



Understory

*NSW BCT Newsletter
Summer 2021*

Biodiversity
Conservation
Trust



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It has been six months since our last issue, and what a challenging time it has been for all of us right across the country. Here at the BCT, we've been focusing on adaptation. Adapting our ways of working, processes and mindsets to see this pandemic through while still working towards achieving our business goals. Despite the challenges we have faced, our staff have stayed positive and committed to the work of supporting private land conservation across NSW. Over the last six months, the BCT has released a new Business Plan, and announced the outcomes of three conservation tenders that have added over 50,000 hectares to the private land conservation network.

New BCT Business Plan

The BCT has released a new four-year business plan for 2021-22 to 2024-25, with the approval of the Minister for Energy and Environment. The plan sets a new purpose and vision for the organisation and outlines our aspirational aims over the next four years. Looking forward, the BCT is aiming to enter 400 new agreements over 200,000 hectares to protect another 50 unique underrepresented NSW Landscapes.

Update on conservation tenders

The outcomes of the BCT's 2020/21 conservation tenders including the Plains-wanderer Habitat, Northern Inland Floodplains and Snow Gum Woodlands and Grasslands (North) tenders were announced by the Minister in October. The BCT welcomes 25 new landholders helping to protect over 50,000 hectares of important habitat for native species on private land across the state. These outcomes were featured in an article produced in The Land in mid-October, [which you can view on the news page of our website](#).

The BCT has also invited two additional landholders to sign conservation agreements to protect an additional 1,485 hectares of priority koala habitat in the Southern Highlands. The BCT Board's prudential management of the Biodiversity Conservation Fund means that additional funds have become available to invest in these two important and large-scale sites. These landholders join the five successful applicants in the Southern Highlands Koala Habitat conservation tender, who will all receive annual management payments for the protection and conservation of habitat for the critical koala population, covering a total of 2,579 hectares.

Revolving fund sales

Through its revolving fund, the BCT identifies properties up for sale that contain very high conservation values. The BCT buys these properties then 'revolves' them by selling to landholders interested and willing to sign an in-perpetuity conservation agreement on a portion of the land, to manage that area for biodiversity conservation outcomes. The BCT has now bought and sold (or 'revolved') six properties where the new owners have entered conservation agreements, covering a total of 3,036 hectares. The BCT has also bought and plans to revolve another seven properties with combined proposed conservation areas of 2,261 hectares.

Online engagement

This year has been a limiting one in terms of engagement, so BCT staff have had to adapt while restricted much of the year to their desks at home due to the pandemic. We've run a large number of online workshops, webinars and information sessions this year to maintain engagement with our landholders and stakeholders while being geographically restricted. This has been largely successful and moving forward we will maintain a balance of in-person and online engagement activities. We hope this will allow us to be more accessible as well as flexible, enabling us to better support our landholders as we start to move into post-pandemic operations.

Paul Elton,
Chief Executive Officer



FRONT COVER
Sun orchids on a biodiversity stewardship site in the Sydney Hunter region.
Joel Stibbard / BCT

OPPOSITE
Moss in a wet schelorphyll forest.
Joel Stibbard / BCT



Landholder Support Officer Nigel Jones attended the event to represent the BCT.

“I was so happy to see the smiles on the faces of community members who I have got to know over the last decade, including many young children who have been going to Mawonga for cultural camps as they have grown up. I look forward to BCT continuing to support WAC and their management of healthy Country into the future.”

There are numerous cultural places, small caves, rock shelters and art sites on Mawonga, as well as many significant plants and animals such as the threatened Yungkay (malleefowl) and woodland birds like the grey-crowned babbler and hooded robin.

Mawonga IPA adjoins both the Yathong and Nombinnie Nature Reserves and the three properties combined form one of the largest continuous stands of protected mallee woodland in NSW.

Ongoing management activities in caring for Mawonga through the IPA program include continuing cultural camps, feral animal and erosion management, cultural burning, cultural site protection and ecological monitoring.

BCT staff getting back out in the field

After a long five months of working from home, BCT field staff are thrilled to be slowly starting to increase site visits, monitoring and other engagement activities on PLC agreement sites. The BCT is taking all safety precautions in line with the current health advice and will only visit landholders who are comfortable meeting with our staff face-to-face.

A big thank you to those landholders who have assisted in the development of case-studies ‘by distance’, providing information over the phone/via email, and sending through photos of the great work they are doing on their land.

We look forward to increasing site visits and face-to-face engagement as restrictions lift even further across the state and returning to ‘normal’ activity in the new year.



