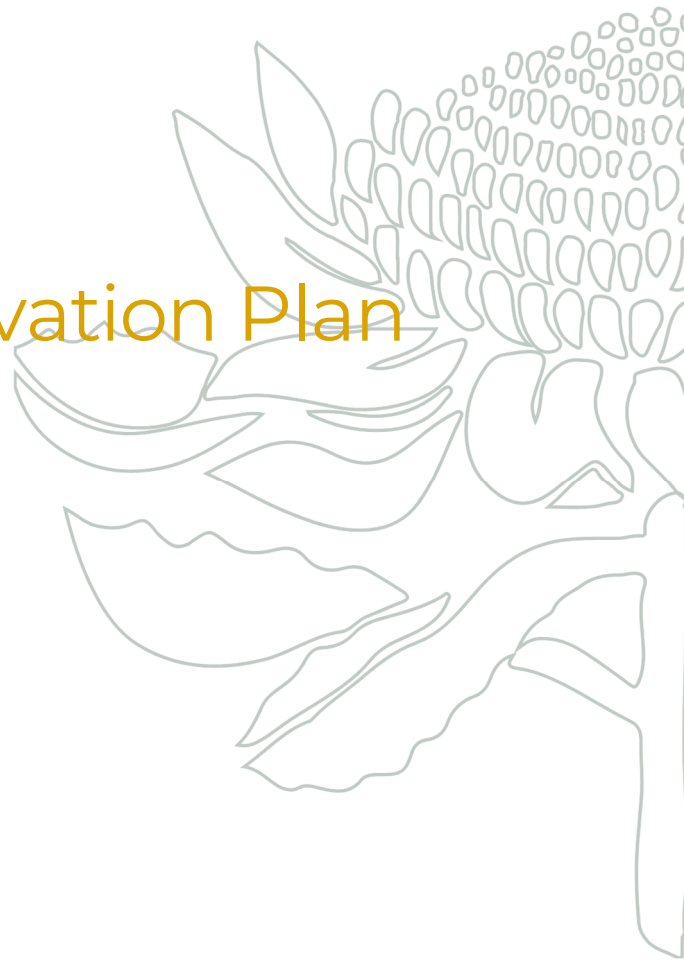


Private Land Conservation Plan

2023 – 2028

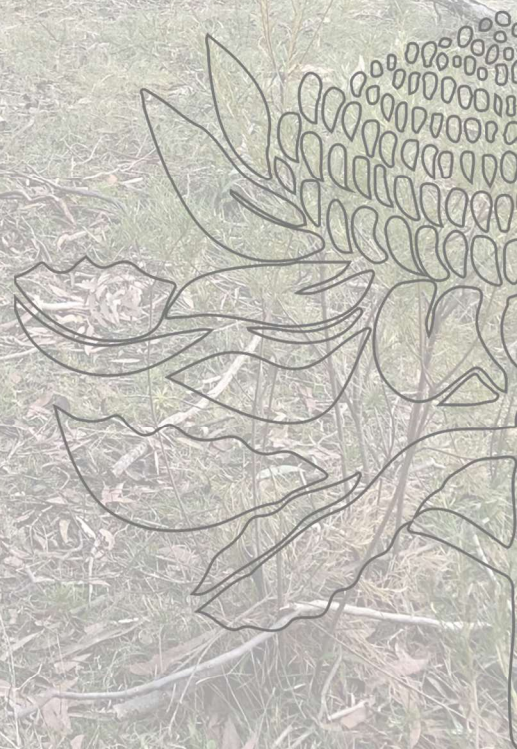


We're with you

We acknowledge the Gundungurra and Dharawal people as the traditional custodians of this place we now call the Wingecarribee Shire.

We recognise the continuous and deep connection for Gundungurra and Dharawal people to their Ngurra (Country) and its great cultural significance to First Nations people, both locally and in the region.

We pay respect to Elders past and present, and extend that respect to all First Nations people.



