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WOODLAND WATCH CONSERVATION OUTCOMES SUMMARY: 2000-2005



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Australian Government

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Cover image: WWF-Australia's Project Officer Woodland Watch, Mick Davis, with Wheatbelt farmer David Graham © Darren Jew/darrenjew.com

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Woodland Watch Conservation Outcomes: Summary 2000-2005

- Over 50 Wheatbelt landholders have implemented or initiated conservation covenants; Land For Wildlife agreements; and/or other voluntary conservation agreements to better manage and protect tall eucalypt woodlands in the Western Australian Wheatbelt.
- More than 1,000ha of bush containing high priority woodlands protected through 10 Conservation Covenants.
- More than 1,300ha of bush containing high priority woodlands under negotiation for Conservation Covenants involving 15 landholders.
- 2,908 hectares of bush containing high priority woodlands protected under Land For Wildlife agreements and subsequently supported by CALM [directly brokered by WWF].
- More than 1,100ha of bush containing high priority woodlands under better management through 23 Voluntary Management Agreements (a 'stepping stone' toward longer term conservation protection options).
- More than 2,500 hectares of bush containing high priority woodlands under Shire and/or community-group control and being managed for conservation either under new Shire conservation policies (developed with the direct assistance of WWF) or according to WWF best-practice management standards.
- 13 Local Government Authorities involved in the project - developing programs aimed at increasing local environmental awareness, and improved local reserve management and conservation (eg. the Shire of Beverley has reclassified 3 local reserves to include for protection of flora and fauna).
- Liaison with six Wheatbelt community conservation groups assisting local authorities develop conservation policies and management plans.
- Completion of three successful BioBlitz events - a 24 hour rapid biodiversity assessment of significant local government-managed reserves in the highly fragmented Wheatbelt: (Lake McDermott Reserve [2002], Mt Marshall Shire; Moningarín Reserve [2003] , Koorda Shire); Kununoppin Town Reserves [2004] Trayning Shire).
- High-level cooperation between an NGO-led, field-based conservation project and the Western Australian state agency (CALM / WA Herbarium), ensuring all science and taxonomic outputs from the project are maintained and catalogued for scientific best-practice and public access purposes.
- Over 150 landholders with high-quality woodlands participating in the project, many of whom are now actively implementing better management and conservation practices.
- 156 woodland sites on both private and non-state managed lands, identified and assessed.
- 156 flora surveys conducted in Wheatbelt woodlands, with over 6000 new plant specimens lodged and vouchered at the Western Australian Herbarium.
- New discoveries of possibly 30 new species, 28 new populations of rare or priority flora species, and range extensions for numerous other species.
- Woodland Watch flora survey data lodged on CALM's acclaimed FloraBase website for open public access to all data.
- Positive changes to attitudes among numerous rural landholders regarding the value of the bush on their land.
- Working partnerships between WWF and other stakeholders developed or strengthened (including CALM, WA Herbarium (CALM), the Avon Catchment Council, Northern Agricultural Catchment Council, Greening Australia, National Trust, North Eastern Wheatbelt Regional Organisation of Councils, Shire of Dalwallinu and Shire of Mount Marshall).

Woodland Watch - Background

Based in Western Australia's Wheatbelt Region, WWF-Australia's Woodland Watch began in 2000 to enhance the conservation of tall eucalypt woodlands on private lands in the Western Australian Wheatbelt.

Woodland Watch was created in response to a need to arrest the decline of woodlands within the Wheatbelt. Eucalypt woodlands in this area of Western Australia have been cleared throughout most of their original range (approximately only 3% of some of the woodlands still exist).

Woodland Watch has focused on red morrel, salmon gum, gimlet and York gum, all of which are particularly under-represented within the conservation estate. The project's recent expansion into the Northern Agricultural Region of the Wheatbelt in 2003 resulted in the broadening of the set of priority vegetation associations to include other woodland eucalypt species such as salt gum, as well as some particular mallee associations that are also under-represented in the national conservation estate.

Woodland Watch aims to raise awareness of the complexity of woodland/mallee types, their intrinsic values (much more than just indicators of good soils), their current health and their future. It also aims to increase public awareness and conservation knowledge of the variety of woodland types and their distribution patterns throughout the Wheatbelt Region, and to add these targeted under-represented woodlands to the conservation estate – primarily through voluntary conservation protection mechanisms.

Woodland Watch is a field-based conservation initiative, which recognises good woodland stewardship by farmers and other land owners and managers, and promotes 'best-practice' woodland management. This is being achieved by providing information to help landholders achieve better woodland management on private or shire land and through establishing collaborative conservation agreements and other conservation strategies, to secure shared long-term conservation objectives.

