



Caring for Dhawura Ngunnawal

A natural resource
plan for the ACT

SUMMARY

2022–2042



Ngunnawal Acknowledgement

*Dhawura nguna ngurumbangu gunangu Ngunnawal
Nginggada dindi dhawura Ngunnawalbun yindjumaralidjinyin
Mura bidji mulanggaridjindjula
Naraganawaliyiri yarabindjula.*

Ngunnawal Language Acknowledgement Translation

*This country is Ngunnawal ancestral, spiritual homeland
We all always respect elders, male and female, as well as Ngunnawal country itself
They always keep the pathways of their ancestors alive
They walk together as one.*

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the land and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

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PHOTOS: Cover - Snow Gum on Mt Gingera - Mark Jekabson; Page 2 and 3 - Yankee Hut Namadgi - Brian Hawkins; Page 4 - Billy buttons and stellaria on Mt Gingera - the first spring after the Orroral Valley Fire - Brian Hawkins; Page 5 - Woodland at Mulligans Flat - Mark Jekabson; Page 6 - Cultural artefacts/tools, Tidbinbilla - Marissa McDowell; Page 7 - Aerial view over the Orroral Valley - Washing away black summer - Kirsten Tasker; Page 8 - Looking out at Yankee Hat before the fire - Brian Hawkins; Page 9 - The big dam at Mulligans Flat at sunrise - Mark Jekabson; Page 10 - Gibraltar falls - Mark Jekabson; Page 11 - Community tree planting at Stoney Creek Reserve - Mary Bonet.

To download the full version of the ACT NRM Plan and to find out how you can be part of the solution, visit <https://www.environment.act.gov.au/act-nrm>

Foreword

The ACT community are the custodians and beneficiaries of our natural environment including water, plants, animals, diverse ecosystems and unique and often rare species. The decisions we make as individuals and as a group impact directly on the health and resilience of our natural environment and community wellbeing.

The collaborative management of these assets is critical to connecting people and landscapes and preparing the ACT for future challenges. Our community is filled with groups that help forge and maintain these connections, including Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians, rural landholders, community groups, non-government organisations, urban dwellers, environmental volunteers, schools, universities, researchers, local businesses and industry.

For natural resource management (NRM) planning to be successful, it must value the diverse contributions and aspirations of the community. It requires a deep understanding of how people engage with landscape and culture and a commitment to respecting how those values overlap and integrate.

Pressure on our natural resources, particularly water, agricultural production and biodiversity, is building under our changing climate. We have seen increasing temperatures, catastrophic fires, post-fire flooding and erosion. This is predicted to worsen with hotter temperatures, more extreme weather events, increased bushfire risks with more intense fires and longer, harsher seasons. These climatic impacts are on top of continuing pressure from urban expansion and intensification.

Resilience and adaptability need to be at the heart of ecosystem management. We need to focus on improved ecological connectivity across different land tenures, sustainable and integrated farming practices and the protection and restoration of catchments to ensure we have ongoing access to clean water. To be successful, we need to learn from, include and celebrate Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians in all land management activities, including the integration of cultural practices into land and water management.

Development of the ACT Natural Resources Management Plan provides the community and government an opportunity to work together to create this shared vision for natural resource management in the ACT. Thank you for your contributions to a healthy, connected and sustainable future in the ACT.

Rebecca Vassarotti MLA Minister for the Environment

Executive Summary

The long-term sustainability and resilience of the natural landscapes in the ACT are vital to the ongoing wellbeing and health of our community.





A city where nature is valued and treated as an essential element of a prosperous and healthy society.

Natural resource management of our land, water, biodiversity, and cultural assets takes into account human activities and natural processes to ensure our landscapes are carefully looked after to meet today's needs and deliver the best outcomes for future generations. Natural resource management actions that promote cultural connections and recognise Ngunnawal custodianship, encourage participation in conservation and restoration, and support outdoor recreation will deliver the required ecological outcomes, while maximising social and economic benefits.