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Acronym Glossary

WSC	Wingecarribee Shire Council
LFW	Land for Wildlife
HFW	Habitat for Wildlife
TEC	Threatened Ecological Community
PCT	Plant Community Type
HEV	High Environmental Value
BCT	Biodiversity Conservation Trust
BCA	Biodiversity Conservation Act
CEN	Community Environment Network
GER	Great Eastern Ranges
SOS	Saving Our Species
DPE	Department of Planning and Environment
LLS	Local Land Services
RPP	Rural Partner Program

Summary

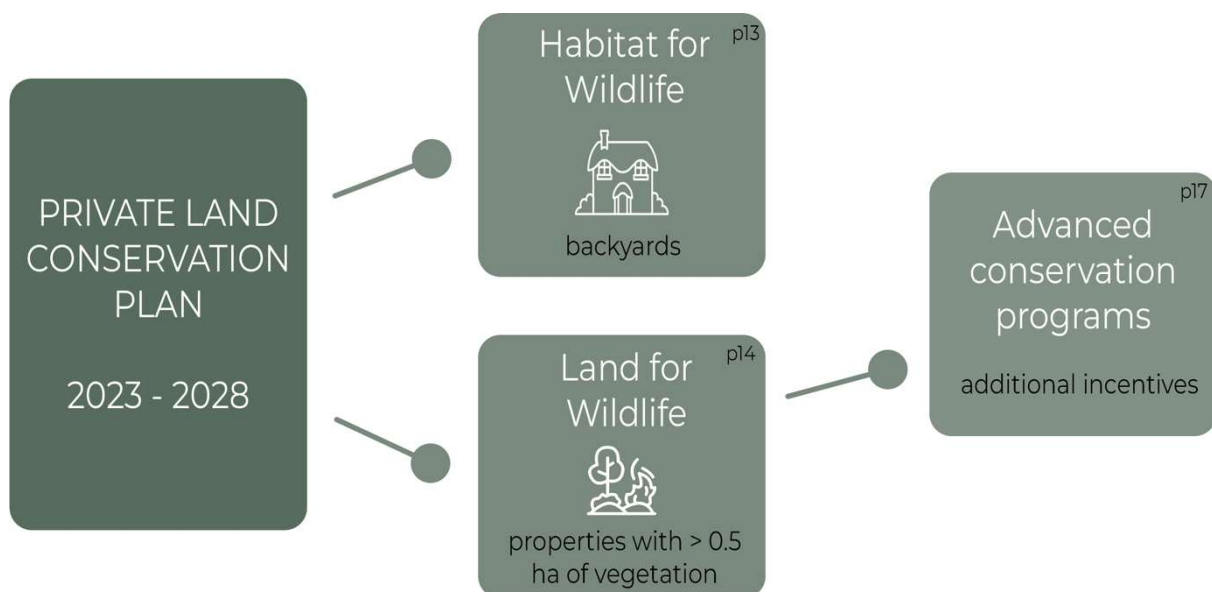
The Private Land Conservation Plan was first developed in 2014. The implementation of the plan and the multi-level framework of engagement with the Wingecarribee Shire community continues to deliver many positive social and environmental outcomes.

Habitat for Wildlife is an entry-level conservation program for landholders with small urban and peri-urban blocks looking to promote backyard biodiversity. Land for Wildlife remains the entry-level conservation program for larger properties with a conservation area/s more than 0.5 hectare. Advanced Conservation Programs build on these entry-level programs with additional financial incentives and require more commitment from landholders. This has included the Vegetation Conservation Program (2004-2015) and the Wingecarribee Koala Habitat Restoration Program (2022-2026).

Our Environment Levy provides significant leveraging opportunities to supply further resources to enhance our existing private land conservation programs and to develop and implement new programs. We will collaborate with external agencies for consistent messaging, resources, and advice to landholders, minimising duplication, and maximising return on investment from all government levels to optimise biodiversity outcomes.

This plan outlines our goals and objectives for private land conservation in Wingecarribee Shire for the next 5 years.

