



ACT
Government

ACT NATIVE WOODLAND CONSERVATION STRATEGY

IN BRIEF





ACT
Government

**Environment, Planning and
Sustainable Development**

Produced by the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development

© Australian Capital Territory, Canberra 2019

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission from:

Director-General, Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development
Directorate, ACT Government, GPO Box 158, Canberra ACT 2601.

Telephone: 02 6207 1923

Website: www.planning.act.gov.au

Acknowledgment to Country

We wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

Accessibility

The ACT Government is committed to making its information, services, events and venues as accessible as possible.

If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like to receive this publication in an alternative format, such as large print, please phone Access Canberra on 13 22 81 or email the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate at EPSDDComms@act.gov.au

If English is not your first language and you require a translating and interpreting service, please phone 13 14 50.

If you are deaf, or have a speech or hearing impairment, and need the teletypewriter service, please phone 13 36 77 and ask for Access Canberra on 13 22 81.

For speak and listen users, please phone 1300 555 727 and ask for Canberra Connect on 13 22 81.

For more information on these services visit <http://www.relayservice.com.au>



PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER



CONTENTS

VISION	5
THE STRATEGY.....	5
WHY SHOULD WE CONSERVE OUR WOODLANDS?	6
STRATEGY 1. PROTECT AND MANAGE WOODLAND AND COMPONENT SPECIES	8
Retain and protect native woodlands.....	8
Reduce threats to native woodland biodiversity	8
Enhance resilience, ecosystem function and habitat connectivity.....	9
Implement ecologically appropriate herbage mass management.....	10
Enhance habitat connectivity	10
STRATEGY 2. COLLABORATE WITH THE COMMUNITY	11
Promote participation in woodland conservation	11
Support sustainable recreational use of woodlands	12
STRATEGY 3. MONITORING AND RESEARCH.....	13
Monitor woodland condition.....	13
Address knowledge gaps in woodland conservation	13
ACTION PLANS.....	14
NEXT STEPS	16





VISION

The people of the ACT working together to create healthy and diverse woodlands for future generations.

Native upland and lowland woodlands cover over 79 000 hectares in the ACT and have significant biodiversity, recreation and cultural values. The protection of our woodlands is critical for the survival of a range of flora and fauna associated with these ecosystems, including threatened species. By working together, we can conserve these areas and their values now and for the future.

THE STRATEGY

The ACT Native Woodland Conservation Strategy (hereafter, the Strategy) aims to build on successes since the 2004 Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy. It has been broadened in scope to inform the ongoing protection and adaptive management of both our lowland and subalpine woodland communities. It identifies conservation objectives to **protect, maintain** and **improve** our woodlands, while prioritising effective **collaboration**.

Conservation objectives identified in the Strategy contribute to achieving the following three goals:

1. Protect and manage woodland and component species
2. Collaborate with the community
3. Monitoring and research

Action plans for five threatened species dependant on woodlands and the Endangered Yellow Box Blakely's Red Gum (YB-BRG) Woodland are included in the Strategy. Achieving the vision, goals and objectives of the Strategy will depend on undertaking the actions identified in the action plans.

The full Strategy is available on the [ACT Government's Environment website](#).

WHY SHOULD WE CONSERVE OUR WOODLANDS?

For thousands of years Traditional Custodians (and neighbouring language groups) relied on, and actively manipulated woodlands in the region. Prior to European settlement woodlands were widespread across the region. While much of the historic distribution of subalpine woodland remains today, many lowland woodlands persist as small remnants, amongst forest, grassland or urban development.

