



Biodiversity
Conservation
Trust

Biodiversity Conservation Trust Conservation Partners Program

Program Implementation Plan | 2021 – 2025

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Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust acknowledges the Traditional Custodians throughout NSW and recognise their ongoing connection to land, waters, biodiversity, and culture.

We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and commit to genuinely, collaboratively engage and partner with Aboriginal people in the delivery of our private land conservation programs.

Private land within NSW often contains various forms of significant sites and features within the landscape.

Aboriginal Cultural Values are connected to Country, including waterways, mountains, wetlands, floodplains, hills, sandhills, rock outcrops and the biodiversity within these geological features.

Many of these features are known to have cultural value and contain culturally significant sites. These elements of the landscape can be associated with Dreaming stories and cultural learning.

1. Introduction

1.1. Private Land Conservation

Much of the world's threatened biodiversity is found outside the public reserve system. Efforts to secure threatened species in the wild and to maintain our invaluable biodiversity into the future must involve private land conservation.

Private land conservation allows a landscape-scale approach to protecting biodiversity and increases resilience to the impacts of climate change by connecting protected areas and providing pathways for the movement of species.

There is growing international recognition of the critical role that private land plays in the long-term conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Private land conservation contributes to meeting our national and international obligations for the strategic growth of protected areas and the long-term conservation of biodiversity, including targets under the international Convention on Biological Diversity and Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

The BCT is currently managing 2,151 private land conservation (PLC) agreements with landholders over more than 2.266 million hectares. This represents over 2.8 per cent of NSW.

This is a good start.

However, more than 70 per cent of the biodiversity of NSW is located on private land, so private land conservation needs to play a much bigger role if we are to achieve good biodiversity conservation outcomes and achieve a comprehensive, adequate and representative national reserve system.

Many threatened plants and animals have much or all of their habitat on privately owned land. More than a third (36%) of priority sites for threatened species in NSW occur primarily on private land and 53% of 'critical' habitat required to support highly mobile threatened fauna is also found on private land.

Biodiversity in NSW continues to be under significant pressure from land use change. Private land conservation has a vital role in protecting biodiversity, improving landscape connectivity, and building resilience to climate change. For example, 93% of critically endangered ecological communities in the Sydney Basin and southwest slopes occur within privately managed lands.

For many landholders, the conservation of biodiversity and native vegetation is already an integral part of their land management, undertaken out of a sense of stewardship and altruism, contributing to personal wellbeing and protecting the aesthetic value of their property. Benefits of private land conservation include material welfare, security of communities, resilience of local economies and human health.

Private land conservation has become a mainstream idea – a way of landholders, communities and governments working together to achieve conservation outcomes that deliver long term benefits to the environment and to supporting productive landscapes.

1.2. About the BCT

The BCT's purpose is to partner with landholders to enhance and conserve biodiversity. Our vision is a network of vibrant private land conservation areas protecting our unique and diverse plants and animals.

The Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT) was established in August 2017, as part of the NSW Government's biodiversity conservation reforms, to encourage and support landholders across NSW to participate in private land conservation. The BCT's core business is private land conservation. Landholders can apply to enter agreements through a range of delivery mechanisms offered by the BCT.

The NSW Government has committed \$70 million per annum ongoing (escalated with inflation) to support the BCT deliver its programs across NSW. The Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy 2018, as developed by the Minister for Environment and Heritage, guides the BCT's investment of these funds in private land conservation in NSW.

The five and twenty year targets within the Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy 2018 are:

- By 2023, private land conservation agreements will protect examples of 30 NSW Landscapes that are either not represented within, or are inadequately protected in, the protected area system in 2017
- By 2023, diversified incomes streams will improve the financial sustainability of participating landholders relative to similar local businesses
- By 2038, private land conservation agreements will protect examples of 90 NSW Landscapes that are either not represented within, or are inadequately protected in, the protected area system in 2017
- By 2038, diversified income and investment streams will improve the financial sustainability of regional and rural communities

The Conservation Partners Program has made a significant contribution to the BCT conservation outcomes to date. As of 31 December 2021, the BCT and landholders have entered 160 conservation agreements in the Conservation Partners Program covering over more than 33,717 hectares, including 37 under-represented NSW Landscapes since August 2017.

During this time, the BCT has also supported 305 landholders with Conservation Partner Grants, providing \$5.6 million to support conservation management activities for 63,100 hectares.

Up to date private land conservation outcomes can be found on the BCT web site at: [Private land conservation outcomes | BCT \(nsw.gov.au\)](#).