Mawonga IPA declaration

On Saturday June 12 the Ngiyampaa Wangaaypuwan people celebrated their long-held dream of having ngurrampaa (Country) back in their management in a declaration ceremony for the Mawonga Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) at Hillston in central-western New South Wales. The IPA means that Ngiyampaa Wangaaypuwan people will be further supported to continue the role of their ancestors by caring for and healing country at the 22,000-hectare Mawonga Station IPA.

Mawonga is also protected by an in-perpetuity conservation agreement which was part of the land divestment (in 2015), and the BCT has an ongoing role on the Steering Committee which provides support and advice for management of the conservation area.



New online educational resources

To date, the BCT’s key education project Conservation Champions has reached over 1,700 students. In response to an increased interest for online and remote learning opportunities this year, the BCT has developed an interactive online unit for NSW Year 10-12 students that focuses on the importance of biodiversity conservation in agricultural settings. This online unit has been a huge success, with 100% of the 85 Year 11 agriculture students who have piloted the unit finding it extremely engaging and informative.

A large number of additional free primary and secondary resources have been developed as part of BCT’s education projects, which are available to download from [the education page of the BCT website](#).

Findings from BCT landholder and program participant surveys

During 2020 the BCT worked with University of New South Wales to design and administer a survey to gain an understanding of how the organisation has been performing against its socio-economic targets since its establishment in August 2017.

Two separate surveys were designed and then administered in December 2020. The Landholder Survey; designed for landholders who have an in-perpetuity or term conservation agreement with the BCT (including pre-2017 agreements), and the Program Participant Survey; designed for landholders who made an application to participate in a BCT program (since establishment in 2017), but who withdrew at some stage or were unsuccessful in their application.

The survey was designed to investigate landholder experiences across five broad themes: program administration, social benefits and considerations, economic benefits and considerations, biodiversity values and motivations, and demographics.

Key findings include:

- 89% of respondents’ motivations for entering into an agreement were based heavily on their belief that landholders have a responsibility to conserve biodiversity. Overall respondents feel good about participating in private land conservation, feel like they are part of something larger than themselves, and that their efforts reflect the values of people they are close to.
- Over 60% of landholders who receive annual payments agreed that signing an agreement with the BCT had diversified their income, and that the conservation area contributes to the profitability of their property.
- The majority of respondents perceived that BCT staff act with integrity (81%), are helpful (79%) and are competent (78%), and generally found BCT communication materials enjoyable to receive, easy to understand and useful.

The BCT will use the findings of these surveys to inform business processes moving forward and will conduct a similar survey every three years.



Partnering with the Australian Museum on FrogID

Do you have frogs on your property? Frogs are excellent indicators of a healthy ecosystem and are also one of the most threatened groups of animals on the planet.

To support the ongoing monitoring and protection of frogs in NSW, the BCT has entered a six-month partnership with the Australian Museum (AM) on their flagship citizen science project, FrogID.

To participate in FrogID, all you need to do is [download the free app](#) on your phone or tablet, create an account and find, record and match the frog calls you are hearing on your property.

To launch the partnership, the BCT and AM co-hosted a webinar during the AM's FrogID Week in November, featuring a presentation from AM Amphibian & Reptile Curator, Dr Jodi Rowley about monitoring for frog and ecosystem health on your land. If you missed out, you can watch a recording of the event by visiting the [BCT YouTube channel](#).



For more info about FrogID, visit www.frogid.net.au.

Stay tuned for more frog-based activities and events in early 2022!

New BCT publications and resources

The biodiversity stewardship agreement (BSA) application process can be complex for landholders, stakeholders and contractors alike. We have now published a series of communications products to assist with understanding the different stages of the BSA process. This includes an online version of the BSA landholder guide, a process infographic, a comprehensive guide to submitting a BSA, and a guide to engaging an accredited assessor for the process. Visit our resources tab on the BCT website to view these and other useful resources.

End of year shutdown

The BCT offices will be closed from **Monday 27 December 2021 - Friday 7 January 2022** in line with the NSW Government shutdown period. If you have any questions during this time, please send an email to info@bct.nsw.gov.au or leave a message at 1300 992 688 and our staff will be in touch as soon as they are back on deck.

We wish you a wonderful summer break and look forward to continuing to work with you to grow the private land conservation network across the state in the new year.

TOP

Green and golden bell frog
on a conservation area.
Joel Stibbard / BCT

RIGHT

Approaching storm on a
site visit in Western NSW.
Tiff Mason / BCT





Your stories

Cedar Creek Wombat Rescue, Wombat Hospital and Wildlife Refuge

Some 40 years ago, Roz and Kev Holme recognised the plight of the bare-nosed wombat. The loss of habitat, road hazards, and debilitating sarcoptic mange have all contributed to the steady decline of the common or bare-nosed wombat (*Vombatus ursinus*).

