



The Great Eastern Ranges Initiative

bringing people together to protect, link and restore healthy habitats
across 3600 kilometres

2011 to 2015 – building for the future

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to acknowledge the outstanding support and involvement of the many individuals and organisations who have shared a passion for conserving Australia's richest and most intact ecosystems across the Great Eastern Ranges.

This includes:

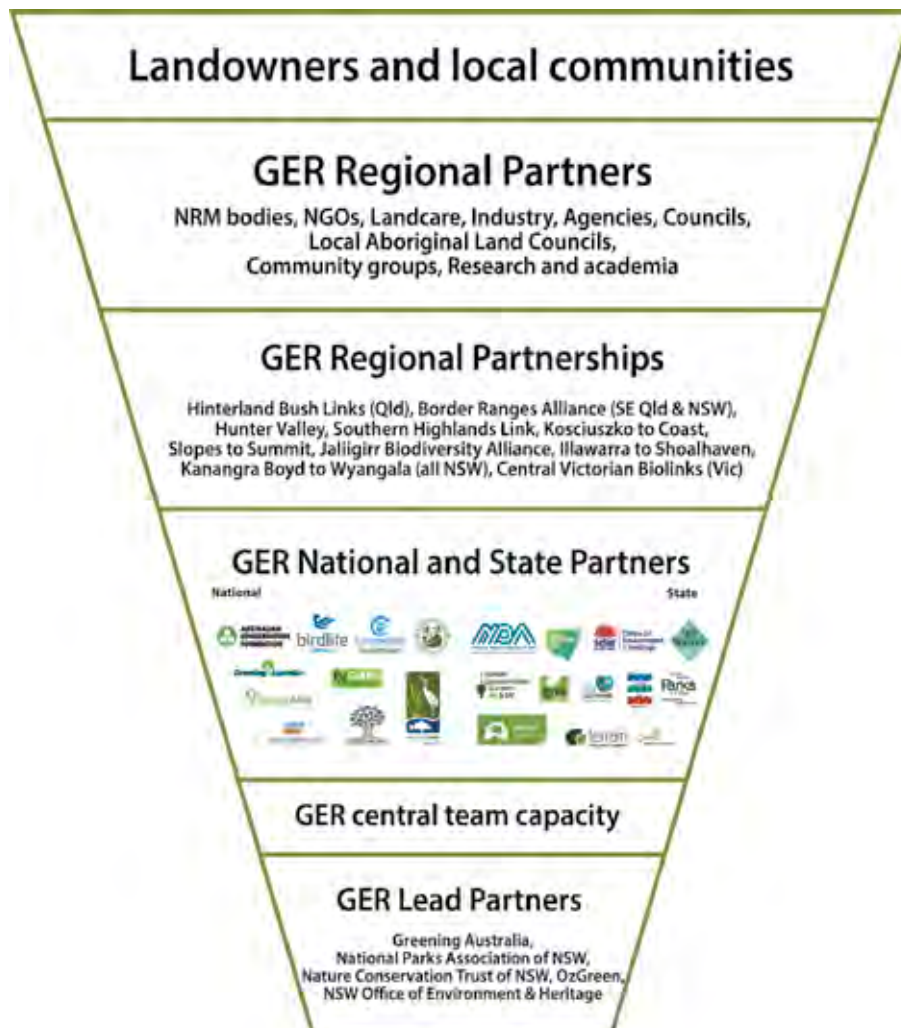
- Numerous landholders committed to managing habitat and connectivity from western Victoria through NSW and ACT to far north Queensland
- Members of our ten Regional Partnership working groups
- Regional Partner organisations, including state government agencies, natural resource management bodies, local government authorities, industry, Aboriginal groups, conservation groups, Landcare, research and education organisations
- GER Regional Partnership facilitators
- GER National and State Partner organisations
- GER Lead Partner organisations
- GER Science Panel
- GER central team
- NSW Environmental Trust Board, Green Corridors sub-committee and secretariat
- Other colleagues, collaborators and stakeholders in Australia and overseas

We would like to recognise that our success has been made possible through the \$11.1 million funding support provided over the last eight years by the NSW Government, and the staff and resources of the NSW Office of Environment & Heritage.

Additional funding from the Australian Government's Clean Energy Futures Biodiversity Fund and other programs has also made a significant contribution to our growth over the last four years.

Major supporters:





The Great Eastern Ranges Initiative network

In August 2015, this report was endorsed by the GER Lead Partners, namely Greening Australia NSW, National Parks Association of NSW, Nature Conservation Trust of NSW, NSW Office of Environment & Heritage and OzGREEN, though it still requires final approval by the NSW Environmental Trust Board. It is being distributed prior to Trust Board approval as part of the current review of our governance, delivery model and strategic plan to ensure GER's future sustainability.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Great Eastern Ranges Initiative (GER) brings people and organisations together to protect, link and restore the connectivity of wildlife habitats over 3600 kilometres from western Victoria, through New South Wales and the ACT to far north Queensland. The region comprises the most biologically diverse landscapes on the continent and includes the most extensive network of protected areas and natural habitats in eastern Australia.