2. Conservation Partners Program

2.1. Objectives

The purpose of the Conservation Partners Program is to encourage and support landowners to participate in private land conservation and increase the network of private protected areas in NSW. The program is available to eligible landholders throughout NSW who wish to voluntarily enter agreements to protect biodiversity on their property.

BCT regions may accept expressions of interest from landholders seeking to participate in the Conservation Partners Program at any time or may specify a period in each year when expressions of interest are received.

Landholders who enter partnership conservation agreements are eligible for Conservation Partners Grants, which provide financial assistance to landholders to manage conservation areas and improve biodiversity values. Participants in the Conservation Partners Program can also receive advice and assistance through the BCT's Landholder Support Program and may be able to access tax and rate concessions.

Partnership conservation agreements contribute to national and international efforts to protect biodiversity. Private protected areas established by in-perpetuity conservation agreements contribute to the National Reserve System. The National Reserve System is the cornerstone of national efforts to protect terrestrial biodiversity, to reduce negative impacts of climate change on biodiversity, and to meet Australia's international obligations under the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) and the [Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework](#).

The Conservation Partners Program also supports landholders who are interested in protecting biodiversity on their property but are not ready to enter an in-perpetuity agreement. These landholders may consider a wildlife refuge agreement or participating in the Land for Wildlife or Wildlife Land Trust programs.

2.2. Delivery mechanisms

The Conservation Partners Program offers four delivery mechanisms for interested landholders:

Partnership conservation agreements

Landholders seeking to permanently protect biodiversity and native vegetation may apply for a partnership conservation agreement. These agreements are in-perpetuity and registered on the title of the land, ensuring ongoing protection under subsequent landholders. BCT regions may accept expressions of interest for partnership conservation agreements at any time or may specify a period in each year when expressions of interest are received. Landholders who enter a partnership conservation agreement are supported by grants for conservation activities.

Wildlife Refuge Agreements

Landholders seeking to protect the biodiversity and native vegetation on their property but who do not wish to enter a permanent agreement may apply for a wildlife refuge agreement. This can be a good option for landholders wanting to explore how they can become involved in conservation and partner with

the BCT. The BCT may refer landholders preferring a non-binding conservation program to the Land for Wildlife or Wildlife Land Trust programs. Landholders who enter wildlife refuge agreements are supported by grants for conservation activities.

Conservation Partner Grants

Conservation Partner Grants offer financial support to landholders who have a partnership conservation agreement or wildlife refuge agreement to manage and enhance the ecological values within their conservation area. These grants are available to other partner agreements managed by the BCT and landholders registered with the Wildlife Land Trust. BCT regions may accept expressions of interest for grants at any time or may specify a period in each year when expressions of interest for Conservation Partner Grants are received. The BCT also supports the Community Environment Network to make grant funding available for eligible landholders who participate in [Land for Wildlife](#).

Revolving Fund

The revolving fund involves the BCT buying properties with important biodiversity values, protecting those values with an in-perpetuity partnership conservation agreement, and selling the property to a buyer interested in managing the agreement. Proceeds are re-invested to purchase more properties with important biodiversity values. Landholders who purchase properties from the revolving fund with a partnership conservation agreement are supported by grants for conservation activities.

3. Complementing government programs

The Conservation Partners Program is developed to complement government conservation programs.

3.1. The National Reserve System

Private protected areas established by partnership conservation agreements contribute to Australia's National Reserve System. The National Reserve System is the network of public, Indigenous, and privately protected areas.

The National Reserve System is the cornerstone of national efforts to protect terrestrial biodiversity and the key strategy for reducing negative impacts of climate change on biodiversity. It is underpinned by a scientific framework, to develop a 'comprehensive, adequate and representative' system of protected areas, commonly referred to as the 'CAR' reserve system.

The goal of a comprehensive adequate and representative reserve system as endorsed by all Australian governments is reflected in Australia's *Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009 - 2030*, includes targets to:

- Build a comprehensive system of protected areas by protecting examples of at least 80 per cent of all regional ecosystems in each bioregion, with priority given to under-represented IBRA bioregions with less than 10% protected.
- Build a representative system of protected areas by protecting examples of at least 80 per cent of all regional ecosystems in each subregion.

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy (BCIS) has targets to progress a comprehensive, adequate and representative protected area system. The BCIS also progresses adequacy by identifying priority investment areas which prioritise NSW Landscapes that have less than 17% of their total area in permanent protection. The BCIS also includes a specific conservation priority to conserve NSW Landscapes that will result in building a comprehensive, adequate and representative protected area system.

The BCT Conservation Partners Program supports NSW efforts to build the protected area system by offering in-perpetuity conservation agreements and providing financial support to manage ecological values. The BCT provides landholder support and ecological monitoring to support effective management of these privately protected areas.