Roz and Kev began this journey in earnest when they became aware of how many local wombats were affected and dying from sarcoptic mange. Roz began studying ways in which wombats with sarcoptic mange could be treated and saved from a slow, horrible death.

It started with a few calls from locals letting them know when a wombat was seen that appeared to have mange. They would treat as many as they could and attempted to educate the public. It has grown into a herculean effort where they travel many kilometres and treat wombats of all ages, sizes and stages of disease or that have been injured in other ways. Animals that would have died if left untreated are given a chance to recover and continue to help maintain the population.

In the past, few people would attempt to rehabilitate any wombat that was much bigger than about 10kg, as they can be difficult to handle. Many sub-adult as well as adult wombats have been successfully treated by Cedar Creek Wombat Rescue for a variety of illness such as vehicular trauma, dog attack or mange and released back into their home range.

Cedar Creek Wombat Rescue, Wombat Hospital and Wildlife Refuge is dedicated to rescuing not just orphaned joey wombats but also sub-adults and adults that are in need of medical care whether it be from accident, injury or mange. Along with wombats, they care for many native species with the focus being on animals that are in need of more than routine care to get them to the point of release. Roz was born and bred into wildlife care and is also a trained vet nurse, enabling her to take on many animals with illness or injuries that may have otherwise been euthanised.

In 2015 Roz was awarded a Pride of Australia Medal for Volunteer of the Year for the Environment. After having spent so long rescuing and rehabilitating native wildlife, the work often goes unnoticed – so it's great to see her being rewarded for her efforts!

Through the generous support and dedication of Sophie Brenton & volunteer vet Robin Crisman, Roz and Kev now run Australia's only dedicated Wombat Hospital.

The facility is incredibly busy and are often low on funds to treat, feed and provide ongoing care for the wombats while they are nursed back to health for release. Check out the Instagram or Facebook page to meet some of the current residents and get the latest updates.

Roz and Kev have recently expressed interest to the BCT to permanently protect their 77-hectare wildlife refuge with an in-perpetuity agreement.

We look forward to visiting Roz and Kev at the Wombat Hospital to discuss this further!



IMAGES SUPPLIED BY
Roz and Kev Holme.

Over 60 hectares of snow gum woodlands protected and secured



ABOVE
Tom and Martina with Pepper.
Supplied by Martina Shelley.

Managing over 1,000 hectares of grasslands and woodlands near Bungendore is a balancing act for Tom Gordon and Martina Shelley, who have their fingers in many environmental pies. Their property has been in Tom's family for five generations now, and has seen a range of land uses from Merino wool to Angus steers, but Tom says that there's always been an environmental mindset in the family, and a desire to maintain an ecological balance.

Tom and Martina still run small Angus steer enterprise, alongside a growing ecotourism business, and have been successful in a range of environmental grants, including a Greening Australia conservation grant for the threatened glossy black-cockatoo. They have also been involved in a local initiative with the Mullon Institute's neighbouring properties to repair and conserve the ecologically and culturally significant Mulloon Creek Catchment, an initiative that has been recognised for its scale by the UNSECO World Heritage Organisation.

Perhaps most notably, Tom and Martina are heavily invested in supporting the Aboriginal community. Situated on the Great Dividing Range, their property lies in the junction of three Aboriginal Nations - the Yuin, Ngunawal and Gundungurra language groups, and thus sits in an historically important trade and communication route between the coast, the tablelands and the mountains.

Tom and Martina are keen to facilitate ongoing engagement with these Nations and the wider Aboriginal community, and have begun the process through co-hosting a series of Cultural educational workshops on caring for Country with Cultural burning practitioners, and with Traditional Elders working on landscape rehydration in early 2022.

A farming friend in Bungendore told Tom and Martina about the BCT, and they saw an ad in the local paper about the Snow Gum Woodlands and Grasslands (north) conservation tender in October 2020. They decided to express their interest for a parcel of bushland on their property. The resulting BCT site visit revealed over 60 hectares of threatened snow gum grassy woodland. They were successful in the tender and signed their conservation agreement in early 2021.

The annual payments which Tom and Martina are now receiving as part of their agreement will go towards wildlife friendly fencing and fence adjustments, and wombat infrastructure like wombat flaps, amongst other conservation actions. They have also set out specific exclusion zones from the agreement to accommodate their possible plans for a future ecotourism glamping venture. Above all, they see the payments as a great way to diversify their income, and to 'spread the risk' of impact from unforeseen environmental and economic hits.