Our Private Land Conservation Program Framework

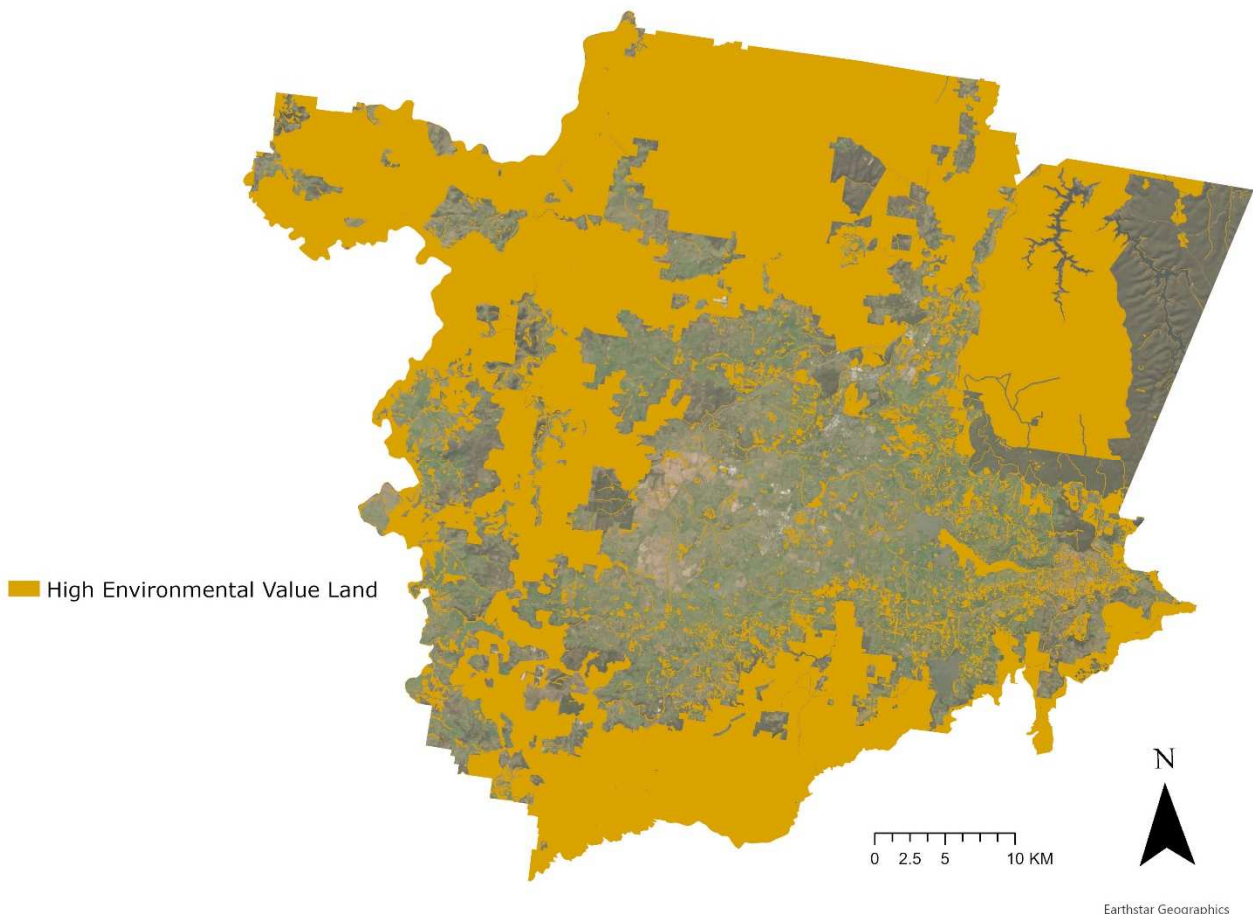


Why is private land conservation important?

Biodiversity Values of Wingecarribee shire

Wingecarribee Shire has outstanding biodiversity values due to its diverse geology, large rainfall gradient east to west, and altitude changes that occur resulting in many different habitat types. Habitats include sandstone forests, tall forests, rainforests, grassy woodlands, Permian slopes, riverine habitats, and upland swamps. [High Environmental Value maps](#) show the scale and extent of biodiversity and conservation values in Wingecarribee Shire (Map 1).

We have a great diversity of native flora and fauna, with over 2,000 plant species and over 374 vertebrate fauna species. Approximately 50 threatened plants, 56 threatened animals, 16 Threatened Ecological Communities (TECs), and over 100 different plant community types (PCTs) are present in Wingecarribee Shire.



Earthstar Geographics

Map 1. High Environmental Value (HEV) land in Wingecarribee Shire (State Government of NSW 2023). HEV land includes areas protected for conservation, native vegetation of high conservation value, threatened species and populations, wetlands, rivers, estuaries and coastal features of high environmental values, and areas of geological significance.

Private Land Values

Around 43% of the shire is privately owned. There are over 55, 000 hectares of extant native vegetation on private land in Wingecarribee Shire, much of which are TEC's. Over 10% is currently conserved in Land for Wildlife voluntary agreements. Most of the remnant vegetation on private land occurs in the more rural western part of the shire, but land around the major town centres has highly fragmented vegetation remnants.

The private land conservation programs are a great opportunity for Council to develop positive relationships with residents. It offers the opportunity for Council officers to be invited onto privately-owned land for a positive interaction and to provide technical and professional support to our community. The community has expectations, as articulated within its primary strategic planning document, the [Wingecarribee Community Strategic Plan](#), to protect and enhance the natural values of the Shire.