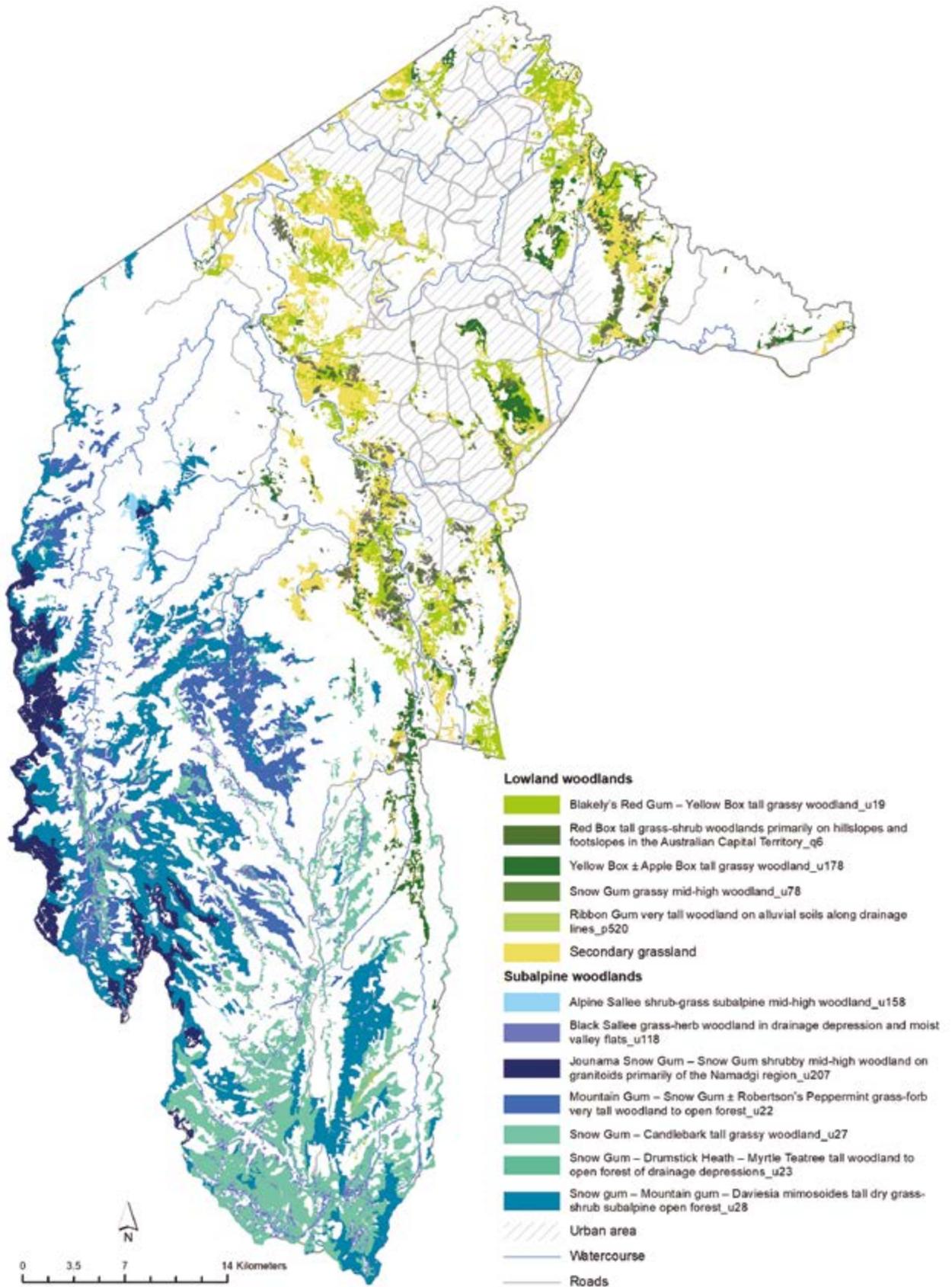
Twelve woodland communities, including seven subalpine and five lowland systems, have been identified in the ACT (**Figure 1**). Subalpine woodlands occur between 730m and 1910m above sea level and cover approximately 48 409ha of the ACT. Lowland woodlands in the ACT occur between 440m and 1340m above sea level and cover approximately 13 573ha of the ACT (excluding secondary grasslands).

Today, our subalpine and lowland woodlands provide critical habitat for a range of flora and fauna species. This includes three plant species and nine bird species that are listed as threatened under the *Nature Conservation Act 2014* (**Table 1**).

Table 1: Threatened species associated with woodlands in the ACT

ANIMALS	PLANTS
Brown Treecreeper (<i>Climacteris picumnus victoriae</i>)	Canberra Spider Orchid (<i>Caladenia actensis</i>)
Hooded Robin (<i>Melanodryas cucullata cucullata</i>)	Small Purple Pea (<i>Swainsona recta</i>)
Painted Honeyeater (<i>Grantiella picta</i>)	Tarengo Leek Orchid (<i>Prasophyllum petilum</i>)
Regent Honeyeater (<i>Anthochaera phrygia</i>)	
Scarlet Robin (<i>Petroica boodang</i>)	
Superb Parrot (<i>Polytelis swainsonii</i>)	
Swift Parrot (<i>Lathamus discolor</i>)	
Varied Sittella (<i>Daphoenositta chrysoptera</i>)	
White-Winged Triller (<i>Lalage tricolor</i>)	

Figure 1: Distribution of woodland communities across the ACT



STRATEGY 1.

