

# Gippsland Conservation Fund

Report FY23/24

*“Together we are creating a future in which Victoria’s nature is valued, protected and thriving”*



**TRUST FOR  
NATURE**

# The Gippsland Conservation Fund

## Fund Purpose

The purpose of the Gippsland Conservation Fund (formerly the West Gippsland Conservation Fund) was an exciting initiative for conservation in the region. By creating an endowment fund with the intent to provide secure, ongoing funding for conservation work in Gippsland, we can continue build capacity to protect this wild, beautiful, richly-biodiverse part of Victoria.

## About Trust for Nature

Established in 1972, Trust for Nature is Victoria's dedicated private land conservation agency. We work with landholders in all regions of Victoria to ensure that our precious native habitat is protected forever, using permanent on-title agreements (covenants).

We continue to grow our partnerships with the more than 2,000 landholders who have secured over 1,500 conservation covenants contributing to the 110,000 hectares of protected habitats under covenant or in a Trust for Nature managed reserve. These places are home to some of our most threatened species like the Helmeted Honeyeater, Growling Grass Frog and the Plains-wanderer.

Trust for Nature takes an evidence-based approach to its work guided by our Statewide Conservation Plan which outlines key areas in Victoria where our most threatened habitats, plants and animals are found. This plan underpins our organisational focus areas including permanent protection and restoration in priority landscapes, landholder engagement in conservation, community engagement including deepening ties with Aboriginal Victorians and innovation in conservation finance including philanthropy.

## About the Gippsland Conservation Fund

The Gippsland Conservation Fund was established in 2019 and has supported landholders to advance conservation activities at properties across West Gippsland. The remit of the fund is now expanding to include the entire Gippsland region, to expand the number of conservation covenants and ongoing stewardship with land holders. The Fund provides a critical opportunity to improve habitat quality and connectedness across this landscape.

## Outcomes and Updates from FY 2023/24

Below is a summary of the significant outcomes achieved by Trust for Nature in collaboration with partners and landholders during the last financial year.

## Habitat Restoration works a Meeniyán covenant

Trust for Nature continued building a positive relationship with the landholders at the Meeniyán habitat restoration site and actively sought their involvement with on ground works. With the landholders' approval and input, Trust for Nature implemented initial high-threat weed control and supplementary planting activities agreed to under a Works Project Agreement established between Trust for Nature and the landholders in 2023.

The first round of revegetation works was completed in Spring 2023. Contractors prepared the site through weed control and spray circles. Ten fenced exclusion plots were installed by Senior Project Officers John Hick and Gabby Fitzgerald to minimise potential browsing pressure. Contractors planted 2,800 plants, in which different guarding methods were used to determine the most effective. The majority of plants went into the exclusion plots, whilst some went outside trialling both guarded and unguarded techniques. Gabby Fitzgerald installed monitoring Photopoints across the site and has completed the Draft Management Plan, which is currently being reviewed by the landholders.



*Trust for Nature staff installing an exclusion fence. Each plot was initially planted with approximately 50 plants.*



*An example of a finished plot that has had site preparation completed and a Photopoint installed (see yellow cattle tag).*



*Examples of individual guards used to guard scattered eucalypts throughout the site. The spray circles are also depicted in the images.*



A second round of revegetation works were completed early Winter 2024, to plant out a different area of the covenant. 1,000 plants including a mixture of understory shrubs and canopy trees were planted utilising the same high-quality contractors as in Spring 2023, who also completed the site preparation of spray circles. All 1,000 plants were individually guarded, due to acquiring free stakes and guards leftover from a finished Project. Under the Works Project Agreement for this restoration site, Trust for Nature plans to undertake additional high-threat weed control and supplementary planting until December 2025. A review of the outcomes of the works completed will then inform any further restoration activities.



*Examples of completed revegetation works undertaken by our local contractors, where individual tree guards were used. It is hoped overtime this planting will provide a buffer from the adjacent farmland and outcompete the dominant pasture grasses.*

## Building understanding of covenanted habitats

Trust for Nature staff have been using remote cameras to obtain additional information on properties, that is unable to be gathered during usual site visits. Remote cameras have been deployed at a covenant in Hedley and a property in Foster that is in the process of being covenanted. The information acquired allows Program Managers to have a more informed understanding of the fauna species that inhabit a property, both native and invasive. This data can influence the management actions and information contained in a covenant management plan.



*A pair of juvenile Red foxes confirmed on a covenant in Hedley.*

A significant outcome of using remote cameras is that landholders gain additional knowledge about their properties, and it can often spark a deeper interest and enthusiasm in managing their land. It is hoped that in the future any significant findings of possible threatened species, will also assist landholders to receive potential grants to improve the habitat on their property.



*A Koala captured on remote camera on a property in Foster, that neither Trust for Nature staff nor the landholders knew to be on the site. This property is in the process of being covenanted and will soon protect habitat for this species in perpetuity.*

## Strengthening on-ground outcomes

Released funds from the WGSF supported staff to be able to actively undertake revegetation works alongside landholders at the Archies Creek covenants and a covenant in Stockdale. These funds have enabled us to achieve greater habitat restoration outcomes from works that are funded through other projects. By supporting staff to be on the ground, we have also been able to strengthen landholder relationships, which has been invaluable.

Released funds from the WGSF enabled Trust for Nature to increase its capacity to control Sweet Pittosporum at the Archies Creek covenants and monitor improvement in habitat condition. These funds provided 8 hectares of Sweet Pittosporum control, which has been vital in significantly reducing its density and the adverse impacts it has on local flora and habitat quality. Released funds also enabled additional woody weed control at a covenant in Bena that protects Giant Gippsland Earthworms. Contractors were engaged to sensitively spray patches of Blackberry to compliment works completed through another Project.