Credit DPE/Thunderbox

Strategic planning framework

The focus of this plan is biodiversity conservation on private land. Various Council plans and strategies both guide and complement this Private Land Conservation Plan.



Strategic Planning Framework what guides this plan



Environment & Climate Change Strategy



Priority area 1
Focus areas 1, 2 & 3

Landscape & cultural values, catchments & waterways, bushland & biodiversity

Bushland & Biodiversity Action Plan

Community Strategic Plan



Environment goal 4.1.1

Protect and enhance our native species, biodiversity, habitats & natural areas through coordinated community and all of government approach

Community Engagement Strategy



Objectives 3, 4 and 5

Strengthen our relationship with the community, understand the community's needs, and improve our approach to community engagement

Land Use Strategies & Plans



Local Strategic Planning Statement: planning priorities 1.3 to 1.5

Local Planning Strategy 2015- 2031: Chapter 2 & 3

Local Environment Plan

Legislative framework

State Government level Private Land Conservation programs are delivered under the Biodiversity Conservation Act (BCA) 2016 and the delivery of these programs is guided by the Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy (2018).

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT) was established under the BCA and oversees private land conservation programs across NSW. The BCT partners with landholders to conserve biodiversity across the state. The Conservation Partners Program is for landholders who voluntarily wish to protect and conserve native vegetation on their land and is delivered in line with the [*Biodiversity Conservation Trust Conservation Partners Program Project Implementation Plan*](#) (2021-2025).

The [*Conservation Partners program*](#) is available to all landholders across NSW. The two types of conservation agreements that landholders can enter include:

1. [*Wildlife Refuge Agreements*](#): non-permanent agreement, eligible for Conservation Partners Grant to enhance ecological values
2. [*Conservation Agreements*](#): In-perpetuity agreement to conserve and manage an area, eligible for Conservation Partners Grant

Landholders can also apply for a [*Biodiversity Stewardship Agreement*](#) through the Biodiversity Credits Supply Fund and Taskforce. Stewardship agreements generate biodiversity credits that can be sold to fund weed and pest control, ecological burning, and environmental restoration.

We will work with the BCT and the Credits Supply Taskforce to maximise synergies where possible and we will encourage Land for Wildlife members to consider moving to more secure and potentially longer-term agreements under the auspices of those agencies. These agreements may lead to additional investment opportunities for landholders to assist with the ongoing management of these areas.

We believe that Land for Wildlife plays an important role in entry-level private land conservation, community building and networking with residents who may progress to the higher-level agreements at the BCT.

Private land conservation goal and objectives

Our Goal

facilitate and promote biodiversity conservation on private land in Wingecarribee Shire



Our Objectives



Encourage private landholders to engage and take action in land and biodiversity conservation



Improve the knowledge and skills of landholders in biodiversity conservation



Leverage with state and federal agencies to optimise investment and conservation outcomes



Improve management of existing natural areas to optimise returns on investment & to balance other land management activities with conservation



Create opportunities for networking within the community to encourage knowledge and skills sharing



Increase resilience in extant vegetation through encouraging the improved management of key threatening processes



Retain and improve connectivity of extant threatened ecological communities and habitat values on private land



Complement the State Government private land conservation programs and provide opportunities for collaboration with our community

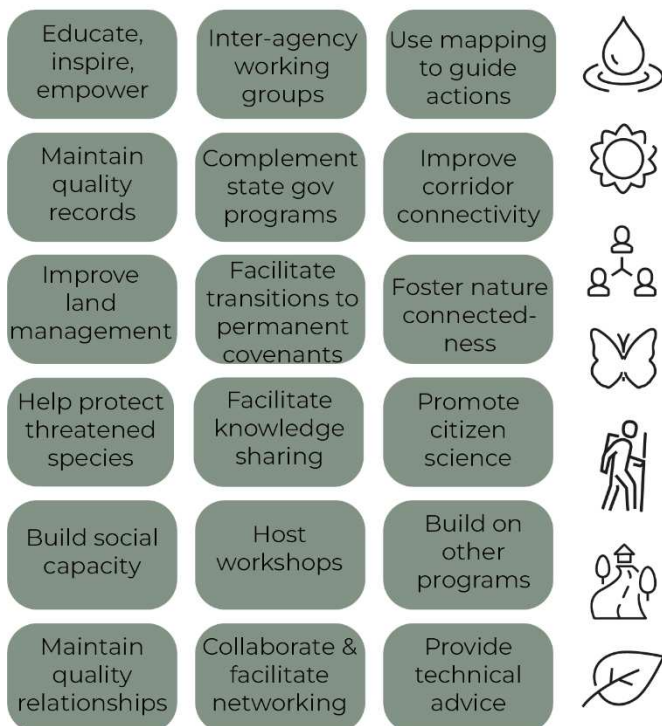


What we do and who we do it with

We will achieve our goals and objectives through our Habitat for Wildlife, Land for Wildlife and Advanced Conservation Programs.