PROTECT AND MANAGE WOODLAND AND COMPONENT SPECIES

RETAIN AND PROTECT NATIVE WOODLANDS

Formal protection of woodland, particularly the long-term conservation of remaining lowland woodlands, facilitates functional connectivity, supports the maintenance of a diversity of slow-developing habitat features and supports the persistence of threatened woodland-dependent species. Since the previous 2004 Woodland Strategy, an additional 1156 ha of woodland has been protected in formal reserves. A range of ACT Government policies are also in place that aim to protect and enhance the values of woodlands outside the reserve system.

This Strategy aims to ensure no net loss of the ecological and cultural values of our woodlands and to maintain or improve the proportion of each woodland community located within the ACT's formal reserve system. This includes identifying opportunities to improve the representation of several woodland communities under formal protection.

REDUCE THREATS TO NATIVE WOODLAND BIODIVERSITY

Native woodlands and associated fauna across the ACT are subject to a range of impacts that threaten their condition, resilience and survival. Threatening processes include those that impact ecosystems at a regional scale (e.g. climate change) and those that are largely restricted to a single site (e.g. inappropriate grazing disturbance). The extent and severity of many threatening processes differ between lowland and subalpine woodlands.

In many cases, threats interact and thus wherever possible the potential impacts of these risks should be mitigated as part of a combined strategy to maintain and enhance the viability of woodlands in the ACT. The Strategy provides objectives to mitigate the risks of current and future threats to subalpine and lowland woodlands, including:

Urbanisation. The development and expansion of new suburbs will continue to be the primary cause of future losses of woodland habitat in the ACT. New and existing urban development impacts connectivity and woodland habitat values across the ACT.

Overgrazing (macropods and livestock). Macropods play a central role in grassy ecosystems. Their densities across the ACT have increased considerably since the 1960s and they now exert high grazing pressure across a number of lowland reserves. This impacts the flora, fauna and soil composition at these sites. Livestock grazing can exert similar pressure on woodlands and also pose a range of unique threats to woodland systems.

Inappropriate fire regimes. Fire is a critical component of a functioning woodland. However, inappropriate fire regimes can negatively impact ecosystem processes, plant communities and fauna habitat. There are many considerations in undertaking fuel reduction activities to mitigate the impacts of large-scale wildfire and to maintain and / or improve the health of woodlands.

Invasive plants. The spread and infestation of invasive plants are threatening processes that can impact the ecological and cultural values of woodlands across the ACT. In the ACT, invasive plants are more abundant, diverse and widespread in lowland woodlands than in subalpine woodlands.

Pest animals. Pest animals, including: the European Rabbit, European Red Fox, feral cat, feral pig, feral horses, Indian Myna, European Wasp, Honey Bee and several species of deer, can impact native species associated with woodland communities in the ACT.

Dieback. Dieback refers to the long-term decline in the health of trees, often leading to death. Dieback is becoming an increasing threat to trees and associated flora and fauna in woodlands in the ACT and more broadly. Modelling indicates that recent changes in the condition of Blakely's Red Gum and lowland box gum grassy woodland is influenced by a range of habitat and climatic variables.

Climate change. Over the past 60 years Australia has experienced a shift in rainfall patterns and a warming climate. Future projections for the ACT include: warmer temperatures, a reduction in cool-season rain, an increase in extreme drought events, and an increase in the number of severe fire danger days. These changes will alter the structure and floristic composition of woodlands in the ACT and likely compromise their function and resilience. Understanding these changes will help us develop realistic and achievable goals, and prioritise and implement strategies to maintain biodiversity.

ENHANCE RESILIENCE, ECOSYSTEM FUNCTION AND HABITAT CONNECTIVITY

To enhance the resilience, function and overall condition of woodland across the ACT, restoration works must aim to maintain (or improve) a range of habitat features. Maintaining heterogeneous understorey structure and intermediate herbage mass are critical components of the restoration of our lowland woodland systems. Habitat connectivity is also a critical consideration in ensuring the long-term resilience and function of woodlands and associated biodiversity.

The most important consideration in seeking to enhance the function of woodland ecosystems is to maintain the extent, integrity and habitat features of existing woodland in the ACT. However, plantings and other assisted natural regeneration activities are important for the restoration of woodland sites with compromised ecosystem function.



