



# 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 to provide ongoing funding for conservation work and support on covenanted properties. This was an exciting initiative for conservation and at its inception was focused on West Gippsland. The endowment fund is now supporting landholders with covenants across all of Gippsland. Trust for Nature is committed to helping continue to 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 have partnered with more than 1,500 Victorians to protect more than 110,000 hectares of native habitat across Victoria. Covenants are actively cared for by the landholders in accordance with our joint management plan and monitored by Trust for Nature. These special places are crucial sanctuaries for nature, and provide vital refuges for wildlife as the climate changes. By safeguarding ecosystems we help protect the homes 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 First Peoples 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 landholders. The Fund provides a critical opportunity to improve habitat quality and connectedness across this landscape.

## Updates and Outcomes

Over the past few years, significant events have impacted staffing, workflow and resources at Trust for Nature and our community. During the COVID-19 years, Trust for Nature activity levels were not at the standard level, thus delaying the delivery of important conservation work and support. This is reflected in the financial data, noting lower expenditure between years 2019-2022.

In recognition of these unforeseeable delays, Trust for Nature has made a concerted effort to make up for lost time and impact, with a considerable increase in staff time and resources being redirected to delivering Gippsland Conservation Fund work. In particular from Summer – Autumn 2024, staff resources were activated to maximise planting season and conservation outcomes. Below is a summary of the significant outcomes achieved in collaboration with partners and landholders last financial year.

### **Habitat Restoration Works – Meeniyen Covenant**

Trust for Nature continued building a positive relationship with the landholders at the Meeniyen 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 initially planted with approximately 50 plants.*



*Example of a finished plot with site preparation completed and a yellow tag Photopoint installed.*



*Examples of individual guards to protect scattered eucalypts throughout the site. Spray circles are also depicted.*

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 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

The Gippsland Conservation Fund 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.

Trust for Nature increased 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*



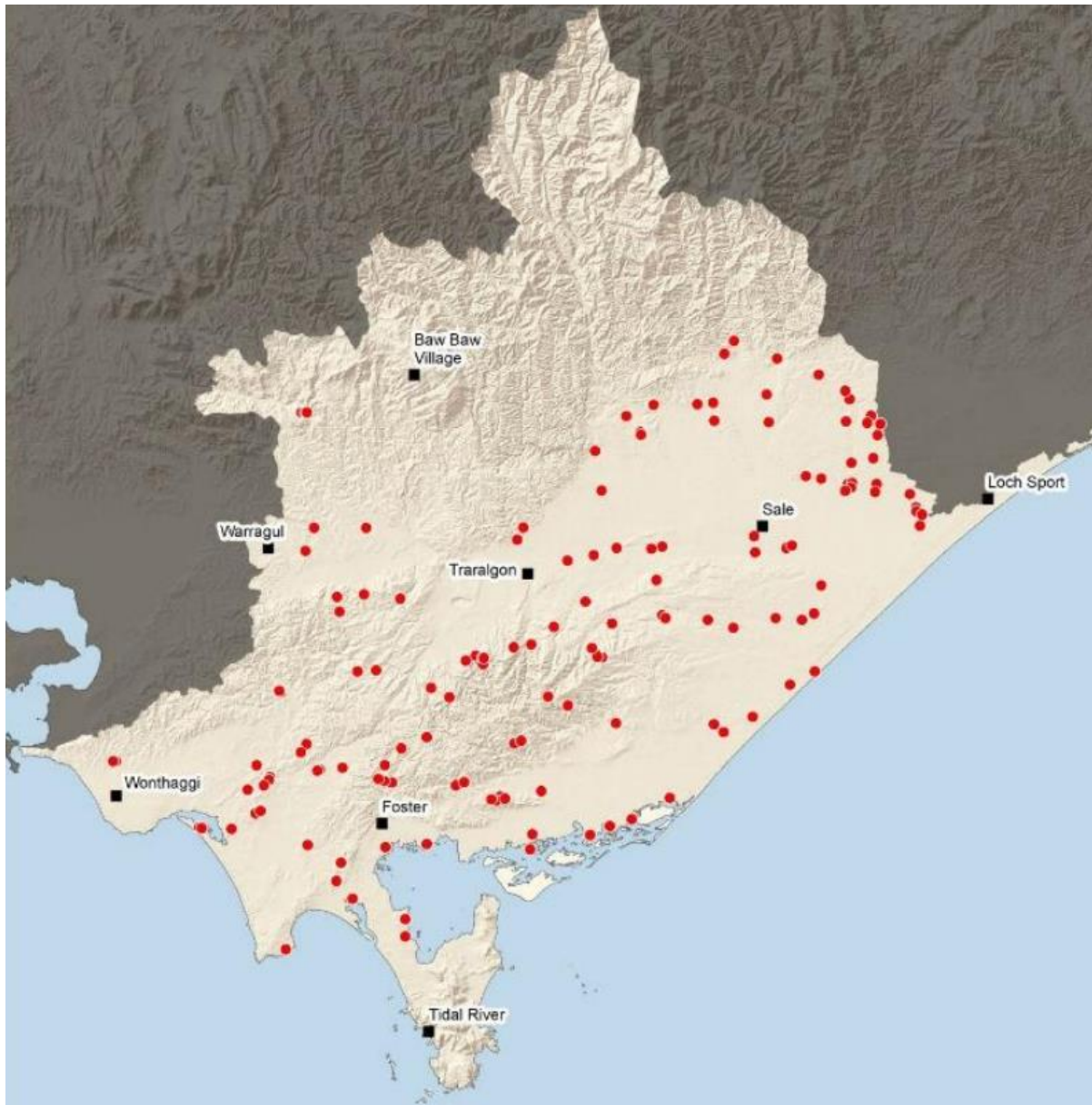
*Trust for Nature staff planting at Archies Creek*



