

TRUST *for* NATURE

TRUST FOR NATURE'S STATEWIDE CONSERVATION PLAN

A SNAPSHOT OF THE SCIENTIFIC PLAN TO PROTECT VICTORIA'S
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY ON PRIVATE LAND



PRESERVING VICTORIA'S MOST THREATENED NATIVE PLANTS AND WILDLIFE ON PRIVATE LAND

Background

Of all states and territories in Australia, the conservation of private land in Victoria is arguably the most important. Victoria has the highest proportion of private land of any state and territory, with 62% in private land. However, it is also the most highly altered state as a result of extensive habitat loss and habitat degradation.

It is estimated that private land in Victoria is being cleared at a rate of about 4000 hectares each year. It is therefore vital that we act to protect more areas of important habitat on private land, and improve the management of this land to conserve Victoria's biological diversity for the future.

As the conservation organisation in Victoria with the legislated purpose to permanently protect native plants, wildlife and ecosystems on private land, Trust for Nature has an important role to play. In its 2011-16 Strategic Plan, Trust for Nature developed two key directions for its conservation program: to implement strategic landscape-wide conservation, and to build and innovate private land conservation practice.

In pursuit of these strategic directions, the Trust saw the need for a comprehensive, statewide perspective of the priority areas to target on private land to better conserve Victoria's native plants, wildlife and ecosystems. The Statewide Conservation Plan now gives that strategic, statewide perspective.

The Statewide Conservation Plan uses a rigorous overarching, scientific framework to help inform the Trust's activities and enhance its effectiveness as a conservation organisation.

It is an important step towards achieving Trust for Nature's 20 year vision:

"Within two decades, protecting native vegetation and wildlife on private land will be recognised and valued as a central part of mainstream Australian environmental practice; just as water and energy conservation is today. There will be a shared expectation and responsibility among communities, landowners and governments that, just as national and state parks are protected, so too significant natural areas on privately owned land should be protected".

What is the Statewide Conservation Plan?

Trust for Nature's Statewide Conservation Plan represents the first statewide analysis of conservation priorities for private land in Victoria. Based on scientific data obtained from government agencies and other conservation bodies, the Statewide Conservation Plan assesses the occurrence and status of terrestrial ecosystems, aquatic ecosystems and threatened plants and wildlife on private land. From those analyses and assessments, the Statewide Conservation Plan has identified the highest priority ecosystems and threatened species to target for conservation on private land in Victoria. Development of the Statewide Conservation Plan was assisted with input from a Technical Reference Group, with representatives from universities, government agencies and other conservation organisations.

Building on earlier reviews, landscape plans and conservation strategies completed by the Trust, the Statewide Conservation Plan was developed to complement other major planning approaches undertaken by state authorities to protect Victoria's biological diversity, including the Regional Catchment Strategies released in 2013.

For the first time, the Statewide Conservation Plan gives Trust for Nature and other conservation bodies a systematic statewide perspective of the ecosystems, native plants and wildlife to focus conservation action on private land. The Statewide Conservation Plan identifies 12 focal landscapes across Victoria that will make the greatest contribution towards conservation on private land. It also identifies the species most at risk and in need of protection.

The delivery of private-land conservation is dependent on landowners as well as partnerships with other organisations and Trust for Nature anticipates that the Statewide Conservation Plan will provide a firm basis for these partnerships.

The conservation objectives

The Statewide Conservation Plan is guided by six objectives. These objectives were based on existing conservation planning guidelines, in particular those of the Australian Government's National Reserve System program. The National Reserve System is Australia's network of protected areas, conserving examples of our unique landscapes, plants and wildlife for future generations.



Red-capped Plover. Photo: Malcolm Just. Front cover: Dockers Plain, a covenanted property in north-eastern Victoria, adjacent to the Lower Ovens River, protecting Riverine Grassy Woodland habitat. Photo: Trust for Nature

