



Private Land Biodiversity Conservation Strategic Plan **2014-2019**

Karen Guymer

Revision 1

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Civic Centre, Elizabeth St, Moss Vale, NSW 2577. PO Box 141, Moss Vale. t. (02) 4868 0888 f. (02) 4869 1203
e. mail@wsc.nsw.gov.au ABN 49 546 344 354

www.wsc.nsw.gov.au

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1 Executive Summary

The *Private Land Biodiversity Conservation Strategic Plan (2014-2019)* has been updated to reflect the progress that has been made within the plan timeframe as of August 2017. The implementation of the plan and the three-tiered system of engagement with the Wingecarribee Shire community has delivered many positive social and environmental outcomes.

The three tiers of the program include:

1. Habitat for Wildlife (HFW)
2. Land for Wildlife (LFW)
3. Vegetation Conservation Program (VCP)

See Figure 1 (pg. 2)

Habitat for Wildlife has been highly successful since it commenced on World Environment Day, 5 June 2015, and the award-winning *Land for Wildlife* (LFW) program has grown considerably. The *Vegetation Conservation Program* (VCP) continues to attract interested landholders keen to restore or enhance high biodiversity value remnant vegetation. With a successful *Fit for the Future* result for our shire, Council has a permanent environment levy in place and therefore a longer-term strategic planning view can now be adopted.

Habitat for Wildlife (HFW) is targeted toward urban and peri-urban properties and is about making backyard gardens more wildlife friendly. Participants receive free educational resources including the *Backyard Habitat Planting Guide*, a small metal sign for their front gate or fence, native plant voucher and connection to a social network. There is minimal administrative support from Council, with no property assessments.

Land for Wildlife (LFW), the second tier, will remain the entry-level conservation program for larger properties with a conservation area/s in excess of 0.5 hectare. The landholder needs to express a written intention of good environmental stewardship.

The third tier *Vegetation Conservation Program* (VCP) builds upon LFW by providing additional financial incentives to protect, improve and restore high priority conservation areas, particularly threatened ecological communities (TECs) or forested areas located in regional or local primary and secondary corridors, and habitat for known locations of threatened species. The VCP management agreements require a greater commitment from the landholder with a shared financial responsibility with Council.

Between 2009 and 2014, the Council's LFW program registered 60 properties with over 1000 hectares of land being managed for wildlife conservation. Between 2000 and 2010 the VCP delivered approximately 393 hectares of TECs conserved in 70 management agreements. Approximately 47 of the agreements have expired, and this plan describes the proposed transitions for expired agreements.

Future programs will build upon these successes, and improve the capacity of the landholders to manage these lands, and provide further assistance where appropriate. LFW registration is the first requirement for landholders to obtain funding assistance from WSC.

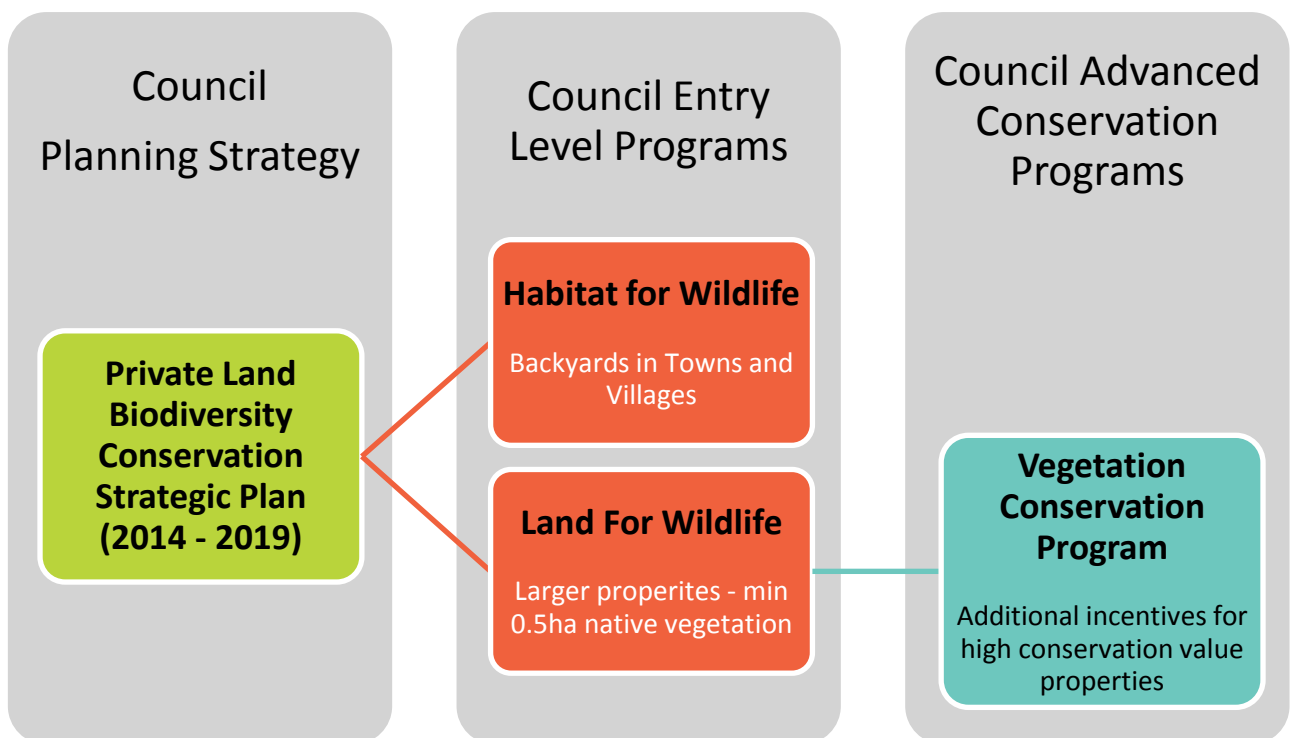
The Environment Levy funded *Rural Partner Program* (RPP) has synergies with the HFW, LFW and VCP programs, and these are also described.

Council’s Environment Levy provides significant leveraging opportunities to supply further resources to develop and implement the programs and potentially to develop a flagship program to conserve the Southern Highlands Shale Forest and Woodland (SHSFW) and the associated threatened population of *Eucalyptus aggregata* (Black Gum) and threatened species *E. macarthurii* (Paddys River Box).

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are used for the development of a series of Natural Resource Management maps and for spatial analyses of priority corridors, TECs and threatened species. Upon completion of the Native Vegetation Mapping and Green Web projects in 2017-18, properties will be targeted based on mapped TECs and priority corridors and the associated investment strategy. All properties registered with LFW are recorded spatially to improve reporting and future planning and this will also apply to VCP project sites.

