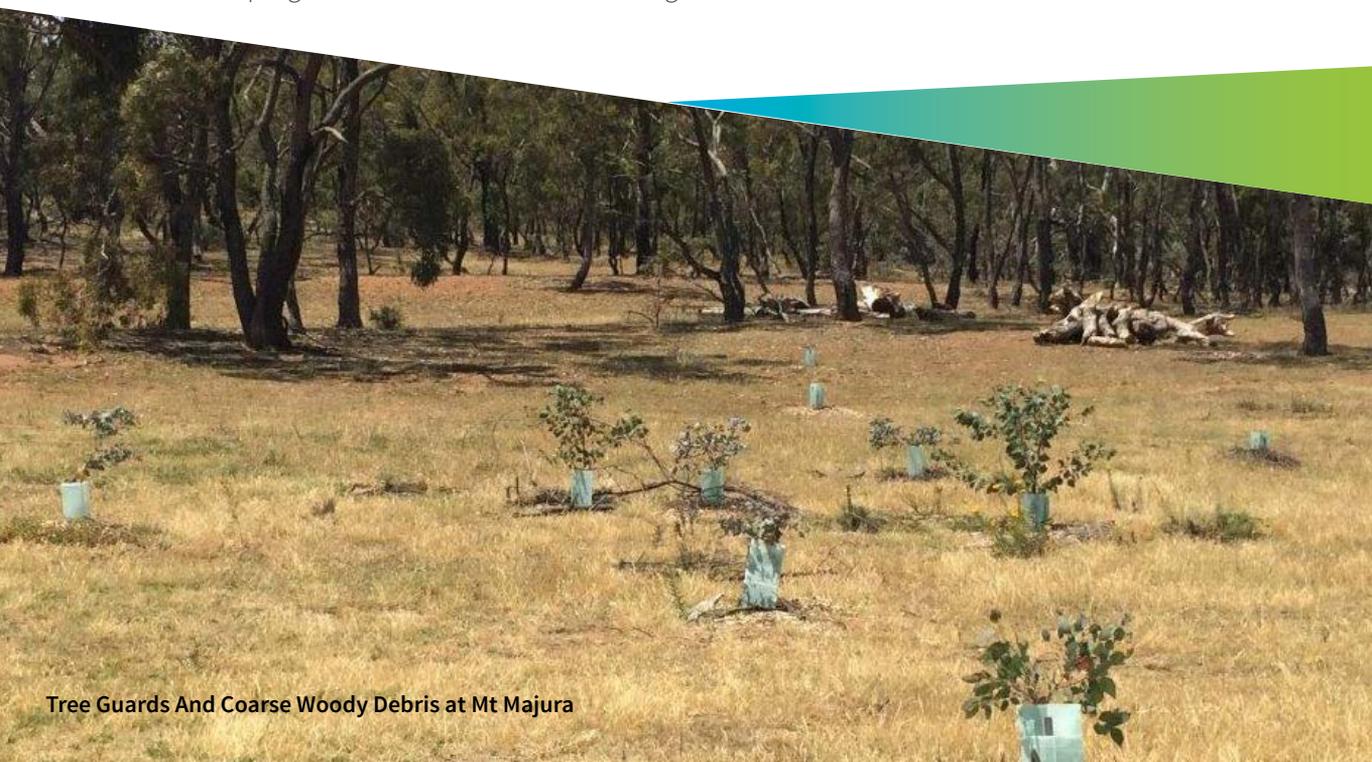
- 300 hectares of revegetation
- 7000 hectares of invasive species control, including foxes
- active involvement of Aboriginal people in natural resource management
- an informed and actively engaged community.

In the Belconnen Hills area, the ACT Government is working with the Molonglo Catchment Group and the ACT Parks and Conservation Service to revegetate previously cleared areas along the lower Molonglo River. With support through the Australian Government's National Landcare Program, over 200 hectares have been replanted with 23,000 trees and shrubs to:

- improve quality and connectivity of habitat for woodland birds such as the threatened Speckled Warbler and Brown Treecreeper
- stabilise soil and reduce the area's susceptibility to erosion
- reduce the cover and abundance of weeds, including Blackberry and St John's Wort.