IMPLEMENT ECOLOGICALLY APPROPRIATE HERBAGE MASS MANAGEMENT

Native grasses and forbs play an essential role in maintaining the structure and function of grassy systems and provide important resources for a range of fauna species associated with woodland. The natural processes that influence herbage mass levels are usually disrupted in modified vegetation communities and, as a result, herbage mass levels can become too high, too low, or too homogeneous to support a diverse flora and / or fauna community. The need (and most appropriate method) for active herbage mass management at a lowland woodland site depends on a range of site-specific factors and climatic conditions.

ENHANCE HABITAT CONNECTIVITY

Fragmentation of woodland can have complex effects on remnant vegetation and can reduce structural connectivity that facilitates the dispersal of plants and animals across the landscape. Improving habitat connectivity improves population viability by allowing small populations to interact and function as larger, more resilient populations.

Snow Gum woodland, Mt Ginini (M. Jekabsons)

STRATEGY 2.

COLLABORATE WITH THE COMMUNITY

Meaningful collaboration between the ACT Government and various stakeholders, including rural landholders, community members and groups, Traditional Custodians and research institutions, will provide the best opportunity to protect and manage woodlands into the future. Collaboration with the community should be based on the premise that no single agency or group holds all the information to successfully manage woodlands.

PROMOTE PARTICIPATION IN WOODLAND CONSERVATION

COLLABORATE WITH RURAL LANDHOLDERS

Today, more than 40% of lowland woodland remains on rural land across the ACT. Recent research illustrates the importance of maintaining a diversity of woodland habitat features as part of the rural landscape; maintaining even small patches of remnant woodland vegetation such as scattered trees, can benefit a range of taxa. To contribute to a whole of landscape approach to woodland conservation, the ACT Government aims to support rural landholders to undertake conservation and sustainable agricultural practices on their properties.

SUPPORT COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND RAISE COMMUNITY AWARENESS

There are many community groups interested and active in woodland conservation in the ACT. These groups are instrumental in advocating for native woodland conservation, undertaking management, monitoring and restoration projects, and raising public awareness of the values and threats to woodlands in the ACT. Providing ongoing support to these groups and opportunities for community members to engage in volunteer and awareness raising activities will provide significant benefit for woodland conservation and the wellbeing of the ACT community.

ENHANCE AND PROMOTE CITIZEN SCIENCE

Monitoring and research activities undertaken by community members and organised groups make a significant contribution to our knowledge of woodlands. Encouraging and supporting the systematic collection and effective use of data collected through citizen science projects will contribute to meeting the objectives outlined in this Strategy.



Kangaroos grazing, Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary (M. Jekabsons)

ENHANCE THE PARTICIPATION OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

For Traditional Custodians, retaining a connection to traditional lands remains important in defining and maintaining cultural identity. The ACT Government supports Traditional Custodians to access, manage and make decisions regarding their traditional lands through, for example: facilitating cultural burning, the establishment and ongoing facilitation of the Traditional Custodians Caring for Country Committee, and the management and protection of cultural sites.

SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE RECREATIONAL USE OF WOODLANDS

Woodland reserves offer Canberra residents and tourists a range of recreation opportunities. Areas containing subalpine woodland, including Namadgi National Park and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, have a steady flow of visitors, although at lower rates than lowland woodland within Canberra Nature Park (CNP). The proximity of CNP to residential areas facilitates regular access by community members. Visitation to reserves can negatively impact woodlands but should, wherever possible, be compatible with the natural and cultural values of woodlands. Effective communication with visitors, and monitoring and management of visitor impacts, is critical to maintaining sustainable recreational use of our woodlands.

STRATEGY 3.

MONITORING AND RESEARCH

The ACT Government is committed to the ongoing collection of data and information to contribute to our understanding of woodland ecosystems. The ACT Government supports a research and monitoring process where relevant information is collected, interpreted, disseminated and applied operationally, with monitoring and evaluation in place.