Wingecarribee Shire Council (WSC) will continue to work closely with external agencies to ensure consistent message delivery, minimal duplication and to maximise the return on investment from all levels of government and to optimise biodiversity outcomes from these investments.

Figure 1 - Council Private Land Conservation Program Framework



2 The Importance of Private Land Conservation in Wingecarribee Shire

2.1 Biodiversity Values of Wingecarribee Shire - Snapshot

Wingecarribee Shire has outstanding biodiversity values and this is due primarily to the diverse geology, large rainfall gradient east to west and altitude changes that occur resulting in many different habitat types. Habitats include sandstone forests, tall forests, rainforests, grassy woodlands, Permian slopes, riverine habitats, and upland swamps.

There is a great diversity of native flora, with over 2159 species. There are over 374 vertebrate fauna species. Approximately 50 threatened plants and over 56 threatened animals and one endangered population (*Eucalyptus aggregata*) occur in the local government area (LGA).

There are 15 Threatened Ecological Communities (TECs), and over 69 different plant community types (PCTs).

2.2 Private Land Values

Around 43% of the shire is privately owned. There are over 55,000 hectares of extant native vegetation on private land in Wingecarribee Shire, much of which are TEC's. Over 5% is currently conserved in Land for Wildlife voluntary agreements.

The majority of the remnant vegetation occurs in the western part of the shire, and land around the major town centres has highly fragmented vegetation.

The private land conservation programs are a great opportunity for Council to develop positive relationships with citizens and groups of landholders. It offers the opportunity for Council officers to be invited onto privately-owned land for a positive interaction and to provide technical and professional support to our community.

The community has expectations, as articulated within its primary strategic planning document, Wingecarribee 2031+, to protect and enhance the natural values of the Shire.

3 Strategic Planning Framework

The work outlined in this strategic plan reflects the goals and strategies within the Wingecarribee [Community Strategic Plan](#) (2017), particularly Environment Goal 4.1 *Wingecarribee’s distinct and diverse natural environment is protected and enhanced* and Strategy 4.1.1 *Protect and improve biodiversity*.

4.1 Wingecarribee’s distinct and diverse natural environment is protected and enhanced

No.	Strategies	Council’s Role	Partners
4.1.1	Protect and improve biodiversity	Leader	Federal Government
		Partner	State Government
		Provider	Business Community
			Community Groups and Organisations

The focus of this strategic plan is biodiversity conservation on private land, however public land is targeted to a limited extent, particularly land owned or managed by Wingecarribee Shire Council.

The Wingecarribee Shire Council [Environment Strategy](#) also guides this plan and is currently under review. The objectives and actions outlined here should complement the new *Environment Strategy* when it is in place.

There are also relevant land use planning documents, including the [Wingecarribee Local Planning Strategy 2015-2031](#), particularly Chapter Two *Managing our Natural Environment* and Chapter Three *Managing our Rural Lands*. There are 53,080 hectares of ‘rural lands’ representing almost 20% of the shire, or 14.5% if Forestry land is excluded. There are five ‘environmental’ zones representing around 75% of the shire, with 45% of the shire publicly owned as National Parks, Nature Reserves or water catchment land. Almost 100,000 hectares are zoned E3 Environmental Management.

The [Wingecarribee Local Environment Plan \(WLEP 2010\)](#) aims to protect environmentally sensitive land through the wide use of E3 Environmental Management zones covering private lands. The WLEP2010 also identifies regional biodiversity corridors, and there are two main corridors mapped.

The Wingecarribee Shire Council [Native Vegetation Mapping Project](#) has been completed to a stage that will inform the [Green Web](#), a strategic project to identify high environmental value (HEV) land, including Koala habitat, important riparian land and other significant natural areas. The *Green Web* will be aligned to state government priorities and will guide biodiversity conservation investment in the Shire.

4 Legislative Framework

As of 25 August 2017, Private Land Conservation programs at a State Government level will be delivered under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*.

The *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* makes several important changes to private land conservation including:

1. Creation of the **NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT)**, who will oversee the new private land conservation program across NSW;
2. Development of a state-wide **Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy**, to guide the delivery;
3. Simplification of State Government private land conservation agreements into three tiers:
 - a. Permanent **Biodiversity Stewardship Agreements** (creating biodiversity credits for offset programs);
 - b. Permanent or time-bound **Conservation Agreements** (may be eligible for stewardship payments); and
 - c. Entry level, non-permanent **Wildlife Refuge Agreements**.

Council will work with the Trust to maximise synergies wherever possible, and will encourage **Land for Wildlife** members to consider moving to more secure and potentially longer-term agreements under the auspices of the Biodiversity Conservation Trust. There will also be additional investment opportunities for landholders to assist with the ongoing management of these areas. Council believes that *Land for Wildlife* still plays an important role in entry-level private land conservation, community building and networking with residents who may progress to the higher level agreements at the BCT.

5 Council Program Goals

The overarching goals of Council's private land biodiversity conservation programs in Wingecarribee shire include:

1. Improved engagement and ownership by private landholders in land and biodiversity conservation
2. Improved knowledge and skills of landholders and residents in biodiversity conservation
3. Continued leveraging with state and federal agencies to optimise investment outcomes
4. Improved management of existing natural areas and bushland remnants to optimise returns on investment and to balance other land management activities with conservation
5. Improved opportunities for networking within the local and broader community to encourage knowledge and skills sharing
6. Improved resilience in extant vegetation through improved management of key threatening processes
7. Retention and improved connectivity of extant threatened ecological communities
8. Retention of habitat values on private land.
9. Work to complement the State Government Private Land Conservation Programs and provide improved opportunities for collaboration with our community and other levels of Government.

6 Review of Program

The *Vegetation Conservation Program* (VCP) and *Land for Wildlife* (LFW) commenced in 2004 and 2009 respectively. They have been funded by the special rate applied to all land in the shire, the Environment Levy, and both programs have attracted significant financial leverage from state government and non-government sources. The Environment Levy will continue in perpetuity as part of the successful Fit for the Future assessment by the NSW State Government in 2016. Longer-term strategic planning to secure and improve Council's natural assets can now be undertaken. The programs are given administrative support by the Bushland Projects Officer part-time position in the Environment and Sustainability Branch of Wingecarribee Shire Council (WSC).

6.1 Habitat for Wildlife (HFW)

Objectives

HFW was launched on World Environment Day 5 June 2015 with WSC delivering the program under a user licence from the Community Environment Network (CEN).