Scope of investment

In 2011, the NSW Environmental Trust (Trust) announced the investment of \$4.4m to enable the growth and expansion of the GER over a four year period, which has been supported further by significant funding from the Australian Governments Clean Energy Futures Biodiversity Fund (Biodiversity Fund) and other supporters.

Particular emphasis was given to:

- Implementing connectivity conservation – Delivering a range of on-ground conservation projects through our regional partnerships and national and state partners to improve the connectivity of habitats in priority landscapes
- People working together – Expanding and building the capacity of the regional partnership network in priority landscapes in NSW, ACT, Queensland and Victoria and supporting efforts to build their sustainability
- Communicating with the community – Extending the reach of the importance of connectivity conservation and awareness of the GER to engage, motivate and influence partners, stakeholders and the wider community

- Applying knowledge and skills – Working with researchers and academia to use the best available research, data and analysis techniques to support the efforts of our partners.

Major achievements

2011-2015 has seen the growth and expansion of GER to see it become recognised as a leader in Australia and overseas in large-scale connectivity conservation.

This has been achieved through:

- Major on-ground outcomes – More than 58 000ha of priority linking habitat have been restored through natural regeneration, weed management and strategic replanting, complemented by more than 160 voluntary private land agreements and 50 property plans encouraging enhanced management of a further 6500ha.
- More regional partnerships – The number of regional partnerships has been increased from five to ten, all located in strategically important landscapes to facilitate local community outcomes, with the number of active organisations increasing 110% from 120 to 260.
- Greater community awareness of the brand – Partners' communications capacity has been mobilised to complement delivery of a GER communications strategy, carrying stories and information about the GER to an audience of at least 4.5 million across eastern Australia.
- Increased trust and collaboration between organisations, community and landholders – Two-thirds of those GER partners surveyed have reported increased contact with other complementary organisations, resulting in high levels of awareness of other partners programs going from 10% to 72% since involvement in GER.
- Knowledge of connectivity conservation – All of those surveyed have reported an increased understanding of connectivity conservation, with 74% of partners expressing high to very high understanding of how their efforts contribute to the bigger picture, increased from 22% prior to involvement in GER.
- Increased focus on GER landscapes – Greater emphasis has been placed on applying resources and effort in priority linking areas, with more than 52% of partners increasing their investment in them.
- Partners' cash and in-kind contributions – The Trust's investment in GER has acted as a catalyst to attract significant project funding and the alignment of partners' existing capacity and resources as in-kind contributions. In the last four years this is estimated to have been at a ratio of \$6.50 for every \$1 of Trust funding.

Lessons for connectivity conservation

- **Local ownership** - The work of GER experience is held by participants engaged in regional projects, knowledge sharing and coordination across landscapes facilitated by a core supporting capacity. Its successes cannot be imposed from outside or above, but are generated from grass-roots level involvement in locally-owned and managed projects.

- **Collaboration** - Throughout the funded period, GER has performed an essential role in engaging organisations, explaining its objectives and helping new partners find a place in expanding regional networks.
- **Coordination capacity** - Experience in GER and elsewhere demonstrates the essential role local leadership plays in the delivery of successful on-ground outcomes. No other mechanism currently exists to coordinate the otherwise disparate connectivity conservation activities of groups and organisations in the landscape at a regional scale. Regional partnerships provide a forum to facilitate agreement on strategic priorities, develop greater understanding of contributions made via on-ground delivery and coordinate activities across a spectrum of groups and project sites.
- **Cross-tenure outcomes** - By providing coordination, GER has performed a unique function by explaining the spectrum of private land instruments and options for getting involved, and brokering greater awareness, understanding, trust and collaboration between managers responsible for different land tenures. This is an essential prerequisite to developing commitment to contribute to a wider outcome and in many cases helps to refine priorities or scheduling of work to better complement neighbours' efforts.
- **Personal and institutional capacity** – Strong investment in building and enabling the capacity of partner organisations, landholders and the wider community is essential for enhancing knowledge of conservation priorities and what others are doing to address them, and improvement in

the coordination of local biodiversity conservation activities. These improvements are reported as being directly associated with GER and represent a major outcome of the Trust's investment.

A program for the future

The 2011-15 period has witnessed the continued growth of GER as it evolved into a highly effective public-private sector partnership for the future. The significance of the Great Eastern Ranges is well recognised by many land managers, policy makers and researchers. The needs of such a landscape are diverse and complex and require the development of systems, approaches and processes that enable society to have confidence that their efforts are having a positive impact on a much wider level.

The size of the landscape and the dynamic changes occurring within and acting upon it require that the most targeted and cost-effective approach to delivering available and emerging interventions is needed. GER has delivered a rational approach to translating knowledge about the status and trends in ecosystems and their drivers into action, by facilitating agreement on local, regional and whole of corridor priorities.