Private Land Conservation in Wingecarribee Shire

What we do



Who we do it with



How we measure success

The following metrics help us keep track of our progress and determine whether we are meeting our objectives and overarching goal.



How we measure success



Number of new HFW and LFW properties



Number of workshops, events, and newsletters



Amount of funding distributed to private landholders



Area of remnant native vegetation being managed for conservation



Number of inter-agency working group meetings



Number of properties in mapped wildlife corridors



Review of our program

Habitat for Wildlife

Overview

Habitat for Wildlife (HFW) was launched on World Environment Day 5 June 2015 with WSC delivering the program under a user licence from the Community Environment Network (CEN).

HFW is about engaging landholders with smaller land parcels in peri-urban, urban and some rural environments which are typically heavily cleared. HFW promotes wildlife conservation and backyard habitat values and encourages landholders to retain or improve these values.

HFW is free to join, and participants receive the [Backyard Habitat Planting Guide](#), other information resources, an attractive metal sign for the property, access to workshops and connection to a social network.

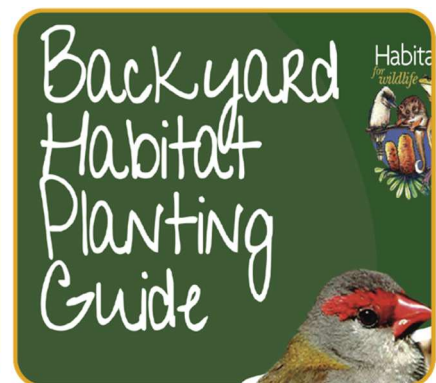
Objective

Expand the HFW network to 500 and engage the existing community through citizen science initiatives and other relevant workshops

Outcomes

Since 2015, HFW has attracted over 280 members and is growing with minimal promotion. The development of the Backyard Habitat Planting Guide was a key outcome, and this booklet is provided free to all new members.

As part of the registration, participants have the option to subscribe to Wingecarribee Web and will continue to be informed about other networks such as Wildlife Rescue South Coast, WIRES, Bushcare and Landcare.



Land for Wildlife

Overview

Land for Wildlife (LFW) is the free, entry-level conservation program for all landholders with a minimum of 0.5 hectare of natural bushland, forest, wetland, or grassland. We have been a regional provider of the program since 2009 and coordination in NSW is provided by the Community Environment Network (CEN).

The goal for this program is to increase the number of LFW property registrations and the extent of natural areas on private land that are managed for biodiversity and wildlife habitat by their owners.

Objectives

Increase the area of extant vegetation being managed for conservation to 15 % (8, 250 ha) by end June 2028

Liaise with the BCT and Credits Supply Taskforce to move interested landholders to more permanent conservation agreements

Land for Wildlife is not legally binding, nor does it change the legal status of the property. This feature of the program encourages participation and the commencement of capacity building for landholders. The landholder needs to express a written intention of good environmental stewardship.

The program is as much about community engagement and the development of social capital as it is about biodiversity conservation, and once registered, landholders commence a journey of discovery on their own land in the context of the regional landscape. Landholders can form Landcare groups to increase their capacity to manage their local landscape for conservation.

