


The Great Eastern Ranges

Bushfire Recovery Program





The devastating 2019-2020 bushfires required a coordinated and complementary recovery effort across eastern Australia. The Great Eastern Ranges Initiative was in a unique position to respond through a staged approach that reacted quickly to the immediate threat, whilst ensuring the long-term restoration, resilience and connectivity of our land, wildlife and communities post-fire.

The Great Eastern Ranges Initiative brings people together to protect, connect and restore healthy landscapes over 3,600km from Tasmania through to far north Queensland. We work with our partners and community to stem the loss of nature, provide natural solutions to the climate crisis, protect precious resources and ensure thriving, resilient landscapes for wildlife and people.

A collaborative response to the bushfire crisis


Since 2007, the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative (GER) has been delivering innovative solutions to tackle some of our greatest environmental challenges. Challenges like the 2019-2020 bushfire crisis.

The devastating bushfires impacted our communities, livelihoods, wildlife and landscapes on an unprecedented scale. Following a prolonged period of drought, the fires ripped through 18 million hectares of eastern Australia, killed and displaced an estimated three billion animals and shattered regional communities, resulting in the loss of 34 people and destruction of thousands of homes and buildings.

With our established network of regionally based partnerships spanning the length of eastern Australia and involving more than 250 organisations, GER was in a unique position to respond rapidly post-fire. Since early 2020 we have been rolling out a series of collaborative and complementary projects in priority locations that combine to deliver impact at the whole-of-landscape, population and ecosystem scale.

Our integrated and locally targeted projects serve to:

1. Bring people together to protect, connect and restore native habitat and support wildlife in areas which have burnt, while helping to conserve and improve the quality of habitat in unburnt areas.
2. Encourage and aid the natural recovery of our grasslands, woodlands and forests.
3. Support local economies by restoring the natural and cultural assets on which our tourism industry and livelihoods depend, and provide new opportunities for employment.
4. Improve the health and wellbeing of our communities, wildlife, landscapes and ecosystems and build their resilience (ability) to cope with the impacts of future natural disasters.
5. Encourage improved land and forest management to reduce the risk and severity of future catastrophic fires.
6. Provide integrated, long-term natural solutions to the climate and biodiversity crisis.



We use a targeted approach to select our focus landscapes, ensuring that resources are directed towards the highest priority sites whilst not being spread too thinly, to achieve maximum impact on the ground.

Focus landscapes

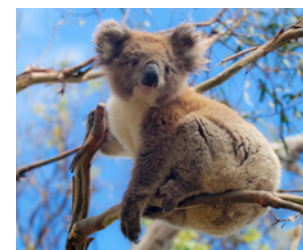
All landscapes are not equal in terms of their potential to improve the connectivity, health and resilience of eastern Australia. To assist in our selection of focus landscapes, GER does an initial desk-top analysis of restoration priorities based on three variables:

- The location of core habitats, mapped climate change corridors and other identified habitat connections.
- The presense of ‘hotspots’ (areas of high concentration) of focus wildlife species based on confirmed sighting records for the period 2010-2019.
- Landscapes identified by GER as priority areas for reconnection based on a combination of:
 - i. The presence of existing active organisations with capacity and interest in delivering collaborative programs.
 - ii. The opportunity to develop and test innovative approaches that contribute to enabling adaptation to climate change.
 - iii. The area’s environmental values (e.g. how unique the region is (regional distinctiveness) and the diversity of species found within it).

Priority sites, focus properties and corridors within these landscapes are informed by the results of bushfire intensity and post-fire recovery mapping and analyses, and further validated and refined through the assessment of individual sites.

Wildlife that benefit

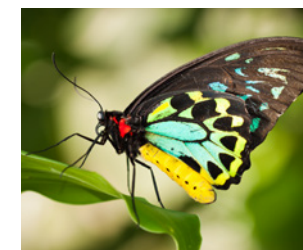
By protecting, connecting and restoring habitat at the continental scale, our bushfire recovery projects directly support a diverse range of mammals, birds, bats, reptiles and amphibians, whilst providing flow-on benefits to a host of other wildlife. Below are just some of the many common and threatened animals being helped and healed through the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative.



Koala



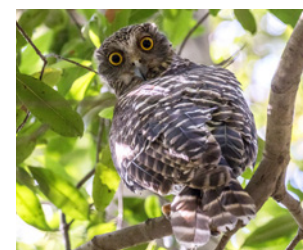
Spotted-tailed Quoll



Richmond Birdwing Butterfly



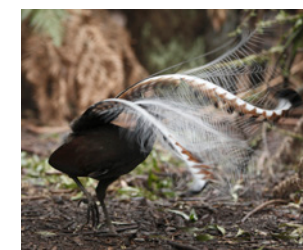
Wombat



Powerful Owl



Platypus



Superb Lyrebird



Sugar Glider

How you can help

Together with our partners, we have identified critical post-fire restoration and conservation projects, along with essential research and capacity-building activities that organisations and individuals can support.



