

A Brief History of Bathurst Vegetation

The landscape of the region had been actively managed by the indigenous Wiradjuri people for millennia before European settlement. The people understood the landscape and its vegetation and many plants were used as resources to sustain a successful and vibrant culture.

Although detailed descriptions of the vegetation of the region at the time of European settlement are sketchy, it is generally accepted to have been dominated by Grasslands and Woodlands with widely spaced trees of mixed ages. Shrubs were sparse, although more prevalent in moist areas. Grasses and herbs were very prominent with a great diversity of species.

The settlement at the current site of Bathurst was established in 1815. Land clearance for grazing and agriculture and timber harvesting for cooking, construction and mining rapidly brought about dramatic changes to the landscape and vegetation of the region.

In the early days of the settlement, the limited availability of water restricted horticulture largely to market gardening and cropping on the river flats, but as the region became more affluent, ornamental horticulture and particularly the introduction of European trees became popular, to make the landscape look more familiar to the new migrants.

The population grew rapidly through the later half of the nineteenth century, on the back of successful wool production on the river flats and to a range of mining activities throughout the region. Bathurst Council commenced its tree planting program in 1871 and in 1886 it became the first country town with a piped water supply. So began the development of urban gardens and public parklands for recreational use.

The twentieth century saw land subdivision in Bathurst and

the surrounding villages, and across the rural landscape. In rural areas, tree clearance continued on the productive lands, leaving only scattered remnants of native vegetation. By contrast, in the urban areas, native vegetation was largely replaced by a diverse range of exotic plants and has resulted in an urban forest with many more trees and shrubs than would have been present prior to non-indigenous settlement.

Native Plants

Australian native plants come in all shapes & sizes and play a number of important roles in Australia. They provide food and shelter for native birds and animals, stabilise our soils and waterways, are tolerant of our extreme climatic conditions and require very little water to thrive, compared to most exotic plant species. As well, native plants can be attractive specimens in your garden and in streets and parks. The planting of native plants helps to maintain and protect the distinctive Australian landscape. They can also help to link pockets of native vegetation that have become isolated by residential and rural development and play a vital role in maintaining the quality of Australia's land and water resources.

Bathurst Vegetation Management Plan - Overview

Considerable community interest in vegetation management and the desire of Bathurst City Council (now Bathurst Regional Council) to have a plan to guide vegetation management into the next half century led to the preparation of the Bathurst Vegetation Management Plan (VMP). The VMP was adopted by Council in 2003 and provides the template for strategic vegetation management on land owned or controlled by Council within the Bathurst Local Government Area (LGA). Since

the adoption of the VMP the area contained within the LGA has increased, though the principles and many of the strategies and recommendations of the VMP still apply.

Vegetation in the LGA is characteristically diverse and particular vegetation groups were classified according to a set of designated 'vegetation themes'. These themes paint a broad picture of the 'types' of vegetation, and can determine the style or character of an area. The themes are briefly described below (Refer VMP, Map A, for map showing theme areas):

- Heritage Conservation Area. The vegetation compliments the cultural history of the area and comprises essentially exotic deciduous trees;
- Endemic Native Vegetation. Remnants of the endemic box-red gum woodlands;
- Native vegetation. Native vegetation though may not necessarily be endemic to the region;
- Exotic/native mix. A mix of both exotic and native species;
- Natives dominant. Similar to exotic/native mix, though with pronounced dominance of native species;
- Exotics dominant. Similar to exotic/native mix, though with pronounced dominance of exotic species;
- Waterways. Vegetation endemic to these drainage systems prior to European settlement; Floodplain. Mostly devoid of trees and vegetated with grasses, forbs and semi-aquatic herbaceous plants.

- To illustrate the use of themes in vegetation management, Council, community members or organisations can determine the most suitable vegetation type for a given area, such as a streetscape or park. This has the primary purpose of maintaining or creating a sense of visual unity, harmony and character, and a sense of transition from one landscape to another. Applying vegetation themes to a particular area also aims to retain and protect the City's cultural heritage, rural identity, natural bushland and riverine resources. For example, in the Heritage Conservation Area planting native trees as street or park trees would be inappropriate. Similarly, planting exotic trees in the theme areas designated as being Endemic Native Vegetation, Native Dominant or the Waterways would be counter to its character and environmental integrity.

The VMP also gives guidance on vegetation management in key functional areas. Within each category a number of specific management strategies and recommendations are given to best achieve the vision of the VMP. These areas, termed management categories in the VMP, include:

- Significant Natural Landscapes
- Native Remnant Vegetation
- Waterways
- Streetscapes
- Parks and Public Reserves
- Gateways
- Floodplains

The VMP is currently being used by Council and the community to manage the vegetation resource and plan for the future. The foundation of the VMP has set the direction for developing specific vegetation management actions and work plans by Council, key stakeholders and the community, thus strengthening the cultural and environmental values of native and exotic vegetation through coordinated and sustainable vegetation management and planning.

Barbara Mactaggart

Author, Bathurst Vegetation Management Plan

Woodlands

The dominant vegetation type of the Bathurst area is formally known as White Box/Yellow Box/Blakely's Red Gum Woodland. This assemblage of trees, shrubs, grasses, herbs and forbs has recently been listed as an Endangered Ecological Community which means that we need to take great care of the few remaining patches that still exist.