MONITOR WOODLAND CONDITION

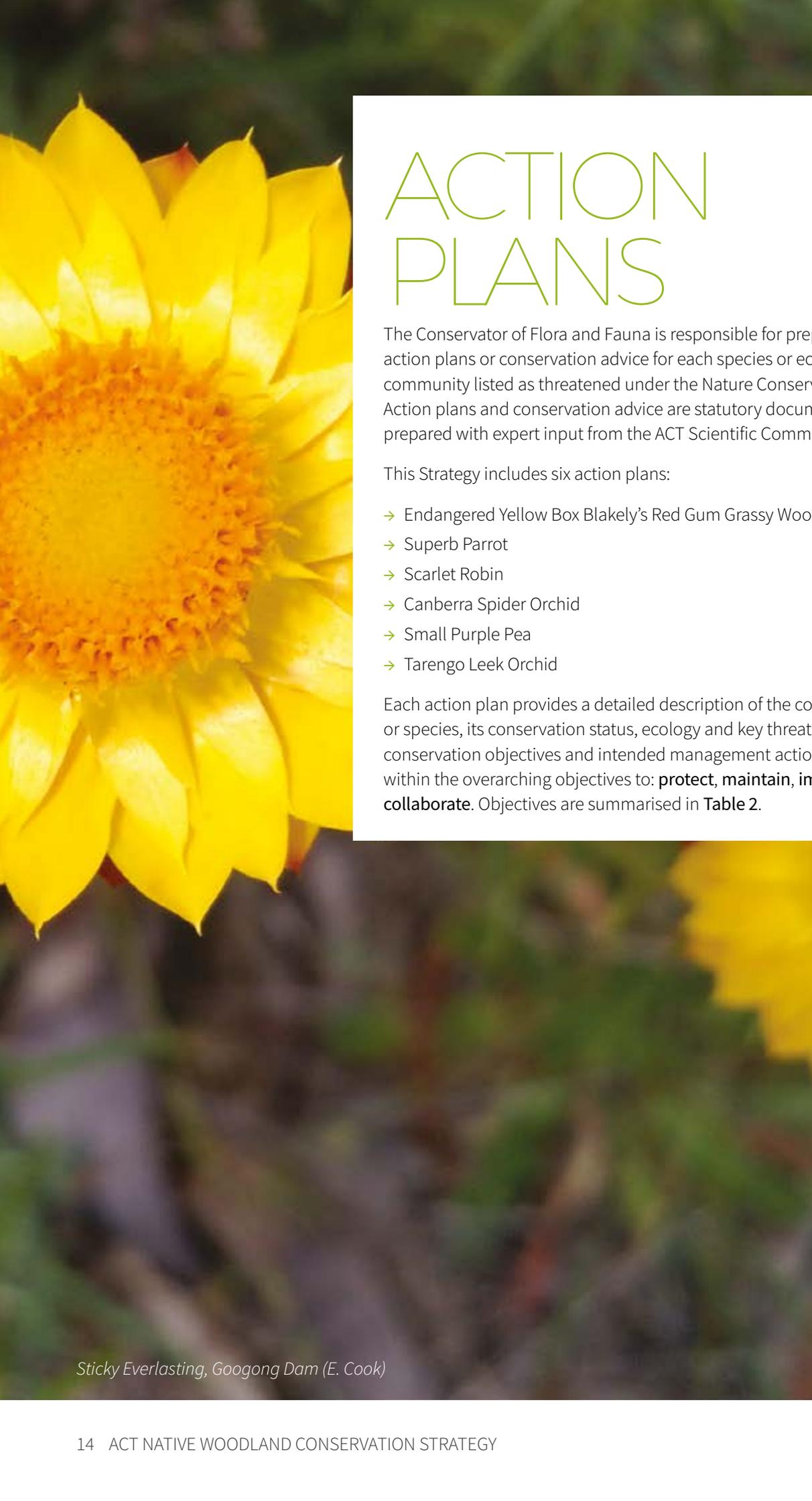
Monitoring the condition of ecosystems is critical to recognise change; this is required to better understand the processes driving these changes and to identify appropriate management actions to address negative impacts. The ACT Government recently developed the Conservation Effectiveness Monitoring Program (CEMP). The CEMP facilitates the systematic and comprehensive monitoring of ecosystem condition by identifying a range of indicators, including ecological values and stressors, to measure ecosystem condition.

COLLECT BASELINE INFORMATION

Baseline information facilitates the adaptive management of woodlands by enabling managers to monitor changes to woodland ecosystems arising from threatening processes and to track the impact of management interventions. While significant work has been undertaken to improve our understanding of the distribution and characteristics of woodlands in the ACT, baseline knowledge gaps exist.

ADDRESS KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN WOODLAND CONSERVATION

The ACT Government, in collaboration with a range of partners, undertakes a range of activities aimed at addressing knowledge gaps to inform the management of woodlands in the ACT and broader region. This includes providing knowledge that can be integrated with traditional ecological knowledge and employed by Traditional Custodians. The Strategy identifies knowledge gaps that the ACT Government will aim to address with dedicated research in the fields of: threats, woodland biodiversity and ecosystem processes.



