

COMMUNITIES FOR COMMUNITIES

Issue 3: March 2006



Update on ecological community listings December 2005 - April 2006

Current nominations

Open for public comment

There are currently no nominations open for public comment. This is due in part to a change in the way the Department assesses nominations to list ecological communities under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (see details below).

Closed for public comment

Nominations for the:

[Central Gippsland Plains Grassland](#)

[Temperate Lowland Plains Grassy Wetland](#)

[Murray Valley Grassland of the Riverina Bioregion](#) and

[Forest Red Gum Grassy Woodland](#)

ecological communities closed for public comment on 3 February 2006, however, late comments may be accepted by the Department.

New Approach to Public Consultation on Nominated Ecological Communities

The approach to public consultation for nominated ecological communities has recently been changed to enhance public understanding and input to the nomination assessment process.

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Until recently, nominations were made available for public comment on the Department's web site immediately after being accepted by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee (the Committee). Expert questions identified by the Committee to clarify information gaps in the nomination were also released at this stage. A two month public comment period followed and from that point until the Committee's advice on the nomination was considered by the Minister, no further information was provided to the public on the status of the nomination assessment process or the nature of the Committee's assessment.

While this was appropriate for many nominations, a number of nominations have been received which have not considered the ecological community's full national extent. In these circumstances, the extent of the listed ecological community (providing it satisfies the criteria for listing) has the potential to be considerably larger than that originally nominated. This was problematic for those people who lived and worked in areas outside the extent of the original nomination, but inside the range of the expanded ecological community. These people would have been unaware of the potential listing of areas near them until the Minister announced a listing decision.

In order to avoid this problem in the future, the revised procedure (outlined below) will be followed.

Once a nomination has been accepted by the Committee, relevant experts are identified and in most cases a technical workshop is convened. The purpose of the technical workshop is to obtain expert opinion on the nature, extent and condition of the nominated ecological community. More information on the nature and purpose of technical workshops appears elsewhere in this newsletter.

A paper outlining the outcomes of the technical workshop is then prepared for the Committee which details the workshop's recommendations in relation to the definition and appropriate condition thresholds. Following consideration by the Committee, the paper is released for public and expert comment along with any additional expert questions nominated by the Committee. The original nomination is also released at this time.

The public release of these documents means that the Department can undertake targeted stakeholder liaison with relevant regional, state and national bodies, as well as broader community consultation, over the full extent of the ecological community being assessed. Moreover, the expert questions determined by the Committee can now be informed by the outcomes of the technical workshop. This process should in turn significantly enhance the nature and scope of information provided by experts and the general public.

Importantly, with the release of the technical workshop outcomes report, the revised process ensures that

community.

Technical workshops

Introduction

Technical workshops are used by the Department as a means to obtain expert opinion on the nature and extent of a nominated ecological community. Workshop outcomes inform the Threatened Species Scientific Committee in its deliberations on the nominated ecological community. As such, technical workshops are considered an early step in the nomination assessment process. As a result of the revised public consultation procedures outlined above, the outcomes of the technical workshop are now placed on the web for public comment. This facilitates a more open and transparent process for the assessment of nominations, and enhances the level of information available to the Committee.

It is important to note that the technical workshop outcomes report represents the collective views of the workshop participants and, as such, reflects one input into the complex nomination assessment process. Release of this report does not imply endorsement of its contents by the Committee.

Workshop objectives

Workshops are generally convened in the vicinity of the nominated ecological community. The main objectives of a workshop are to develop a definition of the ecological community, including thresholds of condition (see the [December 2005](#) issue of this newsletter for more details). This process helps determine what should or should not be included in the definition of the ecological community. Definitions may include attributes such as structure, native species diversity, native species cover, tree density and extent of weed infestation but must also be able to be used by an educated layperson to identify the ecological community in the field.

Technical workshop for the Western Basalt Plains Natural Temperate Grasslands

The most recent technical workshop report released for public comment was on the Western Basalt Plains Natural Temperate Grasslands. This technical workshop was held in April



2005. This ecological community is

a type of grassland that is primarily

dominated by Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*) although other grasses may be co-dominant or become dominant, particularly in degraded sites. It is restricted to the volcanic plains of western Victoria.

Although the period for public comment is closed, the Department welcomes late comment. More information regarding the workshop can be found at:

<http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations/pubs/western-basalt-plains-report.pdf>

Other ecological communities for which the technical workshop outcomes are available on the Department's web site are [Weeping Myall Open Woodlands](#) and [Coolabah/Black Box Woodlands](#) of Northern NSW Wheatbelt and Queensland Brigalow Belt.

The outcomes of technical workshops held for Littoral Rainforests and Vine Thickets of Eastern Australia, Murray Valley Grasslands of the Riverina Bioregion, New England Peppermint Woodlands and Ribbon Gum - Snow Gum - Mountain Gum Woodlands will be available for public comment on the web site in the coming weeks.



Brush Box, Booti Booti National Park, NSW - H Mills

(inset) Sweet Pittosporum - S Maas

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Recovery plans for ecological communities

Introduction

The Australian Government Minister for the Environment and Heritage may make or adopt and implement recovery plans for ecological communities listed under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

Recovery plans set out the research and management actions necessary to stop the decline of, and support the recovery of, listed threatened species or threatened ecological communities. The aim of a recovery plan is to maximise the long-term survival in the wild of a threatened species or ecological community.

Recovery plans should state what must be done to protect and restore important populations of threatened species and habitat, as well as how to manage and reduce threatening processes. Recovery plans achieve this by providing a planned and logical framework for interested parties and responsible government agencies to coordinate their work.