HFW is about engaging landholders with smaller land parcels in wildlife conservation in the peri-urban and urban and some rural environments which are heavily cleared. *HFW* promotes backyard habitat values and refuges for wildlife and encourages landholders to retain or improve these values.

HFW is free to join, and participants receive the Backyard Habitat Planting Guide, other information resources, an attractive metal sign for the property, access to workshops and connection to a social network. However there will remain minimal administrative support, with no detailed property assessments or written reports provided to landholders.

Outcomes

Since 2015, *HFW* has attracted 200 properties and 224 members and is growing steadily with minimal promotion.

The development of the *Backyard Habitat Planting Guide* was a key outcome and this booklet is provided free to all new members.

A new web page has been developed and is updated frequently as required. As part of the registration, participants have the option to subscribe to *Wingecarribee Web* and *Wildlife Wingecarribee* electronic newsletters, and will continue to be informed about other networks such as Wildlife Rescue South Coast, WIRES, and Bushcare/Landcare.

6.2 Land for Wildlife (LFW)

Objectives

LFW is the entry-level conservation program for all residents and property holders with a minimum of 0.5 hectare of natural bushland, forest, wetland, or grassland.

The goal for this program is to maintain existing and increase the number of Land for Wildlife (*LFW*) property registrations to increase the extent of natural areas on private and public land that are managed for biodiversity and wildlife habitat by their owners.

There are two specific objectives for the program over the next 2 years (to end of June 2019):

1. The area of private land conservation to have increased from 5% to up to 10% of the extant native vegetation within the shire (or approximately 5,500 hectares) by the end of June 2019;
2. To liaise with the Biodiversity Conservation Trust to move interested parties into biodiversity stewardship or conservation agreements. The recent changes to biodiversity legislation and management in NSW, provides an opportunity for increased investment in private land conservation in this shire.

LFW is free to landholders and is not legally binding. Registration in the scheme will not change the legal status of the property. This feature of the program encourages participation and the commencement of capacity building for landholders.

Coordination in NSW is provided by the Community Environment Network (CEN). Wingecarribee Shire Council (WSC) has been a regional provider since 2009.

LFW is as much about community engagement and the development of social capital as well as biodiversity conservation, and once registered, landholders commence a journey of discovery on their own land in the context of the regional landscape.

As a regional provider WSC provides free comprehensive property assessments which includes a site visit, natural resource maps, plant species lists, database searches including aboriginal heritage, a suite of practical information resources, facilitated links to a social network, e-newsletters and local training workshops, and access to incentives such as free native plants and nest boxes.

Outcomes

There are approximately 54,493 hectares of native vegetation on private land in Wingecarribee Shire (Appendix 1) and *LFW* properties currently conserve approximately 5% of this (2858 ha) in informal agreements (Appendix 2). The *LFW* program has resulted in 111 voluntary registrations since it commenced in 2009, with 14 expired agreements and 97 active agreements. Most expiries are due to property sales and to date there has been limited renewal of the *LFW* registration by new owners, despite efforts by Council and the CEN to engage with new owners. Long-term client and property retention has been highlighted as an issue for the program.

Despite this, growth is continual with new expressions of interest arriving at Council regularly. *LFW* agreements are mapped spatially using GIS and all agreements are retained and records are updated to Proposed, Active and Expired status regularly.

The total area conserved has grown rapidly since 2012, encompassing several large holdings, including schools and the council-managed Mount Gibraltar Reserve.

Many landholders are managing a small area and some are managing almost their entire landholding for conservation purposes.

A diversity of plant structural classes and communities has been conserved under the program, with a good distribution of *LFW* properties across the local government area (LGA) (Appendix 2).

A successful collaboration with NSW National Parks Association, South East Local Land Services and the Office of Environment and Heritage has resulted in the delivery of seven *Who's Living on My Land?* citizen science workshops across the shire which focus on developing landowner skills in the use of "camera traps" to identify native animals and vertebrate pests on properties. The workshops are run in conjunction with *Feral Fighters*, a vertebrate pesticide training and accreditation program. Four workshops will be completed in 2017, including one at Berrima, two at Robertson (part of the *The Thin Green Line* project – see section 7.1.2 - Great Eastern Ranges (GER)), and one in the northern villages. Results from the camera surveys are improving data and knowledge around native fauna in different localities and adding to existing datasets.

Community engagement has been enhanced by the development of a suite of five short films: *LFW in the Southern Highlands*, *LFW for Families*, *LFW for Farmers*, *LFW for Schools* and *LFW as a Legacy* and these are available on the frequently updated Council *LFW* webpage. The *Wildlife Wingecarribee* e-newsletter is currently distributed to 524 people in autumn and spring of each year, highlighting events, activities, news and links.

6.3 Vegetation Conservation Program (VCP)

Objectives

The main objective is to improve the conservation and protection of threatened ecological communities (TECs) on private land within the shire. In addition Council aims to:

- achieve conservation and protection of core habitat (TEC remnants ≥ 10 ha) and medium to high value core support (remnants < 10 ha or all TECs) areas as mapped within the *Wingecarribee Biodiversity Strategy* (2003)
- achieve conservation and protection of national (Great Eastern Ranges), state, regional and local corridors including the Regional Biodiversity Corridors as mapped in the *Wingecarribee Local Environment Plan 2010* (WLEP 2010)
- achieve conservation and protection of vegetation that provides habitat for fauna and/or flora listed as vulnerable or threatened within the *Biodiversity Conservation Act* (2016) and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (2000)
- achieve conservation and protection of priority wetlands identified in the *Wingecarribee Wetlands Management Strategy* (2009). Education and awareness

activities were considered the most important tool in maintaining and enhancing wetlands within the strategy. There were 346 wetlands recorded in 1996, ranging in size from less than 1 hectare to over 320 ha (Wingecarribee Swamp), classed as upland dells, riverine, or drainage/seepage channels (Perry, 1996). A specific, targeted program will be required to engage owners of wetlands.

Engaging landholders through the *LFW* program is a first step in the process. Following a successful *LFW* registration, Council and the landholder may negotiate a management agreement for all or part of their conservation area under the VCP.

Outcomes

From 2004-2010, the *VCP* resulted in vegetation management agreements on 70 properties within the Wingecarribee local government area conserving approximately 393 hectares of native vegetation, principally remnant threatened ecological communities (TECs).

Within the same period, a significant amount of leveraging from two major funding sources, the HNCMA and the NSW Environmental Trust, was obtained (Table 1). Since 2010 there has been no further leveraging from external sources, except significant private landholder investment with most projects attracting a minimum 50 per cent contribution from the landholder.

