Gippsland Conservation Fund

Report FY24/25

"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) is to support conservation work on covenanted properties. This is an exciting initiative, and at its inception was focused on West Gippsland, it now supports covenantors across all of Gippsland. Trust for Nature is committed to building 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 organisation. We work with landholders across Victoria to ensure that our precious native habitat is protected forever, using voluntary, permanent on-title agreements (conservation covenants).

We have partnered with more than 1,600 Victorians to protect more than 117,000 hectares of native habitat across Victoria. Conservation covenants are actively cared for by the landholders in accordance with the 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, and is guided by our Statewide Conservation Plan which outlines key areas in Victoria where our most threatened habitats, plants and animals are found. This underpins our approach to permanent protection and restoration in priority landscapes, landholder and community engagement, and innovation in conservation finance including philanthropy.

Fund Activity Overview

Thanks to the Gippsland Conservation Fund, covenanted properties in Tarraville, Tarwin Lower, Woodside and Fernbank have received on-ground works and support. Trust for Nature was also able to deliver approximately 23 hectares of weed control across three covenants. We can clearly see the positive impact of on-ground works in improving habitat conditions and outcomes on private land across Gippsland. Provision of these works strengthens existing relationships with covenantors and key stakeholders.

A highlight of the year was the launch of the pilot Landholder Support Program, allowing landholders to apply for support for revegetation, pest control and weeding. The pilot was a success and Trust for Nature received positive feedback from covenantors and staff. More about the Landholder Support Program features later in this report.

Map showing 145 covenants in East Gippsland protecting 6450 ha and West Gippsland with 180 covenants protecting 7676 ha. Collectively there's 325 covenants protecting 14,126 ha private land

Projects Funded

Habitat Revegetation – Fernbank

In February 2024, an ecological event caused severe storm damage to areas of Lowland Forest on the southwest boundary of a covenant in Fernbank. The covenantors have been working hard to revegetate the area since the storm. The focus was to help the landholder expand revegetation efforts by providing plants and funding a contractor to carry out the planting.

The landholder played a key role in the project, offering valuable input on suitable plant species for the property and actively assisted the contractor during the planting process. A total of 970 plants were installed at the covenant in the storm-affected area, aiming to contribute towards canopy reestablishment. The plants were a mix of canopy, understory tree and shrub species, suitable for planting within Lowland Forest. The covenantors were enthusiastic and grateful to be supported in their revegetation efforts.

Storm damage to Fernbank covenant prior to removal of woody debris and revegetation. This area had 970 native plants installed during this reporting period. Image: Ben Williams, 2024.

Weed removal - Tarwin Lower

Trust for Nature assisted a covenantor in Tarwin Lower to fund contractors to remove woody weed species. Sallow Wattle and Coastal Tea Tree, while native to specific areas of Victoria, are outside of their native range at this property. These species have become over abundant, creating dense thickets and inhibiting locally native flora from recruiting. Contractors were able to complete two days of weed removal (one day funded by the landholder and one day by the Fund). A reduction in competition by these weed species will improve the habitat condition. With the bulk of the established Coastal Tea Tree and Sallow Wattle now removed, the covenantor is well-placed to manage future any re-emergence. This is prime example of how the Gippsland Conservation Fund can assist covenantors.

Contractors completing removal of invasive Sallow Wattle at a covenant in Tarwin Lower.

Saltmarsh protection – Tarraville

This covenant protects 110 hectares of Coastal Saltmarsh vegetation adjacent to the Corner Inlet Ramsar site and provides high quality habitat for a range of native fauna. This property was purchased via the Revolving Fund and is on the market for sale. Within the covenant, a previously grazed area had given rise to a significant infestation of Spear Thistle, covering approximately 5 hectares. A team of contractors completed weed control of Spear Thistle, scattered woody weeds including African Box-thorn, Gorse, and Wormwood.

Spear Thistle re-emergence post treatment.

Trust for Nature will revegetate this area to increase native vegetation cover and outcompete future weed emergence. 5,000 *Melaleuca ericafolia* plants were previously funded through another project, with Gippsland Conservation Fund funding a further 1,000 grown with locally sourced seed from the covenant itself. The revegetation project is scheduled to go ahead in Spring 2025.

An example of the excellent condition coastal saltmarsh vegetation found at the Revolving Fund Property in Tarraville.

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Weed Control - Woodside

During the autumn months, weed control was undertaken at a covenant in Woodside to treat Bridal Creeper, Gorse, African Box-thorn and Spear Thistle. Contractors attended the property in June to complete the works and successfully treated the known infestations.

Provision of on-ground works was highly valued as the covenantors are unable to complete on-ground works due to decreasing mobility. Historically, the covenantors have been proactive with managing their covenant, however they are now finding it difficult to manage. The Gippsland Conservation Fund enabled Trust for Nature to offer much-needed support to these covenantors.

Large African Box-thorn post treatment at a covenant in Woodside.
The base has been cut and painted with herbicide to prevent resprouting.

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A contractor completing spot-spraying of bridal creeper at a covenant in Woodside.

Landholder Support Program

Trust for Nature knows that we need to support covenantors year-in and year-out. We understand that for any number of reasons, a landholder may be facing challenges that impact their ability to achieve their conservation goals on their property.

In April 2025 we launched the Gippsland Landholder Support Program to help landholders with on-ground works like weed control, fencing, revegetation and tree planting. This program was successful in assisting 13 covenantors across Gippsland. The response was loud and clear - landholders loved it.

The Landholder Support Program delivered works to the value of up to $5,000 per covenant, from an available total of $50,000. We are so grateful to our donors who see the value in supporting covenantors to manage their diverse habitats and ecosystems, and who continue to support conservation on private land in not only Gippsland, but across Victoria.

Following the success of the Gippsland Landholder Support Program, Trust for Nature is rolling out other Landholder Support Programs this year.

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Gippsland Conservation Fund Financials

An annual distribution from the fund is administered to the South East Area 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.

A matched giving appeal opportunity from an anonymous donor in 2025 enabled Trust for Nature to offer other donors the chance to have their donations matched, dollar for dollar, up to $50,000. The matched giving appeal was successful; the target was achieved and is recognised in donations received below. A wonderful result for Gippsland. Thank you to all the donors involved.

Noting the project expenditure in this table does not include payments made for the Landholder Support Program, as this was funded by additional philanthropic gifts last financial year.

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Opening Balance	**$52,950**	**$1,010,066**	**$1,151,142**	**$1,083,842**	**$1,124,634**	**$1,038,698**
Donations Received	$945,492	$2,600	$1,405	$0	$750	$101,376
Investment Income	$17,107	$28,982	$37,200	$51,897	$36,445	$41,670
Unrealised Gain / (Loss) on investment		$109,687	($95,857)	$27,090	$69,399	$45,217
Annual Return %	na	13.73%	-5.10%	7.29%	9.41%	8.36%
Project Expenditure	$5,483	$193	$10,048	$38,195	$192,530	$22,177
Closing Balance	**$1,010,066**	**$1,151,142**	**$1,083,842**	**$1,124,634**	**$1,038,698**	**$1,204,784***

Please note * These figures are to be confirmed by JBWere by October 2025.

Next Steps

To continue to do more and better private land conservation in Gippsland, 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.

The Development and Regional Delivery teams are working together on establishing more partnerships and funding opportunities across Gippsland. We are so thankful to our donors and supporters who contribute to the Gippsland Conservation Fund and who are allies in private land conservation.

For more information on the Gippsland Conservation Fund, including how you can support Trust for Nature's work in the region, please email: fundraising@tfn.org.au.