

Roadside vegetation mapping in the Rural City of Wangaratta

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Over the past 3 years, the Rural City of Wangaratta has undertaken a long and detailed process documenting its roadside vegetation. This process was instigated through the development of its Roadside Management Strategy, which was compiled with the aid of a grant from the Natural Heritage Trust.

It was found that approximately 45% of roadsides in the Rural City of Wangaratta returned a high conservation status, with around 80% being of at least Medium Conservation value according to the Roadside Conservation Advisory Committee assessment process. Many of these roadsides contain highly significant grassland reserves, including the well-known Boorhaman Grassland Reserve.

Grasslands are a major contributor to the complex array of remnant vegetation that exists in the Rural City of Wangaratta, and much effort is being invested into partnerships with Landcare and the Country Fire Authority to ensure the ongoing maintenance of these areas through ecological burning.

Unlike many Roadside Management Strategies, the roadside conservation data was compiled into a database and linked to Council's geographic

information system (Latitude GIS). This has allowed the Rural City of Wangaratta to continually update and 'ground truth' this data, creating a living document capable of reflecting constant change in the environment, rather than a simple 'snapshot in time'.

This process has been extended to encompass new projects, such as the Natural Heritage Trust-funded Weeds of National Significance project for Chilean needle grass (*Nassella neesiana*). This project incorporates mapping all infestations of this weed in the municipality and adding this information to existing roadside vegetation data as an aid in targeting management activities.

This information is now an important contributor to the planning of road maintenance activities, including the location of stack sites and the development of roadside tree maintenance procedures.

The implementation of the Roadside Management Strategy has thus developed into a long-term process that is constantly evolving to meet the needs of both the environment and the Rural City of Wangaratta, being continually improved and kept in the forefront of roadside management.