Table 1 - A summary of expenditure source and hectares conserved between 2004 and 2010 for the VCP.

FUNDING BODY	AMOUNT	HA's Conserved
WOFE (WSC Environment Levy Funded projects between 2000 and 2012)	\$106,813.70	95
HNCMA	\$150,000.00	98
ENV TRUST	\$90,000.00	125.7
Totals	\$346 813.70	318.7

The investment from Council's Environment Levy ranged from less than \$1,000 to \$10,000 per agreement.

In 2009, the NSW Environmental Trust provided feedback to WSC to work with landholders to secure covenants in perpetuity, particularly for those agreements that have expired and for those conservation areas that have been managed in accordance with the management agreement. There remain opportunities to further progress this recommendation.

A proposal to set up a philanthropic environmental trust for high environmental value land has been raised, with Council resolving in 2015 to undertake further investigations and analysis into the feasibility and efficacy of the proposed Trust (Environment and Sustainability Committee ES20/15). The feasibility analysis was put on hold due to the changes in biodiversity conservation legislation in 2016 and the creation of the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust. Opportunities to revisit this proposal in consultation with the Biodiversity Conservation Trust are anticipated.

The TEC vegetation communities conserved through the *VCP* include the Southern Highlands Shale Woodland, Robertson Rainforest in the Sydney Basin Bioregion, Robertson Tall Open Forest (Upland Basalt Eucalypt Forest of the Sydney Basin Bioregion) and a small area of Montane Peat lands and Swamps.

Mittagong Sandstone Woodland was also conserved. The Shale/Sandstone Transition Forest (SSTF) and Tablelands Snow Gum Grassy Woodland were two TECs that were not conserved.

7 Future Directions

This section outlines the future direction for Council's private land conservation programs, guiding investment until 30 June 2019.

It outlines the integration of *HFW*, *LFW* and *VCP* with external agencies and programs, other Wingecarribee Shire Council programs, leveraging opportunities and refinements to the existing programs.

7.1 Integration with External Agencies and Programs

7.1.1 NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust, established in 2017 as part of the NSW Government Biodiversity Law Reforms, will develop a ***Biodiversity Investment Strategy for NSW*** to guide the NSW Government's investment in private land conservation.

Council will work with the new Trust to maximise synergies between local and state strategies wherever possible, and will encourage ***Land for Wildlife*** members to consider moving to more secure and potentially longer-term agreements under the auspices of the Biodiversity Conservation Trust. There will also be additional investment opportunities for landholders to assist with the ongoing management of these areas. Council believes that *Land for Wildlife* still plays an important role in entry-level private land conservation, community building and networking with residents who may progress to the higher level agreements at the BCT.

The timing for the next proposed review of Council's *Private land Biodiversity Conservation Strategy* (2019) will provide an opportunity to more closely align local private land biodiversity programs with State strategies.

Landholders with expired Council *VCP* management agreements and those existing agreements with particularly large or intact TECs will be encouraged by Council to enter into permanent Conservation Agreements or establish biodiversity stewardship sites with the NSW Biodiversity Trust.

In addition, permanent covenants are often a requirement for funding support from some providers, for example, the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife, and so if landholders move to more permanent conservation agreements on good quality conservation sites, this may provide additional leverage for funding in this shire.

The number and total area of private land conserved under State Government conservation agreements and wildlife refuges, as at March 2014 are listed in Table 2. Details of the natural or cultural significance of these agreements are not available at this time.

Table 2 - NPWS (OEH) Conservation Agreements and Wildlife Refuges in the Shire as of March 2014

LGA	NPWS Conservation Agreements		NPWS Refuges	Wildlife
	Number	Area (ha)	Number	Area (ha)
Wingecarribee	7	1236.2	18	6005.4

7.1.2 Great Eastern Ranges (GER)

The GER is a national and landscape-scale conservation program aiming to protect, link and restore healthy habitats over 3,600 kilometres along the east coast of Australia from Victoria, through New South Wales, to North Queensland.

The Southern Highlands Link is a priority section of the GER corridor, as it links high conservation value areas of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, the Sydney Catchment Special Areas and Morton National Park.

Council continues to work closely with Greening Australia and other GER partners to develop and support the delivery of projects within the GER Southern Highlands Link. There are two current GER projects within and adjoining Wingecarribee Shire (Table 3) where opportunities for establishing new LFW and VCP agreements with landholders will be sought.

Table 3 - GER projects aligned with LFW and VCP

GER Projects	Description
Wall to Wollondilly	Landholder engagement and education package along the Wingecarribee River from the dam wall to the confluence with the Wollondilly River. Provision of subsidies for fencing and weed control.
Thickening the Thin Green Line	Protect and enhance the Illawarra escarpment regional corridor

7.1.3 NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH)

Saving our Species Program

Saving Our Species (SOS) is an OEH program operating under the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016. SOS aims to address the growing number of plants and animals in NSW facing extinction. The program sets out the NSW Government's threatened species management plan and what needs to be done to secure NSW's threatened species in the wild for the next 100 years.

Threatened species have different conservation needs, and the SOS program allocates each species to six different management groups:

1. **Site Managed Species**
Species that can be secured by conservation projects at specific sites.
2. **Landscape Managed Species**
Species that need broad landscape scale conservation projects and are best recovered by addressing threats / key threatening processes such as habitat loss or degradation at a landscape scale.
3. **Iconic Species**
Species that are important socially, culturally and economically, and which the community expects them to be effectively managed and protected.
4. **Data-deficient species**
Species that we need to know more about before we can secure them in the wild.
5. **Partnership species**
Species mainly found in other states and territories (less than 10% of population in NSW).
6. **Keep watch species**
Species with no immediate actions required to protect them.

As of August 2017, there are 33 species of endangered plants and animals which are the focus for creation of SOS projects within Wingecarribee Shire. The majority of these species are site managed, with one landscape and one iconic species.

Council's LFW and VCP programs will integrate, where possible, with the OEH *Saving Our Species* (SOS) program and prioritise conservation efforts in line with SOS targets. Current priorities are those areas with known habitat for priority species.

The main threats to biodiversity in the shire include habitat loss, fragmentation of habitat, feral predators, disease, altered hydrological conditions and weeds. Most of the key threatening processes particularly affecting landscape managed species in NSW are applicable in Wingecarribee Shire, and Council's *LFW* and *VCP* programs will aim to assist private landholders in reducing these threats on their properties.

Southern Highlands Koala Conservation Project

Launched in 2015, the Southern Highlands Koala Conservation Project is a partnership between OEH, Council and Sydney University. The project has been highly successful in

bringing the community together to report Koala sightings, develop a conservation project and undertake collaring and mapping of the Koala populations.