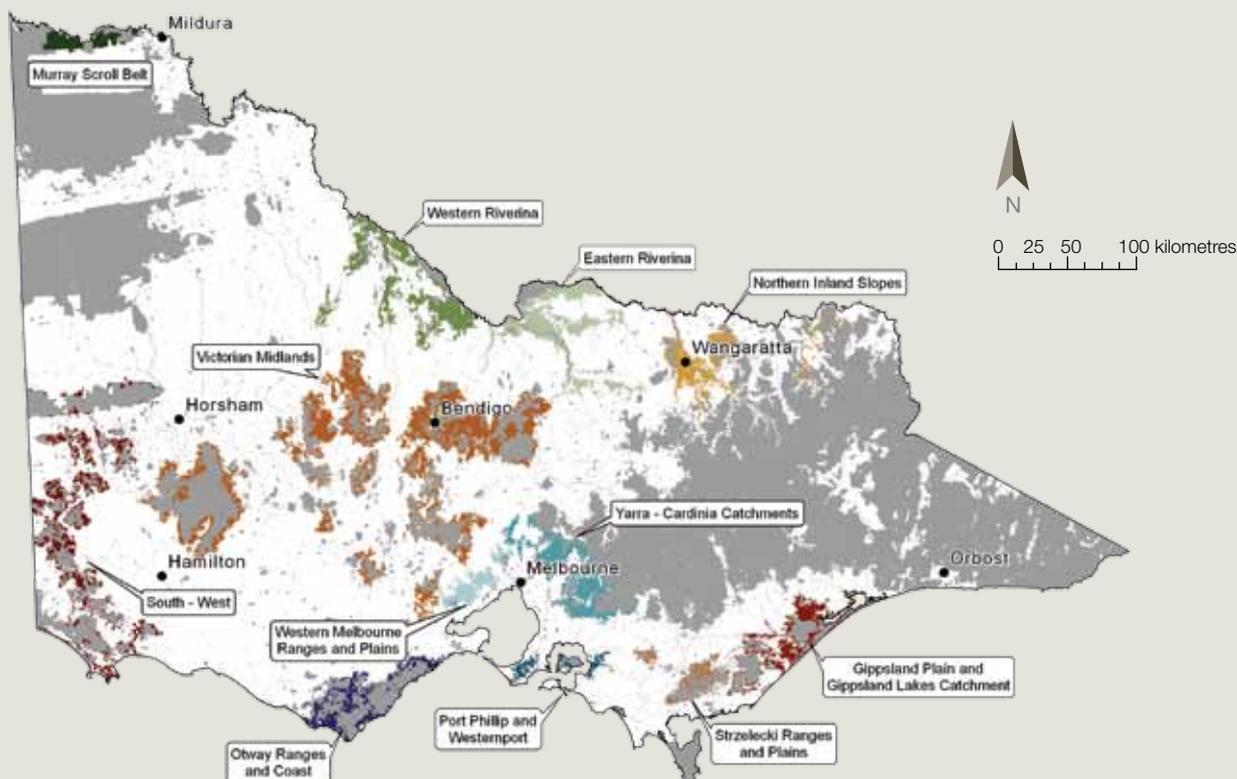


Figure 1: Locations of the focal landscapes identified in the Statewide Conservation Plan in relation to private land.

The Statewide Conservation Plan objectives are to:

- Improve the viability of ecosystems and species at a landscape scale
- Improve protection of the least protected ecosystems and threatened communities
- Improve protection of significant aquatic and coastal ecosystems
- Improve protection of threatened species
- Enhance and protect landscape connectivity
- Enhance and protect habitat quality

Improving the viability of ecosystems and species at a landscape scale

This objective lies at the core of effective conservation programs and aims to target those areas on private land that support the largest extent or largest populations of priority ecosystems and threatened species. To achieve this objective the Statewide Conservation Plan identified 12 focal 'landscapes' across Victoria. Focal landscapes are areas of at least 20,000 hectares in size that contain extensive private-land areas with important biodiversity values, as seen in Figure 1.

Collectively, the 12 focal landscapes cover 12% of Victoria's private land area; almost two million hectares. They contain more than 30% of the most poorly represented ecosystems on private land, more than 50% of the priority native plants and wildlife identified for conservation on private land, identified by the Statewide Conservation Plan, and most of Victoria's internationally significant wetlands. These focal landscapes enable the Trust to work in the most effective and efficient way possible.