The natural landscapes of the ACT are facing ongoing and increasing pressure from population growth, habitat loss, biodiversity fragmentation, inappropriate fire regimes including a lack of traditional burning, biosecurity incursions and climate change. Addressing these significant and increasing pressures with the resources available requires efficient and effective coordination across government agencies and with non-government stakeholders. The purpose of the ACT NRM Plan (the Plan) is to provide a framework for ongoing coordination and collaboration towards a common natural resource management vision of:

A city where nature is valued and treated as an essential element of a prosperous and healthy society; where people are connected to and value all aspects of nature that provide critical ecosystem services essential for wellbeing.



The Ngunnawal people are the Traditional Custodians of our landscape.

The Plan will be achieved through a combination of existing plans and programs that address specific landscapes or natural resource management challenges, targeted responses to future government funding opportunities through the ACT Government and Australian Government, private sector and research investment and community action. The Plan meets the Australian Government requirements to identify and prioritise integrated goals and targets for the ACT natural resource management region.

Managing our natural resources is a shared responsibility. The ACT community's past contribution to health of our ecosystems has been instrumental and addressing the significant challenges facing the ACT's natural resources will require ongoing community input. In recognition of the knowledge held by Traditional custodians and community, within locally-based research organisations, private enterprise and non-government organisations, the Plan has been informed by the people of the ACT.

The Key Focus Areas and the targets identified in the Plan reflect community feedback, as supported by the best available science and implemented through coordination of existing government policies, strategies and plans.

The Ngunnawal people are the Traditional Custodians of our landscape, with cultural roots and identities intrinsically connected to the landscape. Ngunnawal Dreaming, kinship systems and songlines follow the ACT's waterways and natural resource management of seasonally abundant resources support large ceremonial gatherings.

The role of Ngunnawal people and the knowledge that has been passed down generations is recognised as critical for the sustainable management and restoration of our ecosystems. Traditional burning is an important landscape management tool that our ecosystems are uniquely evolved to depend on, showcasing intertwined relationship of traditional custodians with our ecology. Traditional burning that re-establishes a complex diverse overlapping mosaic of age structures and fuel loads can protect landscapes and human-made assets from fierce wildfires.

The role of Ngunnawal people in balancing the physical, social and spiritual connection to nature is recognised through the Reconciliation Action Plan principles. (see [EPSDD Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2019–21.](#))



The broader ACT community is generally well-informed and engaged. The community is active in our natural areas and benefit from local access to world-leading research bodies. The ACT Wellbeing Framework recognises the role of nature in providing positive outcomes for people’s lifestyles, wellbeing, industry and tourism. (Refer [Home - ACT Wellbeing Framework](#))

The ACT community also gives back to nature. Environmental volunteering makes a significant impact to natural resource management, estimated to equate to over \$21.5 million per year in labour or approximately one fifth of the total ACT Government’s environmental expenditure.

The rural landscape of the ACT is a defining feature of living and visiting the region, with farms accounting for 15% of the ACT land area. Productive and sustainable agriculture near urban areas provide valuable biodiversity connections and ecosystem services. Farming enterprises are typically family based, with beef, lamb, wool and horse agistment and equestrian activities common. Other enterprises include free range eggs, chickens, alpacas and llamas, fruit and vegetables, wine, olives and truffles.

Rural landscapes are leasehold with sustainable management supported through a range of educational programs and Land Management Agreements. A specific roadmap for a sustainable and resilient agricultural sector to guide proactive responses to threats such as biosecurity, climate change, ground cover and soil health is under preparation in the Capital Food and Fibre Strategy.



Natural landscapes in the ACT are diverse, ranging from alpine to woodlands and treeless grasslands.

The more densely populated human-made environments of the ACT are home to more than 430,000 people. In these urban landscapes, areas of urban forest, green spaces and aquatic ecosystems support recreation, wellbeing and ecosystem services such as cooling. These green spaces also provide critical connectivity and habitat.

The Canberra Natural Park, managed by the ACT Parks and Conservation Service comprises more than 40 natural parks within the urban footprint, including nationally significant examples of critically endangered Natural Temperate Grassland and Box Gum Woodland. However, the majority of grassland remnants and remnant vegetation remains unprotected. Further, there is an uneven age distribution of trees in streets and parks, and 55% of trees will age out in the next two or three decades, with insufficient younger trees to maintain existing tree cover.