The best publicly accessible example of the Woodland community in the Bathurst area is found in portions of the Boundary Rd Reserve, just 3 kms west of the CBD. The Reserve has a 4 km walking track and is well worth a visit. Across the Orange Road from the Bathurst Golf Club the Brooke Moore Remnant is a small but important 'in town' remnant woodland.

Remnant vegetation: "any locally native vegetation present in the landscape following the removal or severe degradation of surrounding native vegetation"

In the Bathurst region, several important woodland

conservation reserves can be identified and are relatively easily accessed, including:

Evans Crown Nature Reserve – 2 kms south east of Tarana this reserve consists of 425 hectares of open eucalypt woodland country overlooking the village of Tarana and the Fish River.

Peel Native Flora and Fauna Reserve – 12 kms north of Bathurst consists of 142 hectares of Red Stringy bark – Red Box community, once the Peel village common.

Wambool Nature Reserve – 20 kms east of Bathurst comprising 194 hectares of dry open eucalypt forest

Winburndale Nature Reserve – 30 kilometers north east of Bathurst comprising 10,050 hectares of mixed eucalypt woodland and open forest on shales and quartzites with significant montane forest communities.

Fremantle Nature Reserve - 35 kilometers north west of Bathurst consists of 361 hectares of dry open eucalypt woodland mainly red stringy bark and box vegetation.

Macquarie Turon Heritage Lands – the Bridle Track from Bathurst to Hill End. This track, which follows the course of the Macquarie and Turon rivers to Hill End, contains some important and increasingly rare riparian reserves along the rivers including significant stands of *Casuarina cunninghamiana*. As well as these reserves there are also significant areas of Native State Forests to be found on the more rugged ridge country especially to the east and south of Bathurst.

Some of the larger and more important of these Forests include Sunny Corner State Forest, Turon State Forest, Hampton State Forest, Mount David State Forest, Vittoria State Forest and Macquarie Woods.

Macquarie Rivercare

Up until 1985 the banks of the Macquarie River at Bathurst were used as a dumping ground and rubbish tip, the precinct was very much degraded. Bathurst City Council decided that the rehabilitation of the banks of the Macquarie River should be the town's Bi-Centennial project. Macquarie Rivercare Bathurst Inc. was formed under Chairman Nevil Barlow to oversee this rehabilitation and by 1988 the river was in a much more presentable state.

Restoration plans were developed for planting, cleaning and willow removal with the aim of increasing aquatic and bird life as well as making the river precinct a pleasant, passive recreation area for the citizens of Bathurst. A beautiful Bi-Centennial Park has been established as a result and hundreds of people use it daily.

The group applied for and received a National Heritage Trust grant for an academic study in partnership with Dr David Goldney from CSU to restore the riparian zone between Bathurst city and the Ben Chifley Dam along the Campbell's River.

Achievements have been significant. Thousands of native trees, shrubs and grasses have been planted out. The "Ecological Status and Restoration of Degraded Riparian Zones in the Upper Macquarie Catchment" study report has been well received and is presently used as a "best practice" guide to rehabilitation work. A series of 10 brochures on restoration practices has been sent to all landholders along the Upper Macquarie Catchment. Restoration work is progressing but has been delayed by the ongoing drought.

A major creek and wetland re-development of the Raglan Creek is planned for the near future. Some \$200,000 is envisaged in this programme in conjunction with Central West Catchment Management Authority and Bathurst

Regional Council.

Over 20 years Macquarie Rivercare has been an active, community based organisation that has achieved real and lasting results for the people and environment of Bathurst.

The support of Bathurst Regional Council, Conservation Volunteers Australia, Greening Bathurst, Central West Catchment Management Authority, corporate groups such as Simplot and Country Energy, local schools including All Saints' College and Kelso High School, Radio 2BS and the Western Advocate have been significant contributors to making all this possible.

Nevil Barlow

Chairman Macquarie Rivercare

Boundary Road Reserve

The Boundary Road Reserve Landcare Group is made up of a dedicated group of landcare and conservation volunteers who manage the Boundary Road Reserve.

The Reserve is comprised of about 85 hectares of ecologically endangered bushland. It borders on Blayney Road to the north; Boundary Road and the Bathurst Pistol Club to the west, the Blayney Common, Agricultural Farm and CSU to the east and the Archery Club and Hinton Road to the south.

Typical activities of the Boundary Reserve volunteers are:

- Managing/mowing the 4 km of walking track.
- Removing weeds and replanting indigenous trees,

shrubs, grasses and forbs.

- We maintain track markers, and interpretive signs along the track, which inform walkers about different aspects of the Reserve.
- We have also placed seats around the track for those who wish to stop and do a spot of bird watching or just enjoy the tranquility of the bush. Regular repainting of the seats is another task undertaken.
- Prepare various plans including a Plan of Management, Fire Management Plan, Weed Control Strategy to manage the biodiversity of the land.
- Installing and monitoring nest boxes.
- Regular slashing of high grass around the perimeter of the Reserve and around our plantings.

Brooke Moore Reserve

The Brooke Moore Reserve is 4 hectares of native bushland land located in West Bathurst adjacent to the new fire station.

Unfortunately the flora and fauna of Box Gum Grassy Woodlands which characterise this area are under threat.

Greening Bathurst has recently overseen the installation of nesting boxes supported by grants from the Federal Government. These boxes replace the lost nesting hollows of mature trees and will be removed when the current trees have matured enough to form these hollows.