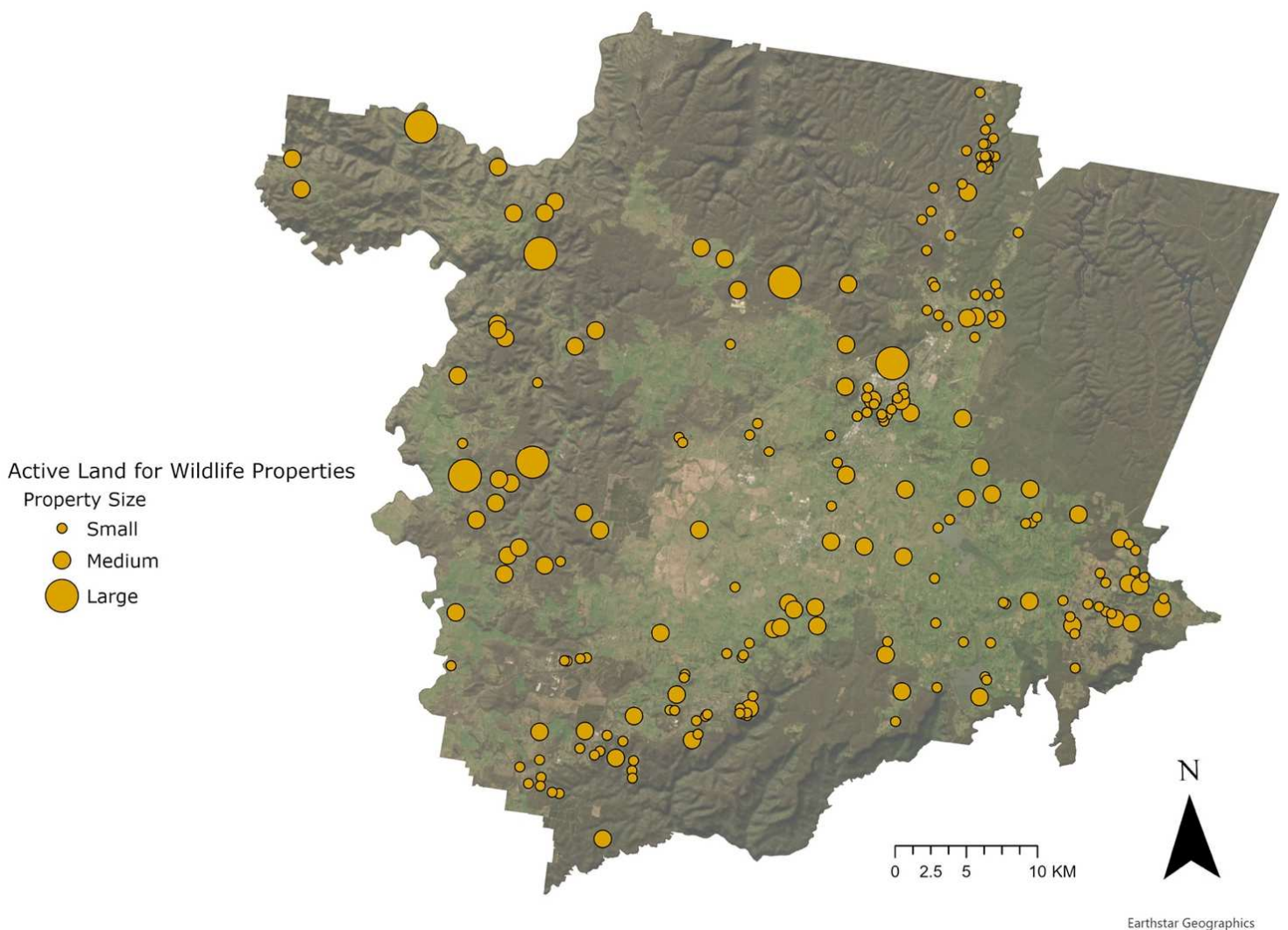
As a regional provider, we supply a free comprehensive property assessment which includes a site visit, natural resource maps, plant species lists, database searches including aboriginal heritage, a suite of practical information resources, facilitated links to a social network, e-newsletters and local training workshops, and access to incentives such as free native plants.

Land for Wildlife is funded by the special rate applied to all land in Wingecarribee Shire, the Environment Levy, and has attracted significant financial leverage from state government and non-government sources. The program has administrative support within the Environment and Sustainability Branch of Council.

Outcomes

There is approximately 55,000 hectares of native vegetation on private land in Wingecarribee Shire and over 5,500 hectares (10 %) are currently conserved on LFW properties in informal agreements. The LFW program has resulted in over 200 voluntary registrations since it commenced in 2009, including several large holdings, schools, and the council-managed Mount Gibraltar Heritage Reserve. Some landholders are managing a small area of their property, while others are managing almost their entire landholding for conservation purposes.

Land for Wildlife agreements are mapped spatially using geographic information systems (GIS) and all agreements have a status of Proposed, Active and Expired assigned and adjusted regularly. A diversity of plant structural classes and communities has been conserved under the program, with a good distribution of LFW properties across the local government area.



Map 2. Active Land for Wildlife properties across Wingecarribee Shire, categorised based on property size.