More details about recovery plans can be found on the Department's web site at: <http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/recovery/index.html>

National Recovery Plan for Natural Temperate Grassland of the Southern Tablelands

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Natural Temperate Grasslands of the Southern Tablelands - H Mills

(inset) Yam Daisy - H Mills

January 2006 the National Recovery Plan for Natural Temperate Grasslands of the Southern Tablelands (NSW and ACT), an endangered ecological community, was adopted under the EPBC Act.

These grasslands are naturally treeless ecosystems dominated by native tussock grasses, including *Themeda* (Kangaroo Grasses), *Austrodanthonia* (Wallaby Grasses), *Poa* (Tussock Grasses) and *Austrostipa* (Spear Grasses). There are also many species of native forbs, including sedges, rushes and Native Bluebells.

Grasslands have tended to attract less publicity for their conservation values than some other types of ecosystems, such as rainforests and coral reefs. However, grasslands and grassy woodlands were once widespread across south-eastern Australia, but over the last 200 years have been greatly impacted by altered fire regimes agricultural and urban development. Only a small proportion of the Natural Temperate Grassland of the Southern Tablelands ecological community that existed at the time of European settlement now remains in a largely undisturbed condition.

Implementation of the Recovery Plan will also benefit a number of nationally threatened species, which inhabit the Natural Temperate Grasslands of the Southern Tablelands, including: the Pink-Tailed Worm-lizard, Striped Legless Lizard, Golden Sun Moth, Small Purple Pea, Button Wrinklewort, Monaro Golden Daisy and Austral Toadflax. Other species found there include the Canberra Raspy Cricket, Perunga Grasshopper, Eastern Banjo Frog, Little Whip Snake and Eastern Lined Earless Dragon.

More details of this recovery plan can be found on the Department's web site at: <http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/recovery/temperate-grasslands/index.html>

Conservation Management Networks

Toni McLeish - Coordinator Grassy Box Woodland Conservation



As a result of European settlement many once widespread and relatively continuous ecological communities, such as the Grassy Box Woodlands, are now highly fragmented and endangered. These vegetation communities are poorly represented in the conservation estate, occurring on a range of land tenures, and, owing to a lack of large, little-disturbed remnants, offer few opportunities for acquisition.

Conservation Management Networks (CMNs) are an important model for the protection and management of these highly fragmented or threatened ecological communities, across all land tenures. The Grassy Box Woodlands (GBW) CMN on the western slopes of NSW has shown that CMNs offer an effective long-term conservation mechanism for ecological communities that are difficult to conserve by other means. Established in 1998, the GBW CMN is still growing in membership numbers and support.

The GBW CMN includes remnants on private land, cemeteries, travelling stock reserves and routes, road and rail easements, town commons and existing reserves. Remnants can be protected by a variety of mechanisms, including Voluntary Conservation Agreements, Joint Management Agreements and Local Environment Plans, or are listed as having a manager who wishes to integrate conservation goals.

A CMN is a network of remnants and their owners or managers, and other interested individuals. They aim to provide support and stimulate partnerships between local communities, government, educational institutions, scientists and conservation practitioners to protect and manage important remnants. The CMN provides an overarching framework to coordinate protection of sites and implement adaptive management. An ecological focus allows a CMN to provide highly targeted advice and support.

The CMN logo represents a group of areas of one ecological community and the critical role people play in the management of that ecological community. Each area in the network is significant in its own right and is different from each of the others, reflecting the local natural conditions and its management history. As a group, areas within the network begin to represent the variety found within the ecological community across its geographic range and under various conditions. With support from the network and continuing expansion of its area, people can begin to rebuild the natural connectivity with other areas of the same and other ecological communities, and repair ecological and landscape function.

Biological objectives of a CMN

- to optimise conservation of the

genetic and biological diversity

of a the ecological community

- to maintain or enhance viable remnants of the ecological community throughout its distribution and
- to contribute to the maintenance of ecological processes and the dynamics of the ecological community in a landscape context.



CMN monitoring at Orange

Social objectives of a CMN

- maintaining and enhancing community ownership and involvement in conservation
- providing a support and linking network for managers with conservation objectives (either as primary or secondary objectives for the site)
- integration of conservation into management by empowerment of landholders with knowledge and resources
- sharing of knowledge between landholders, scientists and conservation planners and managers
- developing a sense of “community” between site managers and
- where appropriate, encourage land owners to seek some form of long-term protection for their site, for example voluntary conservation covenants on private land.

Victorian CMNs

- Broken Boosey - 03 5761 1557
- Gippsland Plains - 03 5153 2999
- Wedderburn - 03 5430 4567
- Northern Plains - 03 5440 1845

NSW CMNs

- Grassy Box Woodlands - 02 6298 9709 (www.gbwcmn.net.au)
- Monaro Grasslands - 02 6242 8484

Upcoming Conferences

Every year, a number of conferences take place that discuss science and issues directly relevant to the conservation of ecological communities. This newsletter will occasionally notify readers of upcoming conferences that may be of interest, such as the event outlined below.

The Australasian Bushfire Conference will be held from 6–9 June at the Brisbane Exhibition and Conference Centre. The conference theme *Life in a Fire-Prone Environment: Translating Science into Practice* aims to provide a forum to share new ideas on the complex issues of bushfire management.

The Conference encourages communication between agencies and groups involved in bushfire management in order to build upon the lessons learnt from previous bushfire campaigns, and to facilitate a new understanding of the role of fire in the landscape. Topics will cover fire management in the urban/rural interface, development controls, bushfires in a changing climate, fuels management, community involvement and participation in fire management, fire ecology, remote sensing, mapping, maintaining the balance between protection and conservation.

More information can be found at www.bushfire2006.com.