Improving protection of the least protected ecosystems and threatened communities

Across Victoria, the Statewide Conservation Plan identifies the ecosystems and plant communities that do not meet the Australian Government's National Reserve System targets for ecosystem protection. These targets are used as a benchmark or measure of 'representativeness' – that is, how much of any ecosystem or community is represented in various natural areas, known as bioregions. The Statewide Conservation Plan determined that nearly half of Victoria's bioregions do not meet National Reserve System targets for ecosystem protection, and remain unprotected. It also revealed that nearly all under-represented vegetation communities in the state occur on private land, notably including woodlands, grasslands, wetlands, box-ironbark forest, dry forest and mallee.

In partnership with private landowners and other conservation organisations, the Trust therefore has a critical role to play in improving the protection status of under-represented ecosystems and vegetation communities classified as nationally threatened.

The Trust will continue its long-standing focus on increasing the protection of woodlands and grasslands in focal landscapes, and will increasingly target other plant communities found on private land that also need protection, such as wetlands.

Improving protection of significant aquatic and coastal ecosystems

The Statewide Conservation Plan looked at the status of three major aquatic ecosystems: wetlands, riparian ecosystems and coastal ecosystems.

Nearly 200,000 hectares of significant wetlands in Victoria occur on private land, including approximately 50,000 hectares each of internationally listed Ramsar wetlands and Wetlands of National Significance. Another key finding was the identification of nearly 50,000 hectares of wetlands on private land that constitute part of the habitat for globally significant populations of a range of migratory shorebirds and other waterbird species.



Brush-tailed Phascogale. Photo: Malcolm Just

More than 40% of the state's 46,000 kilometres of waterways, or riparian ecosystems, are bordered by private land. The Trust will continue to work collaboratively with other organisations, including Catchment Management Authorities and Melbourne Water, to increase permanent protection of riparian ecosystems on private land.

Almost 50% of Victoria's coastal ecosystems occur on private land. The Trust will aim to increase protection of this land, including the south-west coastline of Victoria, Otway's coastline, Bellarine Peninsula, Swan Bay, Western Port Bay, the West Gippsland coastline, Corner Inlet and Gippsland Lakes. The Trust will prioritise the protection of the high-value sites within these regions considered to be at greatest threat from habitat loss or urban development.

Improving protection of threatened species

The Statewide Conservation Plan identifies, for the first time, a set of 148 native plant species and 88 wildlife species to target for conservation on private land. These are species that are both threatened and have a high proportion found on private land. The Trust will build on its existing threatened species work by increasingly targeting protection of these key private land populations of native plant and wildlife species.

Enhancing and protecting landscape connectivity

Many of the ecosystems and vegetation communities found on private land between the focal landscapes are under-represented. They do, however, help to provide linkages between areas that have been identified high-value regions, i.e. the focal landscapes. The Trust will work with its partners to help improve the connectivity between these landscapes. The Trust will also work at a local level with regional partners and community organisations to improve landscape connectivity within the focal landscapes.

Enhancing and protecting habitat quality

Most high-quality vegetation on private land occurs on land adjacent to large protected areas on public land. To enhance and protect native vegetation quality in Victoria, additional emphasis will be placed on improving the quality of already existing privately owned protected areas.

Moving forward

The Statewide Conservation Plan is an important step in the history of private land conservation in Victoria, and will guide Trust for Nature's work into the future.

The identification of the 12 focal landscapes for private-land conservation across the state establishes a clear framework for setting priorities and developing collaborative projects with partners. New work will complement the projects already underway.

The Statewide Conservation Plan has reinforced the Trust's belief that the most powerful way of increasing the National Reserve System into the future, will be through greater protection of ecosystems and vegetation communities on private land. Ongoing and stronger relationships with private landowners will be critical for the Trust to increase the protection of native plants and wildlife on private land.

For more information about the Statewide Conservation Plan visit our website at www.trustfornature.org.au

We invite you to join us in our vision to protect native plants and wildlife in cooperation with private landowners and make a donation to Trust for Nature.

Trust for Nature respectfully and gratefully acknowledges the late Dr Marion Boyd Wanliss for her foresight and confidence in our work. Her passion for conservation and native wildlife led her to make a generous gift to the Trust in her will, which enabled the development of the Statewide Conservation Plan. Dr Wanliss was scientific in her approach and looked to the future and we believe that the Statewide Conservation Plan honours the spirit of her gift.



Trust for Nature
Level 5/379 Collins Street Melbourne VIC 3000
P: (03) 8631 5888 F: (03) 9614 6999
E: trustfornature@tfn.org.au W: www.trustfornature.org.au