Wildlife and habitat recovery

GER brings together the skills, knowledge and resources needed to support the recovery of fire affected wildlife and their habitat. Our targeted mix of on-ground activities are tailored to meet the unique needs of individual sites whilst connecting up across property boundaries and complementing other regional projects to create impact at the whole-of-landscape, population and ecosystem scale.

Creation of habitat: Over three hundred of our native mammals, birds and bats rely on the hollows that form in mature trees to nest, breed and shelter in; the same trees that were lost in high numbers during the 2019-2020 bushfires. We are working to create supplementary habitat, such as nest boxes and tree cut hollows, to replace these lost homes. Our projects also restore native plants to increase insect prey numbers and improve the health and diversity of habitat.

Restoration of feed areas: To increase the amount of food available for wildlife impacted by the fires, we are replanting priority feeding areas with a diverse mix of native trees, shrubs and grasses. These include high volume pollen and sap producing plants to support native wildlife such as greater gliders, koalas, grey-headed flying-foxes and honeyeaters. The revegetation techniques we employ include traditional hand planting and direct seeding as well as emerging, innovative methods such as seeding by aerial drones.

Encouraging natural regeneration: To assist the recovery of native wildlife and aid natural regeneration of their habitat (the recovery of vegetation through natural processes such as regrowth), we use a range of methods to strategically manage major threats to their survival, such as feral predators and weeds.

Facilitating wildlife movement: Like us, animals need to be able to move to survive. To facilitate the movement of species, GER is working to reverse habitat fragmentation by reconnecting key areas across private and public lands through the planting of locally appropriate shrubs and trees. The creation and enhancement of these 'wildlife corridors' will enable koalas and other forest-dependent native animals to move back into the burnt areas of the ranges as they recover, extend the amount of habitat available to them and enable species to adapt to climate change.

Wildlife and vegetation surveys: Our bushfire response work includes initial and ongoing monitoring of wildlife and habitat recovery through the use of traditional and novel techniques, including scent detection dogs, photo points, camera traps, audio recorders and drone surveys. As part of our post-fire recovery effort, GER is also supporting a large-scale research project led by Griffith University and the Australian National University to map and assess the fire footprint and post-fire recovery of the ranges' forests using satellite data in combination with citizen science surveys.



Creating more resilient landscapes

GER's bushfire recovery work focuses on strengthening the health and diversity of our landscapes to assist local communities and wildlife in the short term, while helping to protect these areas from future fire events. These activities include:

- Engaging and supporting landholders in multi-property planning and conservation efforts to restore and connect habitats and ecosystems across private and public land.
- Supporting local community groups, organisations and regional alliances through strategic planning, training and knowledge sharing.
- Two way knowledge sharing with local Aboriginal communities and organisations to maximise impact on the ground and integrate conventional and traditional conservation methods.
- Protecting, buffering and enhancing the resilience of wildlife habitat and trialling the use of alternative shade structures and drinkers for animals such as koalas to protect them against future heat stress and drought.
- Encouraging improved conservation management to aid the natural recovery of habitat, enhance the health and stability of our ecosystems and reduce the impacts of future catastrophic fires.
- Producing data that helps inform future planning and policy, including long-term adaptation to climate change.
- Working with developers to establish wildlife crossing structures, such as rope bridges for gliding possums, or other measures to reconnect habitat and facilitate the movement of animals across our landscapes.



Healing local communities and boosting capacity

The bushfires took a significant toll on our communities across eastern Australia with many people reporting dismay not only at the loss of their homes but also their sense of connection to place. Most lacked the knowledge, skills and resources needed to help their wildlife, communities and landscapes to recover and rebuild post-fire. By engaging landholders, traditional owners, regional communities and NRM agencies directly in on-ground activities, planning and mapping of property cultural and natural values, GER's bushfire response effort helps communities to heal and rebuild, and reconnects people with country.

Our work also focuses on strengthening the capacity of individuals, local landholder groups and partner organisations to respond to future natural disasters, manage risk and link their conservation efforts to create collective impact. This is achieved through training days, planning sessions, workshops, field days and citizen science surveys.



How to donate

To donate to support GER's bushfire recovery program, visit www.ger.org.au/donations. All donations over \$2 are fully tax deductible.

If you would like to learn more, or to discuss the development of a customised bushfire recovery package, please get in touch with us directly:

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**THE GREAT
EASTERN RANGES**
connecting people...connecting nature