In 2017 it was estimated that there are 3700 Koalas in this population, which is a significant population in southern NSW.

Data from the project is being directly used to map Koala habitat and corridors in the Wingecarribee Shire as part of the *Green Web* strategy (see section 7.2.1).

Koala's are an iconic species under the SOS program and Council's *LFW* and *VCP* programs will continue to actively support private landholders who own koala habitat or movement corridors.

7.1.4 NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI)

In addition to SOS project targets, there is potential for Council *LFW* and *VCP* programs to extend to aquatic threatened species protected under the Fisheries Management Act (NSW Department of Primary Industries).

A targeted program for private landholders located in a specific area of Wildes Meadow/Fitzroy Falls area where habitat of the critically endangered Fitzroy Falls Spiny Crayfish has been mapped and will be investigated for its feasibility.

7.1.5 Local Land Services (LLS)

Wingecarribee Shire lies within the South East Local Land Services region.

The South East LLS Local Strategic Plan (2016-2021) sets the vision, priorities and overarching strategy for the delivery of LLS projects and services within the region. One of the goals of the plan is to achieve "healthy, diverse and connected natural environments". The priority locations for biodiversity conservation programs delivered or supported by LLS under its local strategic plan may be similar to past programs (for example, Biolinks), including the regional Joadja corridor in the west, major rivers and creeks such as Wingecarribee and Wollondilly Rivers, and land adjoining the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

Council will continue to work collaboratively with other agencies, community organisations and non-government associations, including LLS, OEH, Birdlife Australia and Greening Australia to deliver complementary projects within regional and local high priority corridors over the next two years.

Close cooperation and communication is essential for the integration of state and local programs and projects, and this will be facilitated by regular (quarterly) meetings with LLS staff.

7.1.6 Leveraging Opportunities

There are opportunities for WSC to utilise the environment levy funds to leverage for additional grants from other government and non-government agencies.

The grant of \$6000 during 2013-2015 from the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife is one example of this.

Potential funding sources are listed below:

- NSW Environmental Trust – Education and other community grants for example the *Environmental Restoration and Rehabilitation Grants*, visit <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/grants/restoration.htm>
- Great Eastern Ranges - GER Partners Grants Program (usually offered in May for the next financial year). Visit the link: <http://www.ger.org.au/how-we-deliver/ger-grants-program/partners-grants-program>
- The Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife – Capacity building and Landholder grants for improvement works. Visit www.fnpw.org.au/foundation-grants/private-land-grants-nsw
- Local Land Services – devolved biodiversity grants from the Commonwealth. Visit www.southeast.lis.nsw.gov.au

Prior to applying for grant funding, scoping studies will be undertaken using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) following completion of the *Green Web*. The spatial analyses will identify opportunities for leveraging for different projects.

One example is a flagship program targeting the SHSF&W and the endangered population of *Eucalyptus aggregata* and/or threatened species, *E. macarthurii*. The GIS can be used to capture all properties with extant SHSF&W in excess of 0.5 ha and these properties can be approached to join *LFW* and progress toward a *VCP* management agreement.

Another example is collection of property information for those properties that lie within 300m of all high priority local corridors for *LFW* marketing. A third example is targeting those properties within a certain distance of a threatened species record, or for a targeted or *Saving Our Species* (SOS) project within the shire such as the *Southern Highlands Koala Conservation Project*.

7.2 Integration with Other Wingecarribee Shire Council Programs

There are several other programs delivered under Council's Environment Levy which have an influence and relationship with *HFW*, *LFW* and *VCP*.

7.2.1 Native Vegetation Mapping and Green Web Project

The Wingecarribee Shire Council [Native Vegetation Mapping Project](#) will be finalised in early 2018 and deliver an updated, fine-scale and standardised native vegetation map that will directly improve the accuracy of *LFW* property and *VCP* management agreements. It is also anticipated that the necessary updating of vegetation mapping using a standard national approach will allow *WSC* vegetation mapping to be consistent with neighbouring LGAs, with investment programs available from the State and Commonwealth.

Aligned to the new vegetation mapping project is Council's *Green Web* project - a strategic planning project to identify high value environmental lands, including Koala habitat, important riparian land and other significant natural areas. *Green Web* also will identify priority wildlife corridors and will be aligned to state government priorities and will guide biodiversity conservation investment in the Shire.

It is anticipated that *Green Web* will be completed in early 2018, will replace the *Wingecarribee Biodiversity Strategy* (2003) and will guide and prioritise investment in on-ground *VCP* projects.

Council's Private Land Biodiversity Strategic Plan will be reviewed and refined following completion of *Green Web* in 2017-18. Council's *LFW* and *VCP* programs are anticipated to play a vital role engaging with private landholders to assist in the delivery of *Green Web*.

7.2.2 The Rural Partner Program (RPP)

The *Rural Partner Program* aims to promote and embed sustainable land use practices in existing agricultural and rural living properties – particularly sustainable land management, and biodiversity conservation.

In 2016 the *RPP* produced the Wingecarribee Shire *Rural Living Handbook*. Visit www.wsc.nsw.gov.au/rural-partner-program for more information. The Rural Living Handbook will be regularly updated.

The *RPP* complements the *LFW* and *VCP* programs and encourages sustainable land management practices and biodiversity conservation through education and awareness activities. The RLH provides basic natural resource management information and links, with a local information section relevant to the Shire. The *LFW* and *VCP* programs are promoted through this publication. Other objectives of the *RPP*, for example sustainable firewood harvesting, link with the *LFW* and *VCP* objectives of habitat retention.

7.2.3 Bushcare Community Nursery

Council's Environment Levy funded community nursery at Moss Vale depot currently focusses on the production of local provenance native plants for Council Bushcare projects on Council owned or managed land. The nursery is managed by Council's Bushcare Team, with volunteer support. The nursery is small and with limited resources, but was upgraded in 2017 to improve infrastructure and capacity.

Opportunities will be explored on how to potentially utilise the nursery facility to support *LFW/VCP* property owners, without compromising its current focus on supporting Bushcare projects on public land. This was a recommendation within the *Wingecarribee Biodiversity Strategy* (WBS) 2003, however it requires further careful consideration as to how this may operate in a sustainable and equitable manner.

7.3 Delivery Plan for HFW, LFW and VCP (to June 2019)

7.3.1 Habitat for Wildlife (HFW)

No changes from the current delivery are proposed.

