

# REPAIRING THE LAND

## INTRODUCTION

Our Repairing the Land conservation package is the Greens vision to make the ACT a place where our plants, animals and ecosystems devastated by climate change, ecological destruction and bushfires can thrive, by creating stronger and more diverse ecosystems across our urban and non-urban environments.

The ACT Greens will make Canberra an urban biodiversity haven, by building urban ecosystems that support species threatened by human-induced climate change and habitat loss. We want fully integrated management of our urban, bush and rural ecosystems, waterways and wildlife corridors, to increase the diversity and strength of our ecological communities and to provide food, shelter and nesting sites across the seasons, providing resilience to climate change.

The Greens will create environmental repair jobs - looking after our city, our bush and our people. The jobs of the future need our environment to stay healthy. Our plan works to heal the country and will employ bush regenerators, wetland workers, indigenous rangers and tree planters. Our package will both employ people to work for the government, but also importantly gives ongoing certainty to our hard-working volunteers and organisations that support and enable their work, including Landcare ACT, Parkcare, the three catchment groups, Waterwatch and Frogwatch. We want to plant hundreds of thousands of trees, expand our wetlands, look after our bush and bring biodiversity to our suburbs with our Repairing the Land conservation package – to address the heat island effect and support our ecosystems.

The way we are developing our city now is not sustainable. Thirty percent of Australia's threatened species occur in cities, and these remnant and struggling ecosystems are threatened by human impacts - from our sprawling urban development, climate change, inadequate resourcing of conservation at all levels and ongoing human impacts. Rather than integrating ecosystems into our city and lifestyles, we're paving over them, which means we cannot provide the food, habitat, water or biodiversity necessary for healthy urban ecosystems.

The ACT Greens have worked hard to introduce urban wetlands to Canberra - resulting in increased wildlife such as birds, frogs and a myriad of insects and reptiles. We have seen how increased urban flora around areas like our wetlands and nature reserves has enabled Canberra to host more diverse birdlife over the past few months, supporting migrating birds, including those searching for food in the aftermath of the devastating bushfires last summer.

The Greens think it is time to take an ecosystems approach to urban land management. While many parts of our urban environment certainly have quite a lot of trees, we don't yet have the diverse ecosystems we need to support our biodiversity.

That's why the Greens have a plan to restore, strengthen and better manage the ACT's unique ecosystems and waterways. Through a range of community, government and local First Nations-led conservation initiatives we can build a better normal for the animals, plants and people who live on this country.

## SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY TO CARE FOR COUNTRY

### CREATE ENVIRONMENTAL JOBS AND LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL INDIGENOUS RANGERS

Indigenous knowledge is critical to our understanding of the natural environment and sustainable management of the land and water. The Greens plan will provide additional opportunities for local Indigenous employment and Indigenous leadership in environmental management with guidance from the Dhawura Ngunnawal Committee and working with key community groups.

The Greens plan will:

- **Provide an additional 10 local full-time and ongoing Ngunnawal Indigenous Rangers** working in Namadgi and Canberra Nature Park to improve cultural practices in environmental management and restoration. Under the guidance of Traditional Custodians, develop and implement an Indigenous Rangers program that covers off- and on-reserve activities (including Namadgi and Canberra Nature Park) to better engage the community on traditional cultural practices and cultural water and fire management. This involves supporting Rangers to work with key community groups under direction of the Dhawura Ngunnawal Committee
- **Increase our recognition, respect and use of Indigenous cultural practices in environmental management** to better engage the Indigenous community on environmental management practices, including by:
  - establishing an Indigenous River and Catchment Rangers program to work alongside Traditional Custodians to manage water health, design strategies to improve water health through cultural understanding of water resources and management;
  - working with the Indigenous community on enhanced cultural burning practices;

- engaging the local Indigenous community in projects to restore endangered ecological grassland and woodland communities; and
- exploring opportunities for improved management of Aboriginal cultural sites on public land throughout Canberra.

