

Communities in landscapes – Working together to integrate conservation and production in Box-Gum Woodlands

J. Dalton

Landcare NSW Inc. c/- Industry & Investment, Orange Agricultural Institute,
Forest Road, Orange NSW 2800
jdalton@landcarens.org.au

Project description

Communities in Landscapes (CiL) is a 2-year CFOC-funded project aimed at increasing native habitat and landscape-scale conservation within national priority White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodlands and Derived Native Grasslands (Box-Gum Grassy Woodlands, BGGW) in all its conditions. BGGW woodlands once extended as a wide belt from west of the Great Divide across much of the more productive agricultural lands of NSW and into southern Queensland and northern Victoria. Heavily impacted by European settlement the BGGW and their diverse flora and fauna are now classified as an Endangered Ecological Community. The CiL project supports community engagement and participation in ways that benefit both the ecosystem and agricultural production. It complements, but should not be confused with, the ongoing Stewardship Program being implemented by some inland CMAs in selected high quality Box Gum Grassy woodlands.

CiL's nine (9) project partners are Landcare NSW Inc (lead agency), Grassy Box Woodland Conservation Management Network (CMN), Stipa Native Grasse Association, CSIRO, Sydney University, Industry & Investment NSW (I&I), Department Environment, Climate Change & Water (DECCW), Greening Australia-Flora Bank and Birds Australia. The range of networks, skills and opportunities provided by these partners and the project's collaborative approach to implementation management enables strategic and efficient delivery of services to land managers in the Murrumbidgee, Lachlan and Central West catchments targeted by the project.

CiL promotes landscape-scale change by engaging and advising land managers and their communities on management practices known to promote resilience in BGGW landscapes, positive outcomes for production and increase community capacity to carry on these practices beyond the life of the project.

To achieve these objectives CiL generates outcomes in three key strategic areas:

- Improved targeting of information and management support for land-managers and community groups;
- Improved knowledge base to inform and support management decisions in BGGW landscapes;
- Implementation of integrated on-ground activities across multiple properties in priority local BGGW landscapes.

The project's partners come from community, conservation, production and research sectors. The range of networks, skills and opportunities they provide and the collaborative approach to implementation ensures strategic, co-ordinated, extensive and efficient delivery of project services.

Information and management support

The major threat to the resilience of Box-Gum Grassy Woodlands is the gradual degradation of sites in all conditions through management actions including heavy or seasonally unsuitable grazing, fertiliser and herbicide applications, weed invasion and ground litter removal. In many locations relatively simple changes have already resulted in enhanced ecosystem function. With coordinated effort this can be extended across large areas of the BGGW landscape with both private and public benefit.

CiL expands BGGW information delivery by working with project partners and other agencies with established members or clientele (including Landcare, CMN, I&I, Stipa and collaborating CMAs) to incorporate BGGW management information into their conservation and/or production-focussed programs to ensure management advice is consistent with maintaining and improving BGG woodlands of all conditions.

The projects other information focus is those land-managers already working on achieving improvement in their woodlands, either through self-interest or funded programs such as an Environmental Stewardship Agreements. CiL assists these land-managers to have access to best-management-practice advice in order that they may adapt their management techniques to achieve best-possible outcomes for both their production enterprises and their agreement responsibilities. The project also raises broader community awareness of BGGW through rural and urban media.

Improved knowledge base

To influence land managers to change their management practices information needs to address landholder priorities, be clear about implications for their enterprise and the effectiveness of on-ground outcomes. This proposal works closely with partners to ensure research activity assesses the effectiveness of activities that improve the functionality of BGGW that are likely to be implemented by land-managers. In addition to trial sites on landholder properties the project includes three demonstration sites with different core management objectives (production, biodiversity and cultural heritage) where identified best-practice-management is applied consistent with property objectives and constraints. These will serve as educational sites for partners and community groups.

Currently there are issues regarding the management of BGGW data which impacts on the ability of the Commonwealth to monitor improvements or declines in extent and condition. The project is assisting DECCW to build an accessible database of existing

government, NGO and private monitoring and management data to enable all involved in research or management of BGGW (including the Commonwealth through ERIN and the Recovery Planning process) to input, access and utilise this resource to track recovery of this endangered ecosystem.

To understand the processes that lead to land managers making decisions that will improve resilience of BGGW, the project will monitor and evaluate behavioural change among landholders to understand the effectiveness of the different engagement approaches used within and beyond the project. A benchmark survey it will also assess land managers in each region who have adopted innovations that have successfully integrated production and conservation. Through both in-depth interviews and on-ground measurement the project will provide data and insights into adoption pathways and the actual benefits of specific strategies.

Integrated on-ground works across multiple properties in priority local landscapes

Given that BGGW exist within a complex geographic and land management matrix, efforts to build ecosystem resilience need to work across property boundaries to enable practices on one property to contribute to conservation outcomes on another. The project will develop 6 sets of cross-property conservation plans, each involving groups of 10 or more land managers. To engage participants in this cross-property planning process the project will identify landscapes where high priority BGGW overlap with active or potentially active community groups and landholders. Incentives to participate will include funded training and support opportunities with project partners, funded connectivity plantings and access to seed-money to begin implementation.

Project contacts

John Dalton, Project Manager.
jdalton@landcarensw.org.au
(02) 6391 3902

Toni McLeish, Coordinator CMN.
toni.mcleish@environment.nsw.gov.au
(02) 6229 7119

Megan Harris, Community Woodlands Officer-
Lachlan
mharris@landcarensw.org.au
(02) 6380 1701

Maryanne Smith, CWO – Central West.
msmith@landcarensw.org.au
(02) 6391 3902

Kimberley Beattie, CWO – Murrumbidgee.
kbeattie@landcarensw.org.au
(02) 6925 7718

Tony Cox, Project Officer I&I.
Tony.Cox@industry.nsw.gov.au
(02) 6391 3885

SuPerior.

SUPERFECT®

THE BALANCED PHOSPHORUS & SULFUR PACKAGE

Not all Superphosphates are the same. Entrust your pasture to SuPerfect®.

- High quality low dust granules deliver even spreading to promote consistent pasture growth
- Calcium, sulfur and phosphorus inside every granule
- Phosphorus and sulfur that is immediately plant available
- A proven performer in pastures

**For details on Superfect, contact your local
Incitec Pivot Fertilisers' Distributor.
www.incitecpivot.com.au**



IP1503-4Red-handed