ACTION PLANS

The Conservator of Flora and Fauna is responsible for preparing draft action plans or conservation advice for each species or ecological community listed as threatened under the Nature Conservation Act 2014. Action plans and conservation advice are statutory documents and are prepared with expert input from the ACT Scientific Committee.

This Strategy includes six action plans:

- Endangered Yellow Box Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland
- Superb Parrot
- Scarlet Robin
- Canberra Spider Orchid
- Small Purple Pea
- Tarengo Leek Orchid

Each action plan provides a detailed description of the community or species, its conservation status, ecology and key threats. Primary conservation objectives and intended management actions are identified within the overarching objectives to: **protect, maintain, improve** and **collaborate**. Objectives are summarised in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Summary of objectives from action plans.

PROTECT	
Protect remaining areas / populations from unintended impacts (unintended impacts are those not already considered through an environmental assessment or other statutory process)	YB-BRG Woodland, Small Purple Pea, Tarengo Leek Orchid, Canberra Spider Orchid
Conserve the ACT population by protecting areas that support breeding birds and emerging wintering grounds	Superb Parrot
MAINTAIN	
Maintain the ecological values of Endangered YB-BRG Woodland to promote ecosystem function and prevent biodiversity loss	YB-BRG Woodland
Manage the species and its habitat to maintain the potential for evolutionary development in the wild	Small Purple Pea, Tarengo Leek Orchid, Canberra Spider Orchid
Manage (and identify where appropriate) breeding and foraging habitat	Superb Parrot, Scarlet Robin
IMPROVE	
Improve the condition and ecological function of Endangered YB-BRG Woodland by undertaking restoration	YB-BRG Woodland
Enhance the long-term viability of populations through management of adjacent grassland / woodland to increase habitat area and connect populations	Small Purple Pea, Tarengo Leek Orchid, Canberra Spider Orchid
Expand the range of the species in the ACT by providing suitable habitat and establishing new populations by translocation	Small Purple Pea, Tarengo Leek Orchid, Canberra Spider Orchid
Improve understanding of Endangered YB-BRG Woodland ecology, restoration principles and best practice threat management	YB-BRG Woodland
Improved understanding of the species' ecology, habitat and threats	Small Purple Pea, Superb Parrot, Tarengo Leek Orchid, Canberra Spider Orchid, Scarlet Robin
Enhance long-term viability of Superb Parrot populations through management of urban landscapes to aid connectivity and promote foraging habitat	Superb Parrot
COLLABORATE	
Co-operate with state and local government agencies	Scarlet Robin
Promote a greater awareness of, and strengthen stakeholder and community engagement in, the conservation of the species / community	All

Conservation advice for the following woodland-dependant birds will be available on the [ACT Government's Environment website](#):

- Brown Treecreeper
- Hooded Robin
- Painted Honeyeater
- Regent Honeyeater
- Swift Parrot
- Varied Sittella
- White-Winged Triller.

NEXT STEPS

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLANS

This Strategy is a thematic document, i.e. it is not site-specific, and addresses native woodland conservation across all land tenures in the ACT. The goals of the Strategy will be achieved through a variety of means, relevant to different tenures.

The ACT Government is responsible for coordinating and implementing the objectives outlined in this Strategy on ACT Government managed land, and for collaborating with various partners to meet objectives on other land tenures.

The ACT Government must work closely with rural landholders, community groups, and Commonwealth agencies responsible for managing woodland sites in the ACT. Cooperation with NSW agencies, together with broader national and regional cooperation is central to considering a broader spatial perspective of woodland and woodland-associated species management. Collaboration with universities, CSIRO and other research institutions will be required to facilitate and undertake aspects of monitoring and research outlined in the action plans.

EVALUATION AND REVIEW

The ACT Native Woodland Conservation Strategy and associated action plans will be in place for 10 years.

Review of action plans is the primary means for assessing progress towards meeting the objectives of this Strategy. Progress reviews will be undertaken during the life of the Strategy and action plans will be assessed by the Scientific Committee, a statutory body established under the *ACT Nature Conservation Act 2014*. The Committee's assessment is based on objectives and performance indicators in the action plans, and progress that can reasonably be expected within the review timeframe. Every 10 years, a review of action plans is undertaken to inform the development of a new action plan.