On receiving annual payments for the agreement, Martina says they will create a sense of security.

"It's a great feeling, knowing that our snow gum environment will always be protected now with the support of the BCT, and we're thrilled that they can reward landholders who care for their country!"

Outside the conservation area, the property will continue to run cattle, host Aboriginal Cultural Burning workshops, and Tom and Martina are keen to pursue new ventures in environmental education. Their son, Oscar, who has returned from working on a large cattle station in the QLD Gulf country, has decided to help with farm management, and will add the expertise of Southern Cross University's regenerative agriculture degree, which he is currently studying. Martina and Tom are thrilled to know that their conservation legacy will continue in the family.

Wargam Lakes adds another conservation agreement to its belt

A mix of flat grazing country, wetlands, native bushlands and grasslands in the Murray Riverina region, Wargam Lakes is an important home to a variety of species, including the plains-wanderer and southern bell frog - both endangered in NSW.

Will Hooke owns Wargam Lakes with his wife, brother's family, and parents.

The family has now seen five generations of their Merino enterprise, Willera Merinos, and has always taken an interest in exploring better ways to manage and improve their land. This interest lends itself to a range of sustainability and ecological initiatives, especially those which help build a stronger market for their wool and meat sales.

Wargam Lakes has been an important part of the NSW Government's Saving our Species Southern Bell Frog conservation project since late 2017.



The lakes are a major breeding site for the threatened southern bell frog, supporting possibly the largest known population in that area, with hundreds of these large frogs heard calling from the lakes each spring and summer. To support southern bell frog breeding, and maintain the site as a refuge, water for the environment has been delivered to the lakes since 2017 in a partnership with DPIE’s Saving our Species Program (SoS), Environmental Water and Floodplains Program, and Coleambally Irrigation Co-operative. These sites are part of the broader Coleambally SoS Local Area Management Plan area and contribute to the network of wetlands that are targeted for the conservation of southern bell frog across southern NSW.

Will was therefore already well-versed in partnering with the NSW Government for conservation when he successfully applied for the BCT’s South West Slopes conservation tender in late 2018. The resulting in-perpetuity conservation agreement and annual management payments have proven worthwhile for Will and his family. They’ve used the payments to support the control of pest species such as pigs, cats, foxes and boxthorn, amongst other conservation actions. Most notably, the family has discovered that supporting biodiversity conservation on their land has given them access to a market that is prepared to pay a premium price for these values. They have since been accredited by The New Zealand Merino Company’s ZQRX, a regenerative agriculture index for ‘ethical wool’, which has helped them break into this premium market.

The ZQRX system scores each property in a variety of environmental, social and animal welfare categories, and with the conservation agreement in place along with the other important conservation work onsite, Wargam Lakes received a biodiversity score of nine out of ten.

Expressing an interest in the region’s most recent BCT conservation tender to protect the plains-wanderer was an easy decision for Will and his family. They had already been involved in existing efforts to conserve the endangered ground-dwelling bird, such as those run by Local Land Services and SoS, so they were familiar with the ideal conditions and grazing requirements of plains-wanderer grassland habitat. However, despite the success of the first conservation agreement, Will was still cautious of entering another in-perpetuity agreement. After weighing up the risk, the family decided to apply for a 15-year term agreement through the tender, for which they were successful.

On considering the risk of getting involved in any conservation opportunity, Will says:

“Environmental farming is another source of income, but not all options work for everyone. You need to identify the offers that suit you best.”

Will’s first priority is the family business, but he has enjoyed learning about the biodiversity values on his farm. He will always look for ways to improve the condition of his land – especially the pursuits that diversify their income and improve marketability.

BELOW AND PREVIOUS
Merino flock and gate sign at Wargam Lakes. Supplied by Will Hooke.



RIGHT
Southern bell frog, at Wargam Lakes. Photo by Helen Waudby, DPIE.

TOP
Environmental water at Wargam Lakes. Photo by Carmen Amos, DPIE.



Properties for sale

The BCT revolving fund is always looking for properties with high biodiversity value to purchase. To get in touch, please contact our Property Investments and Partnership Manager, Chris Perceval, on 0437 147 611, or contact our office on 02 9995 6606.