Under the program, we have provided LFW members with a range of opportunities and resources including, but not limited to:

- Monthly newsletters
- Bi-annual tree giveaways including koala feed tree species
- More comprehensive vegetation surveys which are uploaded to BioNet to inform our vegetation mapping
- Eucalyptus and grass identification workshops
- Rural Fire Service (RFS)/Nature Conservation Council (NCC) Hot Spots training, field trips, farm tours, hollows and nest boxes workshop – [watch the video here](#)
- Koala acoustic monitoring as part of our broader 'Koala Karaoke' monitoring program
- Biodiversity monitoring and citizen science opportunities e.g., Camera trap surveys and Aussie Backyard Bird Count
- Short films e.g., [Land for Wildlife in the Southern Highlands](#)



Advanced Conservation Programs

Koala Habitat Restoration Program

2022 – 2026

Overview

We are delivering the Wingecarribee Koala Habitat Restoration Program in partnership with the NSW Department of Planning and Environment under the [NSW Koala Strategy](#). The program aims to expand, connect, and enhance koala habitat across Wingecarribee Shire, with a focus on the East and West koala stronghold population areas. The eastern stronghold population area includes private land in Glenquarry, Kangaloon, East Kangaloon, Alpine, and Mittagong. The Western stronghold population area includes private land in Canyonleigh, High Range, Joadja, Medway and Sutton Forest.

Under this program, landholders are required to enter into a management agreement with a shared financial or in-kind responsibility.

Objectives

Restore up to 50 ha of koala habitat
on private land

Outcomes

In early 2023, two information sessions were held to promote the program and to encourage landholders to apply for funding under the program. Landholders completed an Expression of Interest form, and the applications were rank based on a range of criteria including proximity to the east and west koala stronghold populations, sustainable long-term benefits (proximity to 3rd order streams, bushfire refugia, co-contributions from landholders), and quality of koala habitat and koala corridor linkages.

Funded activities include weed control, planting, ecological burning, and seedling purchases. We are currently developing landholder agreements for 10 projects on private properties. One 22 ha project has already commenced with 15 ha restored to date. We will continue to take advantage of opportunities to expand on koala habitat restoration on private land in Wingecarribee Shire as funding becomes available.



Integration with other agencies and programs

Integration with External Agencies

NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust

The NSW BCT, established in 2017 as part of the NSW Government Biodiversity Law Reforms, has developed a [Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy](#) for NSW which guides the NSW Government's investment in private land conservation.

Landholders with active or expired Advanced Conservation Program management agreements (e.g., koala restoration program) with particularly large or intact TECs will be encouraged by Council to enter into an agreement under the Conservation Partners Program with the BCT or submit an Expression of Interest form for a Biodiversity Stewardship Agreement to the Credits Supply Taskforce.

Permanent covenants such as Conservation Agreements are often a requirement for funding support from some providers, for example, the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife, and so if landholders move to more permanent conservation agreements on good quality conservation sites, this may provide additional leverage for funding in Wingecarribee Shire.

Great Eastern Ranges

The Great Eastern Ranges (GER) is a national and landscape-scale conservation program aiming to protect, link and restore healthy habitats over 3,600 kilometres along the east coast of Australia from Victoria, through New South Wales, to North Queensland.

The Southern Highlands Link is a priority section of the GER corridor, as it links high conservation value areas of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, the Sydney Catchment Special Areas, and Morton National Park.

We continue to work closely with Greening Australia and other GER partners to develop and support the delivery of projects within the GER Southern Highlands Link. This has included the [Wall to Wollondilly](#) project and the [Thin Green Line Project](#). Where possible we assist with encouraging LFW registrations so that landholders have ongoing support to manage project areas in the future after funding ceases.

NSW Department of Planning and Environment

Saving Our Species Program

Saving Our Species (SOS) is a NSW Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) program operating under the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016. SOS aims to address the growing number of plants and animals in NSW facing extinction. The program sets out the NSW Government's threatened species management plan and what needs to be done to secure NSW's threatened species in the wild for the next 100 years.

We will continue to work with DPE to protect and conserve threatened species and TECs throughout the shire e.g., along roadsides.

Threatened species have different conservation needs, and the SOS program allocates each species to six different [management groups](#): site managed species, landscape managed species, iconic species, data-deficient species, partnership species and keep watch species.

Our LFW and Advanced Conservation Programs integrate, where possible, with the SOS program and prioritise conservation efforts in line with SOS targets. Current priorities are those areas with known habitat for priority species.

The main threats to biodiversity in the shire include habitat loss, fragmentation of habitat, feral animals, disease, altered hydrological conditions and weeds. Most of the key threatening processes particularly affecting landscape managed species in NSW are applicable in Wingecarribee Shire, and our private land conservation program will aim to

Private Land Conservation Plan

assist private landholders in reducing these threats on their properties.