Population growth is a major challenge for the ongoing integration of urban landscapes as part of sustainable and healthy natural ecosystems. Since 2004, there has been a 24% decrease in the ACT's per capita footprint, however this footprint is still nine times the size of the ACT. Population projections of 700,000 people by 2058 will require a responsible approach to development that encourages infilling to limit expanding urban sprawl.

Together the [Urban Forest Strategy 2021-2045](#) and the Urban Connectivity Project are working towards 'a resilient and sustainable urban forest that supports a liveable city and the natural environment, and contributes to the wellbeing of the community in a changing climate.'¹

Natural landscapes in the ACT are diverse, ranging from alpine areas with steep forested hills to sparse open woodlands and treeless grasslands in lowland areas and aquatic ecosystems that includes rivers, creeks, wetlands and fragile alpine wetlands. These landscapes act as critical wildlife connections, spanning climatic zones and linking mountainous corridors of the great divide to coastal ranges and inland migratory routes.

¹ Vision of the Urban Forest Strategy 2021-2045



Within the ACT, approximately 60% of the land is protected through conservation reserve. While the Namadgi National Park and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve are important assets contributing to this area, Box Gum Woodland and Natural Temperate Grassland communities remain under reserved. 70% of woodland, grassland and open forest communities remain outside conservation areas.

All these landscapes are faced with loss of biodiversity, climate change pressures and too frequent fires. Only 34% of native vegetation is within optimal tolerable fire intervals.

A holistic management approach to all natural landscapes, regardless of reservation status, is needed to improve the prospects of the 52 threatened species and three threatened ecological communities known to occur in the ACT and limit common species from declining to endangered levels. Management that supports ecological processes such as seed dispersal, post breeding dispersal of fauna, maintenance of nutrient and energy cycles, interactions between species and pollination will maintain habitat functioning. Additionally, cross jurisdictional management is key to maintaining large scale biodiversity connectivity.

Our ecosystems help filter and clean air, water and soil, provide cooling and shading of urban and rural areas, store nutrients, carbon and water, and support sustainability of food production, amongst other things. The impacts of climate change are highlighting how critical these functions and services are to healthy natural systems and a high quality of life, whilst reducing the capacity our ecosystems have to provide them.

Living infrastructure including street trees, ovals, wetlands, creeks, nature reserves, parks, private yards, green roofs and balconies, and living walls assist with urban heat and flash flooding. Increasing tree canopy cover and surface permeability, along with upgraded stormwater management, are priorities for [Canberra's Living Infrastructure Plan](#) and the [Healthy Waterways Program](#).



A network of government, interagency, research, private sector, non-government and community collaborations will drive achievements under the NRM plan. Governance systems will bring stakeholders together to coordinate overlapping strategies, policies, plans across directorates and ensure a strong public voice in priority settings. This complex network of contributing stakeholders and interested parties requires accountability mechanisms that increase transparency of decisions and actions, provides a safe space for informed conversations, and communicates results to the broader public.

Measuring the success of the NRM Plan will combine the broader outcomes of the range of detailed strategies, targets and actions associated with each theme at the strategic level. Key focus areas to determine overall success of the delivery of the Plan include:

- outcomes of on-ground action
- the level of ongoing involvement of community groups and individuals
- progress towards Ngannawal community involvement in land management and the integration of traditional knowledge into the management of natural resources
- improvements in sustainable agriculture practice and recognition and support for the natural asset stewardship undertaken by rural landholders
- the continued protection and possible expansion of areas of conservation through ACT reserves and rural conservation areas, including the level of protection offered to important urban open spaces and mature trees
- better incorporation of climate change and biodiversity management into land use planning
- the success of integration of management between government departments



**An important
process, tracking
progress towards
targets.**

In addition, the ACT also has an impressive array of information on the condition of the natural resources. This information is brought together and analysed through the regular State of the Environment reporting and the Conservation Effectiveness Monitoring Program. This is an important process and resulting information will be instrumental in tracking progress towards targets.

Implementation will be underpinned by Australian Government investment through the National Landcare Program and other Commonwealth grants, ACT Government funding programs, business commitments towards sustainable management and the continued in-kind support of community volunteers.



ACT
Government