3.2. Saving our Species

Saving our Species (SoS) is NSW's flagship threatened species conservation program. It aims to increase the number of threatened species that are secure in the wild in New South Wales for 100 years and control the key threats facing our threatened plants and animals.

There are currently more than 980 threatened species and over 100 threatened ecological communities in NSW. SoS staff and partners are working to save species and ecological communities through:

- initiating projects that improve habitat and control threats
- monitoring the effectiveness of these projects and the response of species and ecological communities to management activities

- supporting conservation projects in national parks and on private land.

The Conservation Partners Program supports SoS by offering long term protection of sites in SoS project areas through in-perpetuity conservation agreements. Conservation Partner Grants are also available to eligible landholders to undertake management actions identified by SoS projects for site managed species.

3.3. National Parks Reserve System

NSW has the world's second oldest national park, Royal National Park, and since its establishment in 1879, over seven million hectares are now protected and managed within NSW National Parks. This network consists of some 870 parks and covers close to 9% of the state.

The NSW Government is working to build a national parks system which is comprehensive, adequate and representative. The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy highlights the importance of the BCT working closely with the National Parks and Wildlife Service to build a complementary protected area system across public and private land. The BCT will consider opportunities to strengthen this complementarity as the NSW National Parks Reserve System priorities are developed.

4. Partnership Conservation Agreements

4.1. About partnership conservation agreements

Partnership conservation agreements provide permanent protection for important biodiversity and native vegetation. These agreements are in-perpetuity and registered on the title of the land, ensuring ongoing protection under subsequent landholders.

These agreements grow the network of privately protected areas in NSW and contribute towards building a comprehensive, adequate and representative National Reserve System. Landholders who enter partnership conservation agreements join a community of other landholders who have entered permanent agreements under programs previously administered by the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) and the Nature Conservation Trust (NCT). Together these landholders are contributing to the long-term resilience of our unique biodiversity.

4.2. Partnership conservation agreement applications

BCT regions may accept expressions of interest for partnership conservation agreements at any time or may specify a period in each year when expressions of interest are received.

The BCT publishes a *Landholder Guide* which outlines minimum eligibility requirements for partnership conservation agreements.

The BCT may prioritise eligible applications, having regard to targets, priorities and investment principles under the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy and the aims within the BCT Business Plan.

The BCT may also prioritise and waitlist eligible applications, having regard to available resources, strategic campaigns and the timing of other BCT programs. The BCT runs a number of offers under the Conservation Management Program and Biodiversity Offset Program each year and available resources are allocated to deliver outcomes under all BCT programs.

4.3. Strategic campaigns

The BCT may undertake strategic campaigns to increase the uptake of partnership conservation agreements. These campaigns may involve targeted engagement of landholders in localities where there are priority conservation investment areas and/or priority conservation assets and contribute to the targets under the Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy and the aims within the BCT Business Plan.

The BCT may also consider strategic campaigns where there is high alignment with the investment principles in the Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy, the aims of the BCT Business Plan, and/or to deliver emerging government biodiversity priorities, such as private land conservation priorities for koala conservation in NSW.

Koala conservation priorities in the NSW Koala Strategy

The [NSW Koala Strategy](#) was announced in April 2022 with funding of \$193.3 million (to 2026) to help meet the goal of doubling the number of koalas in New South Wales by 2050.

BCT has received funding from the NSW Government under the NSW Koala Strategy to support *private* landholders with priority koala habitat to enter into permanent conservation agreements.

The BCT is working in partnership with other delivery organisations, and may consider targeted strategic campaigns to increase the uptake of partnership conservation agreements to protect priority koala habitat.

4.4. Support for landholders with partnership conservation agreements

Landholders who enter partnership conservation agreements receive the following financial and technical support:

- [Conservation Partner Grants](#) - Landholders with permanent conservation agreements (entered with the BCT or managed under previous programs administered by the Office of Environment and Heritage and Nature Conservation Trust of NSW) may apply for grants over three years. These grants are available to support landholders manage and enhance the ecological values within their agreement area. The amount available is outlined in the [Conservation Partners Grants: Guide for Applicants](#).
- [Rate and tax concessions](#) - Landholders who enter a partnership conservation agreement may be eligible for a number of rate and tax concessions. Some of these concessions also apply to landholders with permanent conservation agreements under previous programs of the Office of Environment and Heritage and the Nature Conservation Trust of NSW. Generally, landholders with a partnership conservation agreement will be eligible for local government rate relief and may be eligible for certain land tax and income tax concessions. The taxation circumstances of each landholder is unique and the BCT has developed the [Landholder guide on taxation issues](#) to support landholders and their financial advisers to identify any available rate and taxation concessions.
- [Landholder Support Program](#) - Landholders with partnership conservation agreements have access to ongoing support from BCT staff and ecologists to problem solve, share challenges and successes. The BCT develops ecological and management guidelines to assist landholders to manage their conservation areas. Landholders are also supported to link in with groups and organisations involved in conservation, and the BCT works with partners to develop workshops and field days for landholders.