*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 to 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 JBWere on behalf of Trust for Nature. As noted previously, the increased project expenditure in FY2023/24 reflects increased staff hours and resources towards improving habitat and conservation outcomes on Gippsland covenants. This follows a period of low expenditure during 2019-2022 with limited travel, staffing and contact due to COVID-19 restrictions and implications. On average, across the last 4 years, project expenses are \$60,000 per annum. The Fund's current balance is reflected below.

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
<b>Opening Balance</b>	<b>\$52,950</b>	<b>\$1,010,066</b>	<b>\$1,151,142</b>	<b>\$1,083,842</b>	<b>\$1,124,634</b>
Donations Received	\$945,492	\$2,600	\$1,405	\$0	\$750
Investment Income	\$17,107	\$28,982	\$37,200	\$51,897	\$36,445
Unrealised Gain / (Loss) on investment		\$109,687	(\$95,857)	\$27,090	\$69,399
Annual Return %	na	13.73%	-5.10%	7.29%	9.41%
Project Expenditure	\$5,483	\$193	\$10,048	\$38,195	\$192,530
<b>Closing Balance</b>	<b>\$1,010,066</b>	<b>\$1,151,142</b>	<b>\$1,083,842</b>	<b>\$1,124,634</b>	<b>\$1,038,698*</b>

Please note \* These figures are confirmed by JBWere as at 24 October 2024.

## Next Steps

Trust for Nature will continue to fundraise for the Gippsland Conservation Fund to ensure it remains for many years to come. The intention of the Fund is to support covenantors in this region to maintain, protect and enhance their land. Trust for Nature is committed to stewarding these relationships with up-to-date management plans and offering critical works on the ground.

Trust for Nature know there is an opportunity to showcase this important work in the local community and gather additional support. The Trusts' Development Team will seek to develop new relationships with local businesses to build a corporate donor stream to the Fund. Existing relationships with large organisations will be explored by our Regional Manager for the Development team to pursue Corporate Partnerships.

The Regional Team are committed to developing and implementing a comprehensive project plan to support covenantors in this region with a new annual grants program for covenantors. The GCF Mini Grants Program will be open early 2025. This will be managed by the Regional Office on a priority and needs basis with grants of up to \$5,000 for a range of conservation work on covenants in the 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).

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