



CONSERVATION PARTNERS PROGRAM

GUIDE FOR LANDHOLDERS



Biodiversity
Conservation
Trust

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1. INTRODUCTION

This guide is to assist landholders who are interested in participating in the Biodiversity Conservation Trust's Conservation Partners Program.

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT) is a not-for-profit statutory body that was constituted with the commencement of the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 on 25 August 2017. The BCT has been established to support and encourage landholders to protect and conserve biodiversity on private land.

The purpose of the Conservation Partners Program (CPP) is to encourage landowners to enter agreements to conserve biodiversity and support productive landscapes. The program is available to landholders who are not seeking or are ineligible for conservation management payments under the BCT's Conservation Management Program.

The program builds upon the voluntary private land conservation (PLC) programs previously offered by Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) and Nature Conservation Trust (NCT), to grow the network of protected areas on private land. The BCT will also continue to support landholders with existing Conservation Agreements, Trust Agreements, Registered Property Agreements and Wildlife Refuges.



2. WHERE DOES THE BCT CONSERVATION PARTNERS PROGRAM OPERATE?

The Conservation Partners Program operates throughout NSW.

3. WHAT AGREEMENTS ARE OFFERED BY THE BCT?

The CPP offers in-perpetuity Conservation Agreements and Wildlife Refuge Agreements to landholders who wish to conserve biodiversity on their land, at no cost to the landholder.

Conservation Agreements

Conservation Agreements are voluntary agreements under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 between the BCT and landholders to conserve and manage biodiversity on an area of land.

This option is suited to landholders who have areas of high conservation value on their land and who wish to ensure those values are protected and managed into the future.

Conservation Agreements are registered on the land title and transfer to subsequent landholders, ensuring that, if the land is sold, the agreement and protections it provides remain in place.

Wildlife Refuge Agreements

Wildlife Refuge Agreements are an entry-level option for landholders who wish to protect the biodiversity on their property but do not wish to enter into a permanent agreement, or whose properties do not meet the criteria for a Conservation Agreement.

A Wildlife Refuge Agreement is a voluntary agreement between the BCT and the landholder to protect and manage wildlife habitat on an area of land. Wildlife Refuge Agreements may be recorded on the land title and transfer to subsequent landholders, however the agreement can be revoked by the landholder at any time in the future.

Wildlife Refuge Agreements are a good option for landholders who wish to explore how they can become involved in conservation.

4. ELIGIBILITY

The CPP is open to landholders with sites that contain high conservation values and meet minimum size and condition requirements. Agreements can be entered with any individual, group or corporation that owns land, or leases land from the Crown. Agreements can also be negotiated with statutory authorities or another Minister.

For the CPP, the relevant area on your property should meet the following requirements:

- contains at least one good example of the least protected ecosystems, including threatened species or their habitats, threatened ecological communities, over-cleared vegetation types, important wetlands, old growth forests, rainforest or high conservation value grasslands (you do not need to know if you have these types of plants and animals, if

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you are eligible for the program, the BCT will determine if you have these plants and animals);

- is in moderate or better ecological condition (this is determined by the BCT during site assessment);
- is managed primarily for conservation, and
- can contribute to landscape connectivity providing linear or stepping stone corridors at a local or regional scale, or be part of a larger area of remnant vegetation (this is determined by the BCT).

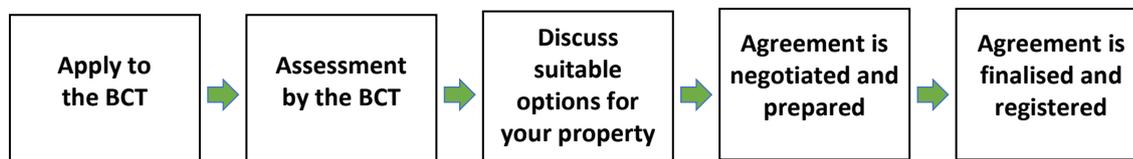
For a Conservation Agreement, properties should have a minimum 20 hectares proposed to be conserved and managed for biodiversity.

For a Wildlife Refuge Agreement, properties should have a minimum 10 hectares proposed to be conserved and managed for biodiversity.

For both types of agreement, smaller properties may be considered by the BCT should they contain very high conservation values (e.g. threatened species or their habitat, or threatened ecological communities), or are of high strategic importance, or are within priority investment areas under the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy.