Habitat for Wildlife (HFW) offers urban and peri-urban landholders information and support to conserve and improve habitats for wildlife. It aims to bring neighbours together in protecting their own backyards, local reserves and parks. *HFW* complements *Land for Wildlife* (LFW) by broadening the eligibility of properties and by including greater numbers of community members.

HFW aims:

- To build support for the GER and provide a first step into conservation without any inspections, assessments or meetings
- To provide an opportunity for smaller holdings to be included in conservation efforts and for people interested in wildlife conservation and biodiversity to contribute despite the size or ownership status of their property.

Features of *HFW* include:

- Under the licence agreement with CEN, registration is free for eligible landholders in the Shire.
- Landholders receive a welcome letter, resource kit and *HFW* sign, CEN newsletters and Wildlife Wingecarribee biannual e-newsletters. The information resources assist property owners to manage their backyard, garden or rural block in a wildlife-friendly way. If a landholder has a larger block they will be invited to join *LFW* and sent an expression of interest.

HFW will remain free to join, and participants receive the Backyard Habitat Planting Guide, other information resources, an attractive metal sign for the property, access to workshops and connection to a social network. However there will remain minimal administrative support, minimal promotion, and no detailed property assessments or written reports provided to landholders.

7.3.2 Land for Wildlife (LFW)

This is the entry-level conservation program for all residents and property holders with a minimum of 0.5 hectare of natural bushland, forest, wetland, or grassland.

LFW registration is required prior to consideration for eligibility for funding incentives under the *VCP*. Detailed environmental and property assessments form the basis for registration, along with a site visit to verify findings. This provides an integrated approach to Council's private land biodiversity conservation programs and assists in increasing the level of engagement with private landholders.

Spatial targets will continue to be guided by the *Wingecarribee Biodiversity Strategy (2003)* until *Green Web* is completed and supersedes it. The selection criteria will apply and projects developed with interested landholders.

All Expressions of Interest (EOI) will be assessed and determined if eligible for registration prior to a site visit. All *LFW* registered properties include management actions and recommendations, and those eligible for assistance from the *VCP* will be encouraged to apply.

7.3.3 Vegetation Conservation Program (VCP)

This program will retain current objectives however there will be slight changes in the way it is delivered.

A review of the existing assessment rating sheets, including the vegetation conservation rating sheet, landholder risk assessment and the overall project rating sheet, is needed as part of continuous improvement processes. A Private Land Conservation Projects Template (Smart Sheet) has been developed to enable consistency for clients and smooth transitions for staff changes.

7.3.4 Community Capacity Building

LFW Workshops

Three workshops funded by a \$6000 grant from the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife (FNPW) were held in Robertson, Colo Vale, and Bundanoon during 2013-2014 and were highly successful. The workshops had a practical focus, and assisted capacity building in conservation land management skills and habitat restoration.

Council hosted the *LFW* Biennial Forum field trip in 2015 and a *LFW* Farm Tour was held in 2016 where a bus load of participants visited two properties at Penrose and Kangaloon. A *LFW* Open Day was held at Karalinga in Bullio on 1 September 2017.

The inaugural *Habitat for Hollows and Nest Box Workshop* at Mansfield Reserve on 26 May 2017 demonstrated to landholders the importance of retaining hollows for habitat. The installation of Squirrel Glider and Microbat hollows was data driven from threatened species records (Bionet) and was opportunistic. The hollows were installed in a stag tree within a Council managed reserve. The workshop was well attended with 38 participants, who also had the opportunity to look at nest boxes for different species including insect hotels.

Council presented its achievements at the 2017 Biennial Forum in Queanbeyan to other regional providers and landholders.

Seven *Who's Living on My Land?* citizen science and *Feral Fighters* workshops at Robertson (2015 & 2 in 2017), High Range (2015), Canyonleigh (2016), Penrose (2016) and Berrima (2017) have been well-attended and have generated interest in *LFW*. The workshops at Robertson in 2017 are targeting landholders along the Illawarra Escarpment, where fox control is a major component of the *Thickening the Thin Green Line* project. The final workshop for 2017 will be in the Northern Villages area in early November.

The feasibility of delivering NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) *Hotspots* training to private landholders will be examined to determine if there is an interest and demand in the community. The capacity of the RFS to partner with Council to deliver *Hotspots* will also be investigated. The first workshop is being planned for autumn 2018 in Canyonleigh.

Additional funding will be sought as opportunities arise, from FNPW, the NSW Environmental Trust and Community Environment Network for future workshops and other activities to continue capacity building of existing and new members.

Social Capacity and Resilience

HFW and *LFW* programs are moving into a new phase over the next two years as participants gain momentum and seek to socialise, share experiences and swap stories at locality-based events. The first of these locality-based groups to commence is in Canyonleigh and if successful it will be replicated across the shire.

The social benefits of *HFW* and *LFW* cannot be overstated. Improving biodiversity outcomes and landscape-scale corridor connectivity is synonymous with social networks and connected people. Participants feel motivated and empowered by the big picture (GER) and the social networks created by Council programs. There has been immense growth in collaboration between WSC and other government and non-government agencies and groups to satisfy the demand from residents and landholders to learn about and participate more in biodiversity conservation.

Communication Strategy

The *Wingecarribee Web* and *Wildlife Wingecarribee* electronic newsletters and web page updates will continue to be the primary method of communication with *HFW*, *LFW* and *VCP* landholders. The web pages are kept current and are reviewed and updated frequently each year.

In addition to electronic promotion, letters are sent to residents to invite them to workshops and this has been highly successful for the “*Who’s Living on My Land?*” series of workshops. Media outlets including the WSC website, Media Centre, Your Say Wingecarribee and Facebook page, Southern Highlands News, ABC Illawarra radio and local village newsletters such as the *Canyonleigh Chronicle* and *Robertson News* are other avenues for promotion. Keeping Councillors and the Environment and Sustainability Committee informed also assists with the continual growth of all programs.

7.3.5 Eligibility Criteria for New Landholder Agreements

The *VCP* assessment sheets have been satisfactory tools for the assessment of particular project sites, and have provided objective criteria to determine the strengths and weaknesses of a project. However, to improve project outcomes several refinements to the eligibility criteria for future *LFW* registration and *VCP* projects are proposed (see Table 4.)