In the Murrumbidgee River Corridor and adjacent rural lands 250,000 trees have been planted. Improving the condition and connectivity of woodlands across the ACT is being informed by and complements world-leading research in the Mulligans Flat Woodlands Sanctuary, which has reintroduced locally extinct native animals such as the Eastern Bettong and quoll to the ACT region. The number of bettongs has increased from 30 released in 2012 to over 200 in 2015. The Mulligans Flat Woodlands Sanctuary is a collaboration between the ACT Government, Woodlands and Wetlands Trust, Australian National University and CSIRO.

Between 2013 and 2015 over 450 community events were supported through the woodlands restoration program and National Landcare Program.



Tree Guards And Coarse Woody Debris at Mt Majura

IMPROVING NATIVE GRASSLANDS

Natural temperate grasslands are listed as an endangered ecological community under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and the *ACT Nature Conservation Act 2014*.

Approximately 5% of the original area of ACT natural temperate grasslands remains. These grasslands are home to a number of threatened species such as the Grassland Earless Dragon and Striped Legless Lizard.

The condition of grassland reserves are being improved through projects that are:

- conducting grazing and fire trials to manage biomass and increase habitat heterogeneity
- reinstating surface rock as habitat for grassland lizards and invertebrates
- managing invasive weeds, in particular grasses such as Chilean Needle Grass, African Lovegrass and Serrated Tussock
- researching the habitat requirements of threatened grassland species
- investigating techniques to replace exotic plant species with native species.

Over the next three years, over 200 hectares of natural temperate grassland in five reserves will be subject to patch burning and re-introduction of surface rock. Grazing trials will be conducted over 800 hectares. The impacts of burns and grazing trials will be monitored and used to inform ongoing management of grassland nature reserves.

Grassland projects are being implemented by ACT Parks and Conservation Service and ACT Natural Resource Management, and is being funded by the Australian Government National Landcare Program and ACT Government.

RESTORING MURRUMBIDGEE AQUATIC HABITAT

A stretch of the Upper Murrumbidgee River near Tharwa is being rehabilitated to enhance native fish populations.

Native fish populations in the Murrumbidgee River are estimated to have fallen to 10% of pre-European levels. Large amounts of sediment have been deposited in the river system following land clearing of the Monaro region for livestock grazing, flooding and erosion.

Using funding (\$287,000) from the Australian Government, Murray–Darling Basin Authority, ACT Government and Icon Water, two engineered log jams were introduced and some existing rock groynes enhanced. The artificial habitat structures have been successful in promoting fish passage by increasing river channel depth from 45 centimetres to over 2 metres and improving fish habitat in including for juvenile Murray Cod.

Furthermore, revegetation and weed control along the river bank has rehabilitated native habitat.

In 2015, 180 Waterwatch volunteers surveyed over 200 sites across the upper Murrumbidgee catchment.

In the Canberra Nature Map's first year (2015), over 200 people lodged 7200 plant and fungi reports across ACT grasslands, woodlands and waterways including 2000 records of rare or uncommon species (equivalent to 40% of the total recorded over the previous 110 years).

WHAT IS NEXT

While we have achieved some great outcomes for the environment in the ACT and region, there is more to do. The focus over the next two years for implementing the Strategy will be:

- restoring and revegetating priority landscapes
- promoting biodiversity values in urban areas
- supporting better management of native vegetation on farms
- supporting traditional custodians to apply Aboriginal land management methods on Country
- connecting people to nature for health and wellbeing
- building our capacity to plan for and adapt to climate change
- building the ACT's ability to monitor conservation effectiveness within reserves.

BEYOND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2013-18

A second implementation plan will be developed by the end of 2018 following a review of progress in implementing the Strategy by the ACT Conservator of Flora and Fauna. The plan will also be informed by stakeholder consultations, advice from experts and funding availability.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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