## **VALUE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

The Canberra community plays a critical role in caring for the ACT's environment. Organisations such as Landcare ACT, Parkcare and the three ACT catchment groups have existed for decades, but in more recent years, localised communities are also working together to adopt their local suburban patches - to focus on creating ecosystems, food gardens and forests, and supporting the remnant endemic biodiversity. Supporting these volunteer organisations enables localised and dedicated care from people who truly love and understand their neighbourhoods.

To increase support to our community groups and for community education the Greens plan will:

- Ensure increased and reliable ongoing funding and support of \$3.2M over 4 years for Canberra's valuable community local environmental volunteer-based groups, such as Landcare ACT, Parkcare, catchment groups, rural leaseholders and urban park groups.
- Increase Environment Grants funds for removing invasive plant species, and re-establishing riparian vegetation to improve habitat and protect lakes and waterways from pollutants.
- Expand the Landcare ACT, Parkcare and Catchment Group initiatives to establish more Junior groups and further incorporate schools involvement.
- Create a dedicated urban parks and places volunteering scheme focused on ecological improvement outcomes.
- Improve management of peri-urban developments, through expansion of the Bush on the Boundary framework and improved communication stakeholder engagement to manage environmental and social impacts with members of the community.
- Canberra has many knowledgeable scientists and keen environmentalists who have created a range of citizen science programs that provide significant and valuable information to the government. Commit recurrent funds to our citizen science programs such as Frogwatch, Waterwatch and NatureMapr to continue to monitor key ecological indicators.
- Increasing the support and assistance program funds for rural leaseholders with threatened ecological communities on their properties, to better protect these environments.
- Provide additional funds to Wildlife ACT, to support them with wildlife rescue and rehabilitation programs.

- Review and implement natural resource management governance and planning arrangements in the ACT to enable greater community engagement.

## PROTECTING AND ENHANCING OUR ECOSYSTEMS

### PROTECTING THE ACT'S THREATENED ECOSYSTEMS AND RESTORING SENSITIVE AND THREATENED ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES

The ACT is home to many endangered species (such as the Grassland Earless Dragon and Superb Parrot) and ecological communities (such as Natural Temperate Grassland and Yellow Box/Red Gum Grassy Woodland). These species and communities are under threat from development, invasive plants and animals, and insufficient or unreliable funding and management. Despite our fantastic nature parks, there are still many small parcels of land within the urban environment of conservation value which need protection. These areas should be restored and managed, incorporated into nature reserves or biodiversity corridors, or protected in ways that enhance the resilience of our threatened species.

The Greens will ensure these precious environments are properly cared for, restored and protected, by:

- Identifying and rezoning key unprotected remnant grassland and woodland sites of ecological significance, by incorporating them into nature reserves or other zones that focus on conservation as a key outcome.
- Accelerating a program to **restore and protect areas of endangered woodlands** and species across Canberra, including implementing conservation plans for the lowland woodlands in the Molonglo-Murrumbidgee areas, and improving connectivity across woodlands and wildlife corridors with new plantings.
- Working with community organisations and the Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) to obtain Commonwealth funding to restore and manage off-reserve grassland and woodland communities.
- Improving land management focused on an ecosystems approach by better coordination between PCS rangers, City Services Rangers, Landcare ACT, catchment groups and Parkcare groups. Additional PCS rangers should be employed to support the Parkcare volunteer work.
- Increasing funding for PCS for management of Canberra Nature Park, including activities such as:
  - invasive plant and animal control - providing increased and stable 4-year funding to invasive species management, especially at significant ecological sites and hotspots.
  - a review of grazing, mowing and burning practices and application of best practice techniques;
  - installation of conservation bollards and fencing; and

- planting and other restoration work.
- Trialing innovative land management techniques, such as:
  - refined cool burning in cooperation with Indigenous elder and ranger advice;
  - installation of cost-effective grazing and predator-proof exclosures that are porous to small mammals and reptiles across Canberra Nature Park; and
  - Working with ecologists to attain ARC funding to further investigate outcomes of such exclosures
- Increasing funding for management of Namadgi National Park, including:
  - Significant bushfire rehabilitation management funds such as planting and invasive species management
  - Trialling different management techniques:
    - Protecting long-unburnt sites of Namadgi from prescribed burning (8% of the NP), noting that these areas have the highest reptile and mammal biodiversity and the lowest fire fuel hazard, burning the areas adjacent for further protection (preferably with cool burns) and increasing invasive animal species management there
    - Introducing cool, cultural burns in various sites for scientific study and PCS training purposes
- Increase our recognition, respect and use of local Indigenous cultural practices in environmental management
- Creating and funding a separate biodiversity offsets management fund, to ensure consistent funds available for PCS management of sites as required, and consideration of funding for community organisations or academics for projects where appropriate.
- Explore an expanded ACT biodiversity offsets scheme which incorporates destruction of environmental values below the threshold for Matters of National Environmental Significance as outlined in the EPBC Act.