Table 4 – Minimum eligibility criteria for LFW registration and VCP projects

Program	Criteria units	Criteria	Comment
LFW	Min. area (ha)	0.5	No change
	Habitat values & all other criteria	Set by CEN	New clause on environmental stewardship included in Landholder Agreement.
VCP	LFW registration	Essential	Shows commitment to conservation, and allows environmental assessment to occur prior to project.
	Remnant area (min.) (ha)	2	Larger remnants given priority funding, with smaller areas than 2 ha exceptions, require justification (e.g. SHSF&W, threatened species or new EPBC listing, riparian land).
	Corridor width (min.)	10 m	No change, however wider remnants will be more resilient.
	Agreement length (min.)	5 years	This reflects the time required by landholders for implementation of projects and the resourcing required by WSC to develop, manage and report on projects.
	Agreement length (max.)	15 years	An increase in the maximum allows more time for impact of changes and transition to permanent covenants.
	Vegetation Conservation Rating Sheet	>50%	A slight increase in the rating should ensure that slightly better quality vegetation will be conserved. This upper value is under review.
	Project Risk Assessment Tool	Low to Medium	Higher risk equates to greater resources to manage projects.
	Total Env. Levy contribution (max.)	\$13 300	The total contribution has increased to reflect inflation and is based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Depending on leveraging opportunities, this means that the total budget will support two to three management agreements per year.
	Timeframe for completion	2-4 years	An increase due to the requirement under our licence to use local provenance seed for re-planting work. Also, from a review of the program, it was found that few projects were completed within 12 months.

Program	Criteria units	Criteria	Comment
	Items that will be funded		Internal fencing, weed control, alternative stock water, seed collection, propagation and planting out of seedlings, direct sowing, nest boxes, and feral animal control.
	Items that will not be funded		Boundary fencing, landscaping, beautification, and noxious weeds in areas that are not listed as TECs.

7.3.6 Expired Agreements – Transition and Facilitation

Land for Wildlife Registration

The process for registration with *LFW/VCP* is outlined in [Appendix 3](#). When a property is sold or leased the program is dependent on the new owners or tenants notifying WSC or CEN about the change in circumstances.

Unfortunately, this does not always happen, and so the regular checking of property ownership information is necessary and will be automated using Council's Property and Rating and GIS systems.

When a property is sold or leased, WSC will approach the new residents to invite them to register for *LFW* and retain their existing sign.. Replacement agreements also result in updated mapping, AHIMS and data checks and provide an opportunity to improve management recommendations.

New Agreement/Financial incentive

Following registration with *LFW*, the landholder may be interested in further incentives to undertake conservation work. If the proposed work satisfies the eligibility criteria a project proposal and management contract/agreement will be drafted in consultation with the landholder. If the proposal does not meet the eligibility criteria, it will be deferred or considered under another program such as the proposed flagship program on Southern Highland Shale Forest & Woodland (SHSF&W) TEC and *E. aggregata*.

External agency agreement

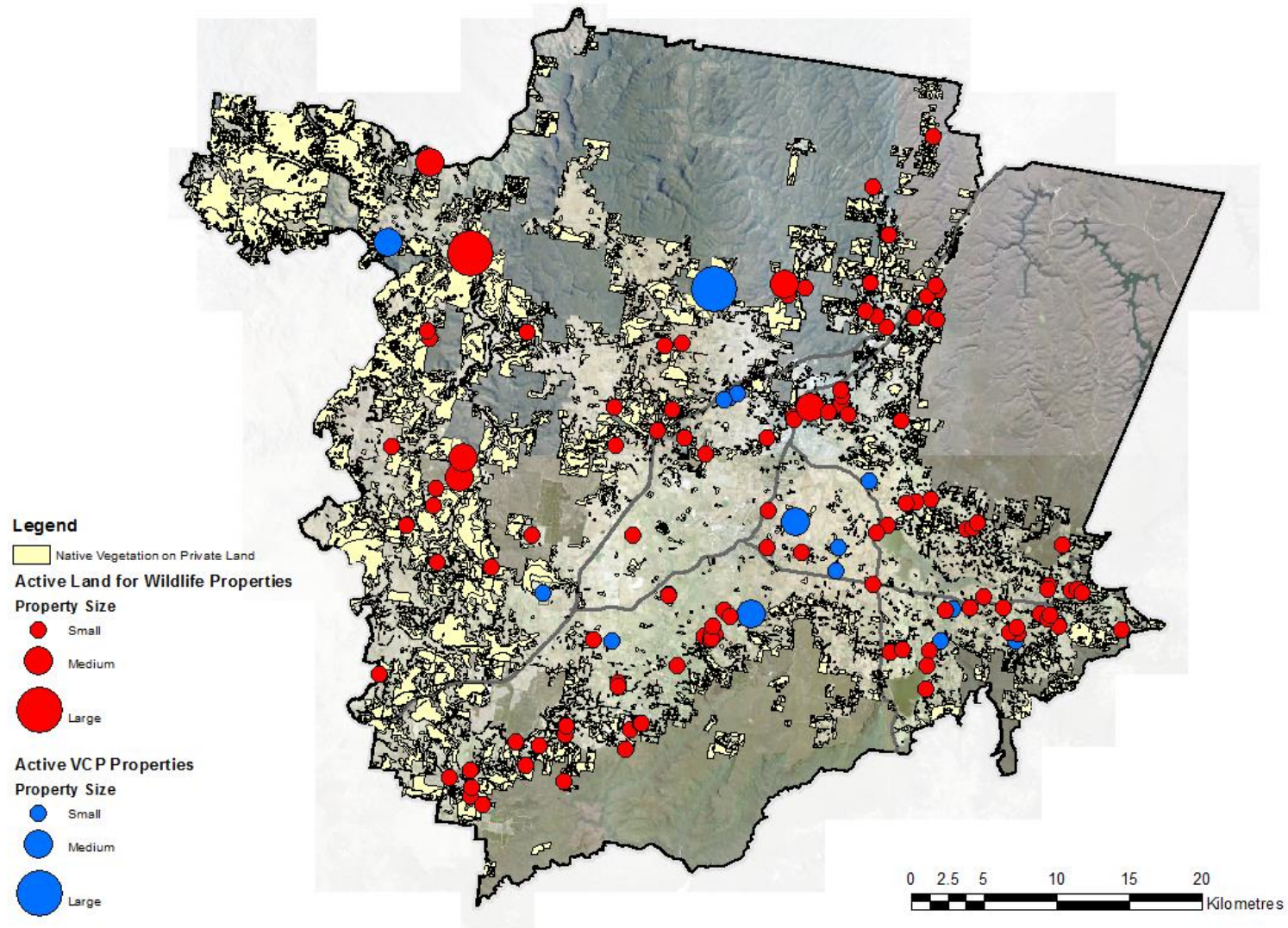
Landholders with expired *VCP* management agreements, or new sites of particular conservation value, will be provided with information on permanent covenants such as Biodiversity Conservation Trust Biodiversity Stewardship (Tier 1) Agreements.