5. Wildlife Refuge Agreements

5.1. About wildlife refuge agreements

Wildlife refuge agreements provide an opportunity for landholders wanting to explore how they can become involved in conservation and partner with BCT, but who do not wish to enter a permanent agreement.

Wildlife refuge agreements may be registered on the title of the land. However, an existing or future landholder may request to revoke the agreement at any time.

5.2. Wildlife refuge agreement applications

BCT regions may accept expressions of interest for a wildlife refuge agreement at any time or may specify a period in each year when expressions of interest are received. The BCT may also refer landholders who submit an expression of interest for a wildlife refuge agreement to the Land for Wildlife or Wildlife Land Trust non-binding conservation programs.

The BCT publishes a *Landholder Guide* outlining minimum eligibility requirements for wildlife refuge agreements.

The BCT may prioritise eligible applications, having regard to targets, priorities and investment principles under the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy and the aims within the BCT Business Plan.

The BCT may also prioritise and waitlist eligible applications, having regard to available resources, strategic campaigns and the timing of other BCT programs. The BCT runs a number of offers under the Conservation Management Program and Biodiversity Offset Program each year and available resources are allocated to deliver outcomes under all BCT programs.

The BCT will prioritise applications for permanent protection, such as conservation agreements and biodiversity stewardship agreements, over applications for wildlife refuge agreements. This approach is to ensure that BCT resources are aligned with the investment principles and delivering targets of the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy. It also helps focus available resources to increase privately protected areas in NSW and build a comprehensive, adequate and representative National Reserve System.

5.3. Support for landholders with wildlife refuge agreements

Landholders who enter wildlife refuge agreements receive the following financial and technical support:

- [Conservation Partner Grants](#) - Landholders with wildlife refuge agreements, or landholders who are registered with the Wildlife Land Trust program, may apply for grants of up to \$2,000 per year for three years. These grants are available to support landholders manage and enhance the ecological

values within their agreement area. The BCT supports the Community Environment Network to provide similar grants to landholders who are registered with Land for Wildlife.

- Landholder Support Program – Landholders with wildlife refuge agreements have access to ongoing support from BCT staff and ecologists to problem solve, share challenges and successes. The BCT develops ecological management guidelines to assist landholders manage their agreement areas. Landholders are also supported to link in with groups and organisations involved in conservation, and the BCT works with partners to develop workshops and field days for landholders.

6. Conservation Partner Grants

6.1. About Conservation Partner Grants

The purpose of the Conservation Partners Grants is to support eligible landholders to manage and enhance the ecological values within their agreement area.

Conservation Partner Grants provide up to three years of financial support for conservation management activities. The level of grant funding is outlined on the BCT website, with higher amounts available for landholders with permanent agreements.

Successful landholders enter a grant agreement with the BCT. Landholders may be eligible to apply for another grant at the conclusion of the first three-year agreement, depending on demonstrated need and availability of funds.

Conservation Partner Grants are available to support landholders with the following types of agreements:

- in-perpetuity conservation agreements established under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* or the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*
- in-perpetuity Trust Agreements established under the *Nature Conservation Trust Act 2001*
- in-perpetuity or termed Registered Property Agreements established under the *Native Vegetation Conservation Act 1997*
- wildlife refuge agreement established under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* or Wildlife Refuges established under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*
- participants in the [Wildlife Land Trust](#) (Humane Society International) program in NSW.

The BCT also supports the Community Environment Network to make grant funding available for eligible landholders who participate in [Land for Wildlife](#).

Landholders who have a conservation agreement with the BCT and are receiving annual management payments or have a 'set aside' conservation agreement under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* as part of compliance outcomes under the *Native Vegetation Act 2003*, or have agreements established for the purpose of securing a biodiversity offset, are generally not eligible for a Conservation Partner Grant.

6.2. Conservation Partner Grant applications

BCT regions may accept expressions of interest from eligible landholders at any time or may specify a period in each year when expressions of interest for grants are received.

Eligible landholders may choose to submit a developed work proposal and costings, or request support and advice from the BCT to develop a proposal.