Southern Highlands Koala Conservation Project

The Southern Highlands Koala Conservation Project (SHKCP), launched in 2014, is a partnership between DPE, Council and The University of Sydney. The project has been highly successful in bringing the community together to report koala sightings, develop a conservation project and undertake collaring, monitoring, and mapping of our koala populations. There are an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 koalas in Wingecarribee Shire.

Koalas are an iconic species under the SOS program and our private land conservation programs will continue to actively support private landholders who own koala habitat and corridors.

Funding from the NSW Koala Strategy (2022-2026) will support an update of our Fine-Scale Plant Community Type (PCT) map for Wingecarribee Shire, incorporating the revised NSW PCT classification system. This map will be the basis for an updated koala habitat and corridor map which will inform koala conservation actions on private land. All properties with agreements under LFW and Advanced Conservation Programs are recorded spatially to improve reporting and future planning.

NSW Department of Primary Industries

In addition to SOS project targets, there is potential for our private land conservation programs to extend to aquatic threatened species protected under the Fisheries Management Act, NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI). We will continue to connect relevant landholders with DPI projects, resources and funding opportunities in Wingecarribee Shire where appropriate (e.g. the [Fitzroy Falls Spiny Crayfish program](#) in Wildes Meadow) and consider our role and how our operational activities may impact target species under these programs in the region.

Local Land Services

Wingecarribee Shire lies within the South East Local Land Services (LLS) region. The [South East LLS Local Strategic Plan](#) (2021-2026) sets the vision, priorities and overarching strategy for the delivery of LLS projects and services within the region. One of the goals of the plan is to “grow primary industries productivity and healthy environments”. The priority locations for biodiversity conservation programs delivered or supported by LLS under its local strategic plan may be like past programs, including the regional Joadja corridor in the west, major rivers and creeks such as Wingecarribee and Wollondilly Rivers, Areas of Regional Koala Significance (ARKS), and land adjoining the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

We will continue to work collaboratively with other agencies, community, and non-government organisations, including LLS, DPE, Birdlife Australia and Greening Australia to deliver complementary projects within regional

Private Land Conservation Plan

and local high priority corridors over the next five years.

Close cooperation and communication are essential for the integration of state and local programs and projects, and this is facilitated by regular working group meetings with LLS and other agencies.

Leveraging Opportunities

There are opportunities for Council to utilise the environment levy funds to leverage for additional grants from other government and non-government agencies.

Potential Funding Sources	
Department of Planning and Environment	Threatened species programs
Local Land Services	Devolved biodiversity grants from the Commonwealth
NSW Environmental Trust	Education, research, and other community grants
The Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife	Capacity building and landholder grants for improvement works

Integration with Other Wingecarribee Shire Council Programs

There are several other programs delivered under our Environment Levy which have an influence and relationship with HFW, LFW and Advanced Conservation Programs.

The Rural Partner Program

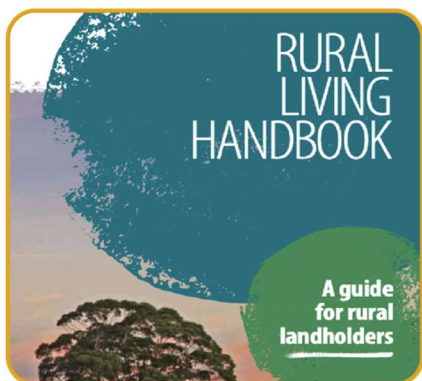
The Rural Partner Program (RPP) aims to promote and embed sustainable land use practices in existing agricultural and rural living properties, particularly sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation. In 2016 the RPP produced the Wingecarribee Shire [Rural Living Handbook](#) (updated 2021).

The RPP complements the LFW program and encourages sustainable land management practices and biodiversity conservation through education and awareness activities. The Rural Living Handbook provides basic natural resource management information and links, with a local information section relevant to Wingecarribee Shire. Other objectives of the RPP include sustainable firewood harvesting and habitat retention.

Bushcare Community Nursery

Our Environment Levy funded community nursery at Moss Vale depot currently focusses on the production of local provenance native plants for Council Bushcare projects on Council owned or managed land. The nursery also propagates local seed from koala feed tree species for koala habitat restoration projects on private land. The nursery is managed by our Bushcare team, with volunteer support.

We will explore opportunities to potentially utilise the nursery facility to support LFW property owners, without compromising its current focus on supporting Bushcare projects on public land.



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