



Draft forest management plan 2014–2023 and biodiversity

Western Australia's south-west is home to many species of plants and animals. It is also important for recreation and social wellbeing, provides water catchments for most of the State's population, and is a source of minerals, wood products, gravel, wildflowers and honey.

These activities, as well as the past clearing of forests for agriculture and towns, a changing climate and threats such as invasive species and altered fire regimes, together impact on the ecology, and the plants and animals living there.

Conserving biodiversity – the variability among living organisms and the ecosystems they form – is a key goal of the Draft plan. Activities to achieve this in forests are based on maintaining their fundamental features, such as keeping linkages between habitats and maintaining ecological processes. Remedial actions are also necessary, for example to tackle feral animals, weeds and dieback and to protect threatened species (see the 'Biological diversity' chapter in the Draft plan for further discussion about these principles for conservation and the strategies used to provide for them.)

The Draft plan builds on the many past initiatives to conserve biodiversity in Western Australia's south-west forests. Highlights include:

- Nearly 62 per cent of the 2.5 million hectares vested in the Conservation Commission in the Draft plan area is in existing or proposed conservation reserves or otherwise protected areas. This provides large areas of structurally diverse native vegetation, as well as protecting rivers and streams and sensitive habitats.
- A further 4,010 hectares is proposed as an addition to Whicher National Park following survey work that shows the flora and vegetation complexes of the Whicher Scarp form a separate forest ecosystem with important conservation values.
- All reserve proposals in the current plan that are still to be formally established are carried forward in the Draft plan. In the meantime, these areas will continue to be managed by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) as if the reservations were already in place.
- Most of the 27 separate forest ecosystems in the south-west are reserved at levels above the nationally agreed target. Additional protection on private land would be required to meet those targets that are not achieved.
- All old-growth forest will continue to be protected. In December 2011, there were 333,160 hectares of old-growth forest recognised in formal or informal reserves – an increase from the 331,370 hectares at the start of the current plan after the status of some areas was reviewed.

- The Draft plan proposes increased protection of black cockatoo and numbat habitats (and those of other species) through changes to harvesting and regeneration operations in State forest and timber reserves. Under these changes, operators will be required to leave dead standing trees, more large logs on the forest floor, large marri trees and more of the mid-storey shrubs and small trees in jarrah forest. Large marri are an important food source and preferred nesting sites for black cockatoos, so it is proposed that large marri be retained in the jarrah forest in addition to the existing requirement to leave habitat trees standing in harvested areas.
- The network of fauna habitat zones continues under the Draft plan, with two options put forward for feedback: either no change to the existing 283 zones totaling 52,673 hectares, or varying the size of individual zones to allow a gross area of more than 6,700 hectares to be consolidated into Batalling forest block (a recognised fauna hotspot), portions of Topanup forest block (which includes a vegetation complex that is poorly represented in protected areas) and parts of Molloy and Rapids forest blocks (which include habitat for threatened fauna, including quokkas and invertebrates). Option 2 proposes 285 zones in all, with a total area of 44,244 hectares.
- Populations of threatened and priority flora and fauna and threatened and priority ecological communities will continue to be protected, for example by DEC maintaining databases of their locations to inform planning for disturbance activities, by continuing survey and by developing and implementing recovery plans.
- The Draft plan proposes extending DEC's *FORESTCHECK* biodiversity monitoring program. Begun in 2002, *FORESTCHECK* samples a wide range of species at multiple sites across the jarrah forest to provide information about changes and trends in biodiversity associated with forest activities.
- The Draft plan also proposes minimising the impacts of clearing for the removal of gravel and other basic raw materials (BRM) by seeking to have these products taken from a network of fewer, strategic pits. This network will be identified in consultation with relevant government agencies and BRM users.
- Activities to deal with invasive species and other threats to forest health are included in the 'Ecosystem health and vitality' chapter in the Draft plan.

The *Draft Forest Management Plan 2014-2023* is available at www.conservation.wa.gov.au and is open for public comment until 7 November 2012.



Department of
Environment and Conservation