Grant proposals are assessed having regard to:

- demonstrated need for the conservation management activity – such as the activity being identified in the agreement or associated management planning, or activities are required to address emerging conservation management issues
- good value for money - demonstrating reasonable cost for comparable activities, and/or aligned to BCT cost benchmarks where applicable

- consistency with BCT ecological management and technical guidelines, or proposed method is technically feasible (i.e. the approach to undertaking the activity is sound and it will deliver results to maintain or improve the conservation values of the property).

The BCT may prioritise and waitlist assessment of grant proposals having regard to available resources, and the timing of other BCT programs. The BCT has a number of offerings under the Conservation Partners Program, the Conservation Management Program and Biodiversity Offset Program each year and available resources are allocated to deliver outcomes under all BCT programs.

6.3. Activities supported by Conservation Partner Grants

Conservation Partner Grants provide financial support for conservation management activities such as:

- assisted regeneration and weed control (as part of assisted regeneration strategy)
- fencing to secure conservation area, control grazing from livestock, to enable restoration of native vegetation
- introduced pest animal control
- revegetation (including supplementary planting)
- habitat restoration—such as installation of nest boxes and artificial hollows, or additional ground cover layer and habitat structure
- Saving our Species management actions
- other maintenance—such as repairs to existing feature required to maintain conservation values
- native vegetation restoration planning to guide assisted regeneration or revegetation
- assistance with project / grant management by third party(s)

The BCT may also provide additional assistance to landholders affected by natural disasters such as floods and bushfires.

The types of eligible conservation activities, including BCT standards and requirements, are set out in the [Conservation Partners Grants: Guide for Applicants](#).

7. Working with third party organisations

BCT may work with third party organisations to deliver the objectives of the Conservation Partners Program. Third party organisations could include non-government environmental organisations, philanthropists, private sector and other government agencies. Working together may enable BCT and third party organisations to leverage investment to deliver mutually aligned objectives and maximise biodiversity outcomes.

Establishing partnership conservation agreements

BCT may work with third party organisations who wish to secure biodiversity outcomes by establishing new partnership conservation agreements with landholders.

The BCT will publish a policy outlining the principles for working with third party organisations, including clear alignment of objectives, provision of ongoing support for participating landholders, application of BCT standards, and processes and fee for service arrangements.

Support for entry level programs

The BCT recognises the role of entry-level non-statutory options for landholders to ‘step into’ conservation. The BCT may provide financial and other support to complement entry level conservation programs where the programs align with the purpose of the BCT. The BCT may also enter an agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with providers of entry level programs such as Land for Wildlife and Humane Society International’s Wildlife Land Trust, to support landholders who wish to explore how they can become involved in conservation but who do not wish to enter a permanent agreement.

The Land for Wildlife program is a non-statutory property registration scheme that encourages landholders to make a commitment to protect and conserve wildlife and its habitats on their land. The BCT currently supports the Community Environment Network (CEN) to provide grants to landholders registered in the Land for Wildlife program to assist manage ecological values. The BCT has also entered a MoU with CEN to support the coordination and delivery of Land for Wildlife in NSW.

Wildlife Land Trust is a national and international network of sanctuaries on private lands that is dedicated to wildlife and habitat protection. The BCT also entered a MoU with Humane Society International to optimise landholder conservation options and to collaborate to establish conservation agreements on eligible Wildlife Land Trust properties. As part of the MoU, the BCT provides access to BCT Conservation Partner Grants for landholders in NSW who participate in Wildlife Land Trust.

8. Conservation agreements for development obligations

The NSW Biodiversity Offsets Scheme provides the framework for the offsetting of unavoidable impacts on biodiversity from development. The primary mechanism for securing biodiversity offsets in NSW is a Biodiversity Stewardship Agreement.

There are some limited circumstances in which conservation agreements are specified in development consent conditions or planning proposals. This is generally where projects do not trigger the Biodiversity Offset Scheme or are subject to legacy conditions of consent. Conservation agreements entered into under these limited circumstances are referred to as 'offset conservation agreements' and are not part of the Conservation Partners Program.

The BCT has developed the [Guidelines for use of offset conservation agreements](#) outlining the circumstances where the BCT may offer conservation agreements associated with development, including requirements such as size, biodiversity values and configuration. The guidelines include a schedule of fees that cover processing of applications and ongoing technical support for landholders.

While offset conservation agreements are not within the scope of the Conservation Partners Program, BCT may provide Conservation Partner Grants to landholders with offset conservation agreements, provided the landholder is: (a) not the proponent who is required to satisfy the consent condition; and (b) able to demonstrate they are not receiving funds for managing biodiversity offset obligations or development consent conditions.