5. THE PROCESS

The steps in establishing an agreement are:



Applications

You can obtain an Application Form by calling 1300 992 688, emailing info@bct.nsw.gov.au or making an enquiry through the BCT website www.bct.nsw.gov.au/make-an-enquiry. The Landholder Application Form provides you with the opportunity to tell us about you, your property and its conservation values and whether you are interested in a Conservation Agreement or a Wildlife Refuge Agreement.

We suggest that you give us as much information as you can in your application and indicate on a 'mud map', that part of your property you are considering to be covered by an agreement.

Assessment

BCT will use your Application Form, as well as other available data, to make an initial assessment as to whether your property meets the criteria to be further considered for a Conservation Agreement or Wildlife Refuge Agreement. If at this stage your property is not considered

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suitable for your preferred option, the BCT will recommend that you consider another option, or refer you to other programs, including Land for Wildlife or Wildlife Land Trust.

You will also be advised if your property might be eligible for a Conservation Agreement with conservation management payments under the BCT's Conservation Management Program, or may be suitable for a Biodiversity Stewardship Agreement.

If your property may be suitable for an agreement under the CPP, the BCT will contact you to organise a visit to your property to gain a better understanding of the conservation values, to assess the ecological condition of the proposed conservation area and to discuss your property's management issues. Please note that in some places demand is high, and your property may be on a waiting list for this visit.

After the visit and the assessment process is finished, the BCT will discuss with you the appropriate conservation options for your property based on your property's size, conservation values, condition, location and any relevant management issues.

Preparing an Agreement

If your property is suitable for a Conservation Agreement or Wildlife Refuge Agreement, the BCT will work with you to negotiate and prepare the agreement.

There are several stages in the process and you will get a number of opportunities to discuss any management issues or concerns you may have, and comment on draft documents. The process of reviewing and making amendments continues until the landowner is happy with the agreement.

A sketch diagram may need to be prepared by a registered surveyor to meet Land and Registry Services guidelines for registering agreements on the land title. This will be undertaken in consultation with the landholder.

Finalising an Agreement

Once the agreement is completed, BCT will arrange for all owners to sign the documentation first. If you have a mortgage, you will also need to arrange for the mortgagee (e.g. your bank) to countersign the agreement. Landholders will then return the signed documentation for signing by the BCT, who will then make arrangements for the agreement to be recorded on the title of the land.



6. LANDHOLDER BENEFITS

Conservation Agreements enable landholders to conserve land permanently while retaining management and ownership. Landholders with Conservation Agreements and Wildlife Refuge Agreements are provided with ongoing support as part of BCT's Landholder Technical Support Package, together with a range of other benefits.

Protecting your investment

Many landholders are managing part of their land for conservation and have expended both time and money in ensuring that its natural conservation values are retained and improved, and the benefits from environmental services provided are protected. Ensuring in-perpetuity protection of these values through a Conservation Agreement can provide peace of mind to landholders who find they are in a situation where they need to sell their land. The BCT will support future landholders to understand and fulfil their obligations according to the terms and conditions of the Conservation Agreement.

Financial incentives

Landholders with in-perpetuity Conservation Agreements who are not receiving annual conservation management payments may benefit from financial concessions and incentives (e.g. exemptions from land tax, and local council rate relief).

Current arrangements for existing conservation agreements will be carried over, with some minor adjustments. Information is available on the BCT website.

Landholder Technical Support Package

Landholders with agreements will receive support from the BCT's Landholder Technical Support Package. This may include providing advice through phone calls and site visits, newsletters, field days and workshops, website information and resources, landholder networking opportunities and assistance with monitoring.

Conservation Partner Grants

The aim of the Conservation Partner Grants is to assist landholders who have agreements to actively protect or improve the ecological value of their properties. Conservation actions that may be funded include fencing, pest and weed control, revegetation and habitat restoration.

Signage

Areas covered by a Conservation Agreement or Wildlife Refuge Agreement are eligible for a sign, free of charge, from the BCT. The sign recognises landholders' commitment to conserving biodiversity and informs other people of the importance of the area.

7. FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information, to discuss your options, please call 1300 992 688, emailing info@bct.nsw.gov.au or making an enquiry through the BCT website www.bct.nsw.gov.au/make-an-enquiry.