## **GROWING AND PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY - TO ENSURE THE ACT IS A HAVEN FOR DIVERSE AND THREATENED WILDLIFE.**

Biodiversity is the key to a healthy environment, and the ACT Greens will take a range of measures to protect and improve biodiversity and habitat across the ACT. We have an excellent nature reserve system, but the way our urban environment is managed puts constant pressure on our parks - if our urban areas were managed in a more sensitive manner and our community better understood their impacts, such as spreading weeds, we would be able to reduce the ongoing costs of managing our nature reserves.

Our trees and green spaces are threatened by urban sprawl, development and human impact. Sadly, our urban ecosystems currently do not contain the year-round food sources, nesting sites, water sources and wildlife corridors needed to support our biodiversity and become a bee-friendly city. Canberra is also threatened by the impacts of climate change - such as increased heat, drought and more severe storms. The Greens want our urban environment to

improve amenity, improve climate change resilience, enhance and protect biodiversity and reduce negative impacts on our nature reserves.

To **increase our urban biodiversity and improve climate change resilience**, the Greens will:

- **Establish an urban wildlife and biodiversity corridors program** linking to our nature reserves where possible, which:
  - expands local habitats, nest sites, food trees, and accessible water, to make the ACT a biodiversity hotspot and wildlife haven; and
  - creates pollination corridors by planting bird- and pollinator- attracting plants across the urban environment.
- **Create neighbourhood forests** in appropriate public open spaces.
- **Address the heat island effect** by:
  - **ensuring Canberra's urban tree canopy cover increases to 30%**, with a \$21.5M injection into tree planting in the next 4 years, by:
    - **planting at least 500,000 urban trees**. This plan will both replace the dying and dead trees in the existing urban forest, and increase its overall size; and
    - enacting tougher regulation on developers to make it harder to cut down trees and detrimentally impact green and public space
  - developing a strategic investment program for green and blue 'living infrastructure' across Canberra to both improve water quality and mitigate the urban heat island effect.
  - amending the planning and development system to incentivise buildings to plant more rooftop and vertical gardens.
- Improve management practices of our urban trees in public places, by:
  - **protecting trees with habitat hollows for wildlife habitat;**
  - protecting the area surrounding remnant mature trees by creating mini-ecosystem pockets with forb, grass and shrub plantings and fallen logs, this may be co-located with nature-play in appropriate areas. As well as improving biodiversity and amenity, this will also reduce mowing requirements and costs and will need education of urban rangers and mowing contractors;
  - protecting young saplings self-seeded from our remnant trees in public parks and open spaces;
  - supporting biodiversity in our urban open spaces by strategic placement of fallen logs to support bugs, birds and reptiles;
- Better support our vital pollinators by:
  - ensuring that government urban tree and shrub planting lists include flowering seasons, to ensure year-round nectar availability for bees and birds; and
  - banning the use of "neonicotinoids" (a type of pesticide that harms bees) in Government land management, and to reduce other impacts - reducing the use of glyphosate and other pesticides wherever possible.

## IMPROVED LEGAL RECOGNITION FOR THE ACT'S ENVIRONMENT

Improving the legal status and recognition of the importance of the natural environment can play an important role in ensuring the environment is valued, in government decision making, and that it cannot be degraded or destroyed.

The Greens will enhance the overarching legal protections for the natural environment in the ACT by:

- enshrining the “right to a healthy environment” into the ACT’s Human Rights Act;
- exploring opportunities to enshrine ‘rights of nature’ into the ACT’s legal system.