Wilga

\$1,500,000
NORTHERN NSW

Located a short drive west of Bingara and central to Moree, Inverell and Narrabri

- | Conservation / agriculture
- | Well set up grazing property
- | Horton River frontage



Forest Ridge

\$1,350,000
SYDNEY-HUNTER NSW

Ten minutes to Gloucester

- | Rural lifestyle / hobby farm
- | Gwydir River frontage
- | Short drive to Barrington Tops

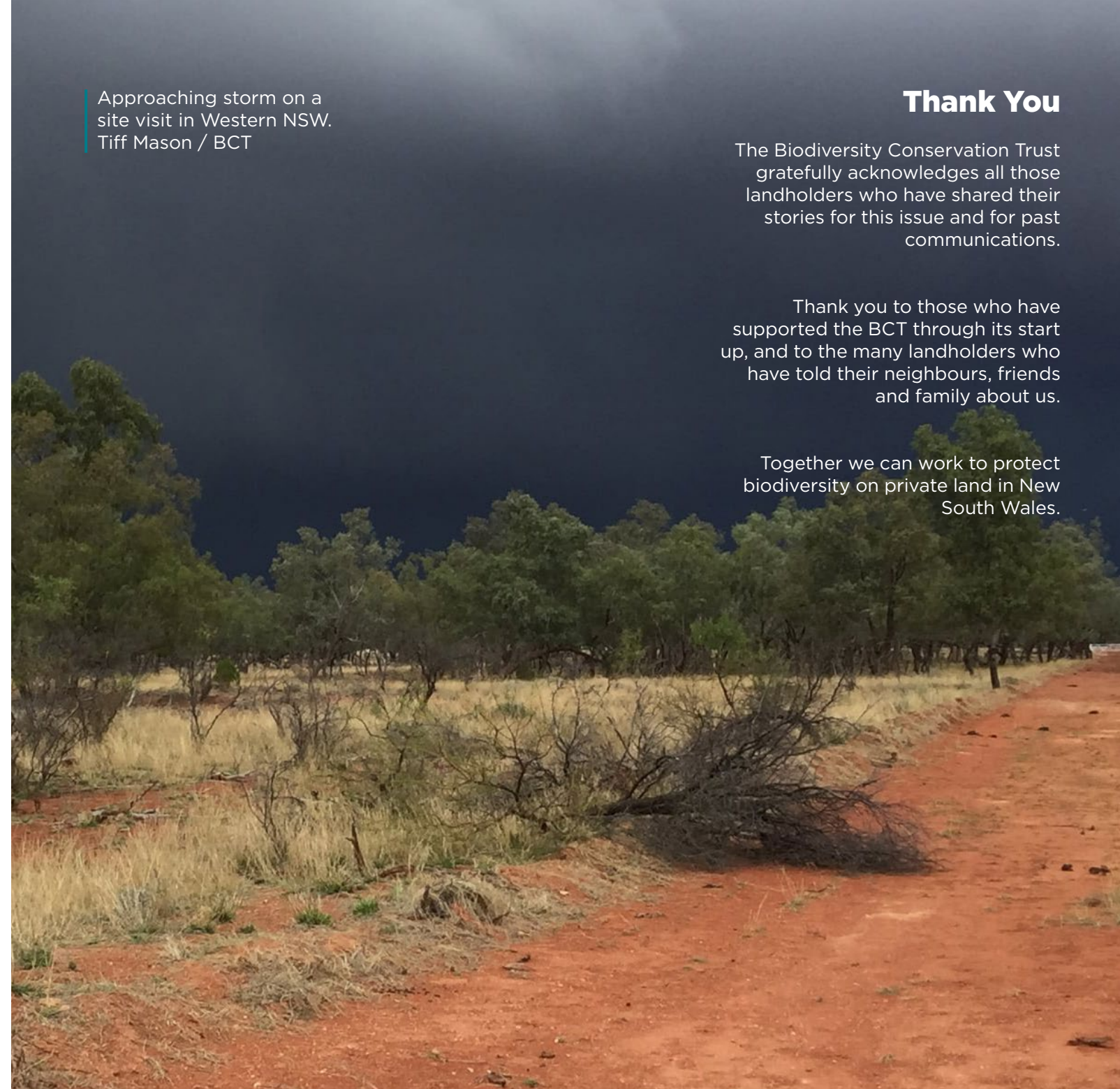
Approaching storm on a site visit in Western NSW.
Tiff Mason / BCT

Thank You

The Biodiversity Conservation Trust gratefully acknowledges all those landholders who have shared their stories for this issue and for past communications.

Thank you to those who have supported the BCT through its start up, and to the many landholders who have told their neighbours, friends and family about us.

Together we can work to protect biodiversity on private land in New South Wales.



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