*Trust for Nature staff planting alongside the landholder at Stockdale*



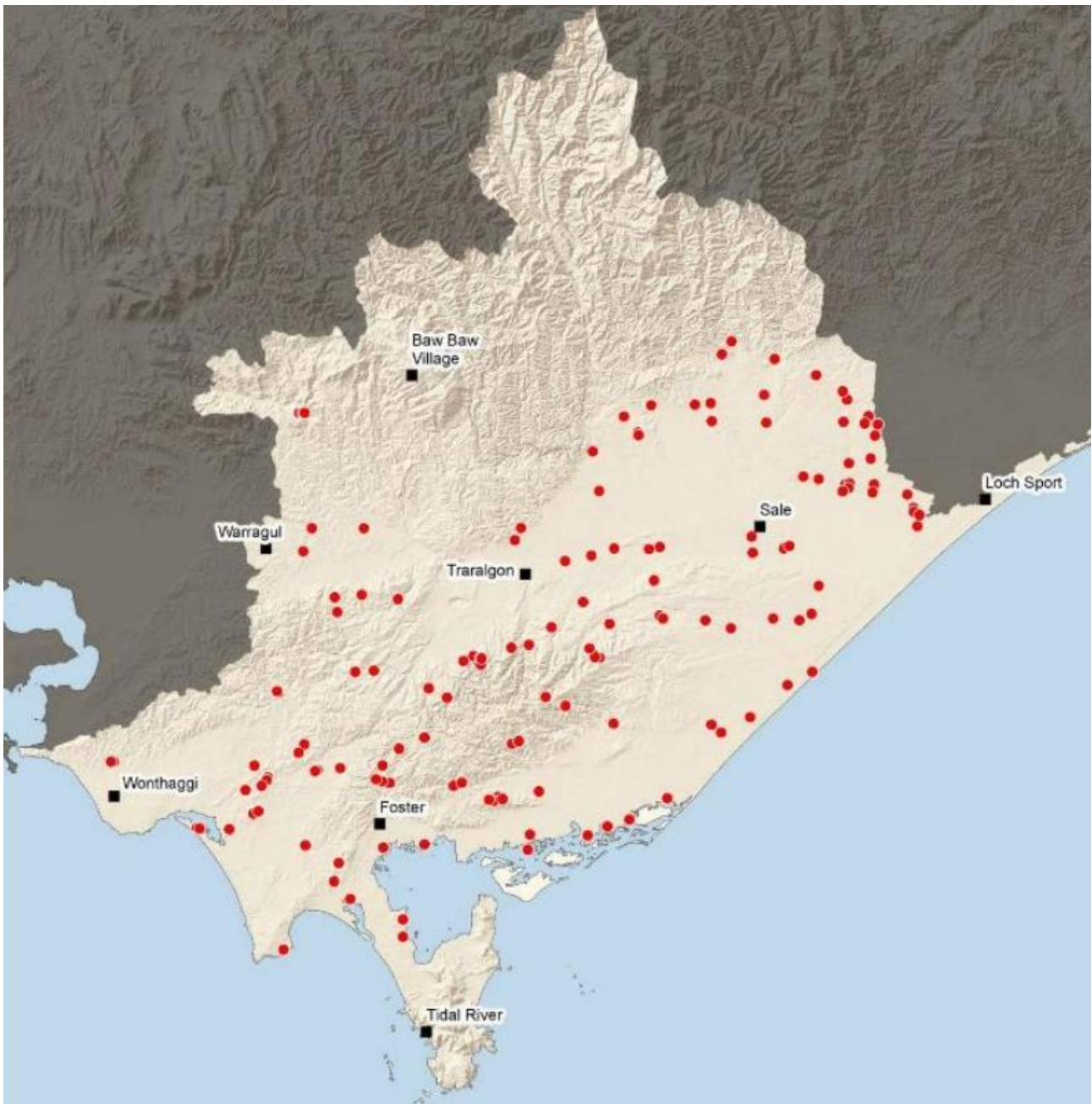
*Trust for Nature staff planting at Archies Creek*



*Examples of extensive areas of Sweet Pittosporum control at the Archies Creek covenants, funded through the Gippsland Conservation Fund*

## Conservation Covenants

The number of conservation covenants is increasing across the Gippsland region. The map below shows the 146 covenants currently protecting 6,000 hectares of private land. The conservation covenant is a unique and powerful tool that ensures this land will be protected in perpetuity, which is critical to securing the future of ecosystems, habitats and threatened flora and fauna.



## Gippsland Conservation Fund Financials

An annual distribution from the fund is administered by Trust for Nature's Gippsland conservation team to facilitate on-ground activities at strategically selected locations to deliver the best possible conservation outcomes. The Gippsland Conservation Fund is administered by JB Were on behalf of Trust for Nature. The Fund's balance is reflected below.

Year	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Opening Balance	\$52,950	\$1,010,666	\$1,151,142	\$1,083,842	\$1,124,634
Closing Balance	\$1,010,066	\$1,151,142	\$1,083,842	\$1,124,634	\$985,000

## Next Steps

Trust for Nature will continue to fundraise for the Gippsland Conservation Fund to ensure it remains for many years to come. The Regional Team are committed to developing and implementing a comprehensive project plan to support covenantors in this region.

For more information on the Gippsland Conservation Fund, including how you can support Trust for Nature's work in the region, please email the Development Team - [fundraising@tfn.org.au](mailto:fundraising@tfn.org.au).

### Trust for Nature

ABN 60 292 993 543

[trustfornature@tfn.org.au](mailto:trustfornature@tfn.org.au) | (03) 8631 5888

Wurundjeri Country, Level 5

379 Collins Street, Melbourne VIC 3000

[trustfornature.org.au](http://trustfornature.org.au)