In Western Australia there is still much to be learned about the extent, health and conservation status of our remaining woodlands particularly those outside the national conservation estate, which makes it difficult to set conservation priorities. WWF-Australia and leading eucalypt botanists and ecologists therefore earmarked the conservation of temperate eucalypt woodlands as a national priority.

Woodland Watch was established using funding from the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust which has provided subsequent annual funding through until 2005. Alcoa World Alumina Australia provided additional funding between 2000 and 2004 to support project expansion and magnification.

Since 2003 Woodland Watch has been classified as a NHT Priority Project for both the Avon Catchment Council (ACC) and the Northern Agricultural Catchment Council (NACC).

Under the State/Federal bilateral arrangement for NHT and NAPSWQ funds, delivered through the regional NRM process/model, WWF continues to apply the Woodland Watch model for on-ground conservation brokering with private landholders and land managers. Both the ACC and NACC have selected WWF as preferred delivery agent for the application of the Woodland Watch model in their respective regions. Further funding security is anticipated under the respective Regional NRM 3-year Investment Plans.

Woodland Watch – Social Impacts

[Excerpts taken from 'Executive Summary' of the Woodland Watch Social Impacts Report © 2005
WWF-Australia / Ted Rowley Amron Consulting P/L]

The evaluation of Woodland Watch, as demonstrated through the 61 Most Significant Change stories collected and subsequently categorised according to the Bennett's Hierarchy Program Logic of Causality, showed that in the primary and secondary users targeted, the Project had:

- Developed higher levels of awareness and knowledge about bushland values held by farmers, Landcare/NRM coordinators and Local Government Officials
- Built new skills and capacity to plan and share knowledge about bushland conservation by Landcare and NRM Coordinators and farmers
- Developed new partnerships and relationships between government agencies, regional community, local government authorities and ENGO (WWF) groups and farmers for bushland conservation
- Built teams across government agencies (CALM) and ENGOs for bushland conservation supporting activities
- Helped develop new systems for collecting and sharing botanical information and knowledge by the CALM WA Herbarium and Landcare and NRM Coordinators
- Developed a model partnership with the CALM WA Herbarium, capturing floristic data on private land and ensuring it adds to the public knowledge base of vascular floral biodiversity in the Wheatbelt
- Developed new science-based knowledge of plant species, and
- Inspired bushland management actions that have been implemented by land managers, farmers, local government and Landcare/NRM Coordinators

Several conclusions from the *Woodland Watch Social Impacts Evaluation* stand out, specifically:

1. Beginning a relationship with a farmer by providing a participatory learning experience, which left management choices to the farmer provided an empathetic and effective entry point for Woodland Watch Coordinators (and other partners) to progress biodiversity conservation opportunities on farms
2. Increased awareness of, information about and knowledge of what was in the bushland was a fundamental driver of positive change in farmers' (and other land managers) and Landcare/NRM Coordinators' views, values and management actions for bushland
3. Trusting partnerships have been formed between state government agencies, local government authorities, regional NRM groups, farmers and ENGOs for achieving biodiversity outcomes
4. Bush values are becoming 'normalised' among farmers (and Landcare/NRM Coordinators), bush is beginning to be seen as an asset in its own right and agricultural production and bushland conservation are being planned for and implemented in an integrated way

5. Locally available (bushland) expertise was important to farmers and Landcare/NRM Coordinators.
6. Undertaking a scientifically robust botanical survey process (conducted by botanists and taxonomists from the CALM WA Herbarium) that involved the primary and secondary users was the basis for successful data gathering on the distribution of native plant species on private land across the Wheatbelt. The information gathered was made accessible in a useful and effective way to farmers, Landcare/NRM Coordinators, Government Agency partners, Local Government and regional NRM groups.
NOTE: This unique relationship between a community-engaging project (Woodland Watch) and the State Herbarium (CALM) has provided new access to private lands thereby filling in the huge geographic gaps in the herbarium collection record, previously predominantly restricted in the Wheatbelt to nature reserves and public road corridors.
7. The presence of an ENGO (WWF) in delivering a bushland conservation project in the field facilitated the building of partnerships between farmers (and their advisers) and individuals from government agencies that were delivering other components of bush conservation programs (e.g. Land for Wildlife, Landcare and NRM Programs)
8. Establishing a plant species presence/absence benchmark through the botanical survey process in the bushland areas surveyed thereby providing a basis for further surveys), was seen as important and readily acknowledged as a way of beginning a longer term planning activity for bushland conservation by farmers and Landcare/NRM Coordinators

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NOTE: Reports on the Conservation Outcomes, the Floristic Analysis of Woodland Watch Flora Survey Data and the Social Impacts of the Woodland Watch project are available on the WWF-Australia website.