LFW registration will be offered initially, for these expired agreements, however, other options will also be provided by written letter to the landholder.

8 References

- Australian Network for Plant Conservation (ANPC) <http://anpc.asn.au/>
- Australian Native Plants Society <http://anpsa.org.au/index.html>
- Australian Plants Society – NSW <http://austplants.com.au/>
- Carbon Farming Initiative <http://www.daff.gov.au/climatechange/cfi>
- Community Environment Network <http://www.cen.org.au/>
- Florabank <http://www.florabank.org.au/>
- Bird Atlas <http://birdlife.org.au/projects/atlas-and-birdata>
- Birdlife Australia <http://birdlife.org.au/support-us/join-us/>
- Bird Data Entry <http://birdata.com.au/homecontent.do>
- Local Land Services – South East <http://southeast.lls.nsw.gov.au>
- The Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife <http://fnpw.org.au/>
- The Nature Conservation Trust of NSW <http://nct.org.au/>
- The Environmental Trust of NSW <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/grants/envtrust.htm>
- Great Eastern Ranges <http://www.greasternranges.org.au/>
- NSW BioNet (website for the Atlas of NSW Wildlife) <http://www.bionet.nsw.gov.au/>
- Office of Environment and Heritage <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/grants/envtrust.htm>
- OzGreen www.ozgreen.org.au
- Perry, S. (1996) *Inventory of Wetlands Within Wingecarribee Shire*. The University of Wollongong, NSW.
- PlantNET <http://plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/floraonline.htm>
- Wingecarribee Shire Council www.wsc.nsw.gov.au
- Wingecarribee Shire Council 2003. *Wingecarribee Biodiversity Strategy* (2003), NSW. Prepared by Eco Logical Australia Pty Ltd, Sutherland, NSW.
- Woodlots and Wetlands 2009. *Wingecarribee Wetlands Strategy*. Wingecarribee Shire Council, Moss Vale, NSW.

APPENDIX 2 – Active LFW & VCP Properties in Wingecarribee Shire - April 2017



APPENDIX 3 – Model process for LFW registration and VCP project development

1 - Expression of Interest (LFW)

- Expression of Interest (LFW) received and the owner and property details checked
- Criteria of 0.5 ha confirmed
- ArcGIS map created
- LFW Properties layer (GIS) edited.
- New Applicant subdirectory on p drive created using the company or landholder surname.
- Property and company owners are checked. If the owner is a charity or association, the President, Secretary and/or Treasurer can sign the Landholder Agreement.
- The completed EOI is scanned and saved in Dataworks LFW 6800/13, Property Number (PN) and client name/s.
- The LFW Masterlist (xls) is completed with the new client information and draft registration number
- The client is contacted to confirm receipt of the EOI and next steps. Date for site visit is arranged within 6-8 weeks of receipt of the EOI.

2 - Desktop Environmental Assessment

- The new map file is used to complete the natural resource maps and a draft Property Assessment is prepared for the site visit.
- NRM maps are created including: 1. Biodiversity Corridors (broad scale eg 1:25000) 2. Biodiversity Corridors (fine-scale if property on or near a corridor say 1:3000) 3. Land Tenure (1:25000), 4. Vegetation Structure v2.1 (2017) (1:10000), 5. Plant Community Types v2.1 (1:2000) 6. Soil Landscapes (1:3000), 7. Contours and Drainage (1:3000) 8. Slope (1:3000), 9. Aspect (1:3000).
- Threatened fauna and flora records within 1 km and 5 km from the property boundary are extracted and added to PA under "Notable Nature Conservation Values of the Property" as lists of species (scientific name for threatened flora and common names for threatened fauna). In addition, this section of the PA should note the presence and order of streams, wetlands, rivers and creeks and TECs (Threatened Ecological Communities). Also, being within or close to a priority biodiversity corridor is worth mentioning in this section.
- Note range in altitude for the property using contours
- Basic AHIMS search completed and pdf saved in client folder
- Extensive AHIMS search completed if necessary and if requiring a shapefile due to large number of lots at a cost of \$60. Information from the GIS work is added to the draft property assessment (PA)
- The Landholder Agreement is prepared and signed and emailed to client prior to the site visit or 2 hard copies are taken to site visit depending on availability of client.

3 - Site Visit and Property Assessment

- Resources: printed A3 NRM maps, draft PA & LA, LFW resources kit, LFW metal sign, plant id books, snap lock bags, and WHS items
- WHS issue: Use a work vehicle for site visits or walk the site. If being driven around, ensure that the vehicle is registered and wear seat belts at all times. Be careful if the owner wants to use an all-terrain vehicle.

- Visit with the landholder and inspect the area for habitat values, conservation priorities, and complete a draft plant species list and notes on recommendations and treatment options. Complete a bird species list if there is time, and obtain copies of any lists the landholder may have.
- Draft the PA and send to the landholder for comment if required
- Merge all files into the one pdf, including LA, PA, maps, soil landscape descriptions, PCT descriptions (use SCIVI) and any other appendices
- Save the merged file on p:drive and in DW
- Print the A1 colour aerial map and laminate
- LFW masterlist Excel Spreadsheet and GIS Attribute Table is updated and completed
- Send out any other follow up resources required such as Frogs on Farms, the Farm Dams Handbook, the Rural Living Handbook etc

4 – Registration

- Send the merged file to the landholder and CEN
- Follow up with CEN regarding welcome letter and registration number and update LFW Masterlist if required
- Send out EOI for VCP if property is eligible

5 - Expression of Interest (VCP)

- EOI is received and completed, scanned and saved in DW and p:drive
- Cross-reference EOI with LFW recommendations
- Complete Veg Cons Rating Sheet, risk assessment and overall project assessment - eligibility criteria
- Develop project objectives and specific components
- Survey work
- Fencing
- Rehabilitation
- Reconstruction
- Alternative stock water
- Feral animal control
- Other proposed work

6 - Development of Project

- Liaise with client and develop project plan map
- Develop budget for project components and use Vendor Panel to obtain quotes for work
- Develop Draft Management Agreement and send to landholder for comment
- Arrange a meeting to discuss the management agreement
- Finalise the management agreement and arrange signatures (landholder and WSC E&S Manager)
- Provide copy of signed management agreement to landholder and save on DW

7 - Project Implementation

- Complete all components of the project
- Finalise all payments to contractors
- Complete a project progress report following each stage or at 12-monthly intervals
- Register all project progress reports and financial statements in DW
- Complete a site visit and Final Report

- Save completed report and signed Stat Dec in DW

8 - Monitoring and Review

- Review project outcomes and budget and complete the xls
- Modify project plan template as required.