Continued long term success of the GER will rely to a large extent on continued public, industry, philanthropic and government support to:

- **Leverage recent business development** – develop innovative delivery programs that position proposals alongside existing projects in a bigger context of contributing to continental connectivity conservation with projects linked thematically across landscapes
- **Continue to communicate the vision and successes** – facilitate cross-sharing of information, engagement with a wider audience and underpin the continuing growth in wider community awareness of GER, particularly in our priority partnership areas
- **Implement a new strategic plan** - take stock of the GER approach through review of ongoing delivery, funding opportunities and governance arrangements for GER.
- **Leverage partners' programs** - further leverage the knowledge, skills and capacity of partner organisations to further mainstream GER investment priorities and facilitate growth in awareness of community participation and collective investment in partner programs

“The Great Eastern Ranges Initiative will make a globally significant difference, as well as a difference in the lives and future of every Australian.”

Harvey Locke,
Co-founder of the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative



1. BACKGROUND

1.1 The Great Eastern Ranges of Australia

The Great Eastern Ranges (also referred to as the GER corridor) is made up of the mountainous landscapes that separate the east coast of Australia from inland eastern Australia. They extend for more than 3600 km from the Grampians in western Victoria, along the Great Dividing Range and Eastern Escarpment of New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and to the wet tropics of Far North Queensland (see map on p.9).

The ranges form the watershed and headwaters of 63 major river systems directing run-off either towards the coast or inland. Topography varies widely in elevation and form and includes Australia's highest mountain (Mt Kosciuszko at 2228 metres) located in southern NSW. Here, the ranges receive over 3000 millimetres of rainfall annually. In other areas the terrain is barely distinguishable from the surrounding landscape.

The Great Eastern Ranges comprises the most biologically diverse ecosystems on the continent and includes the most extensive network of protected areas in eastern Australia. Of equal scale and importance as the Great Barrier Reef the ranges host a series of biodiversity hotspots interconnected by a wide diversity of native vegetation and intact habitat.

Within NSW, the GER corridor contains examples of most land tenures. Public protected areas (e.g. national parks and nature reserves) occupy 39% of the area, with other public lands (e.g. State forests, military reserves and travelling stock reserves) covering a further 20%. The remainder comprises land

under private ownership. Connectivity of protected areas is greatest in the southern sections of NSW and the Alpine areas of ACT and Victoria, however, parts of the corridor have been cleared and fragmented and are subject to ongoing significant land-use pressures.

1.2 The Great Eastern Ranges Initiative

GER is one of a growing number of internationally recognised connectivity conservation programs developed in response to the ongoing decline and mass extinction of species due to past and current land-use and other threats to habitat and biodiversity.

In the face of an increasingly variable climate, GER is working to strengthen the resilience of natural ecosystems and the native plant and animal species supported by the GER corridor. Improved resilience can be achieved by drawing together the efforts of community, industry, government, non-government organisations and individuals already working on conservation projects in eastern Australia and concentrating their efforts where they are most needed.

Connectivity conservation seeks to establish a targeted approach to conservation management. It aligns effort across a range of tenures and geographical landscapes strengthening or re-establishing physical connections between protected areas to create a continuous corridor of healthy habitats that enable species to disperse and persist in the face of threats such as climate change and habitat loss.

Maintaining ecosystems and connectivity of the GER corridor is also essential for sustaining the health and well-being of eastern Australia's rapidly growing population and economy, providing the water supply of 11 million people and protecting significant nature-based tourism and recreation assets.

1.3 The evolution of GER

GER was set up in 2007 with a commitment of \$6.7m from the NSW Government. The period 2007 to 2010 saw investment in the GER brand and connectivity conservation science that continues to underpin the work of GER today and the establishment of five GER regional partnerships in priority NSW landscapes.

With the continuing support of the NSW Government, GER transitioned in 2010 to a non-government-led (NGO) enterprise under direction of a Lead Partner group and small GER central coordination team.

During this transition in December 2011, the NSW Government announced a further investment of \$4.4m over four years to June 2015. This supported the continued development of the five GER Regional Partnerships, establishment of additional regional partnerships in new areas and extension of GER inter-state. It is this funding that has taken GER into its current iteration, a phase of significant growth and expansion and recognition as a leader in large-scale connectivity conservation in Australia and overseas.

This report outlines GER's achievements over this most recent phase in our evolution.



The Great Eastern Ranges in eastern Australia

2. APPROACH TO DELIVERY

2.1 Vision and objectives

A major strength of GER has been its ability to motivate a diverse range of partners. Over the past four years, GER has leveraged its brand not only to maintain the previous level of enthusiasm but to engage an increasing number of partners and sectors and in more regions of NSW, ACT, Victoria and Queensland.

GER provides a unifying focus for the many active organisations involved in the conservation of the Great Eastern Ranges, as aspired to through the GER vision (see below).

The size, complexity and reach of GER is such that its achievements are reflected in a range of land management, social, research and community capacity-building outcomes. The ultimate objective of GER is to increase the extent, condition and connectivity of natural habitat across the 3600km length of the GER corridor and enhance the persistence of natural ecosystems and native species.

This objective is supported by three complementary objectives which reflect the importance of collaboration, communication and the application of knowledge to ensure more effective and lasting outcomes (see diagram on p.11).

2.2 Partnerships, partners and supporters

Connectivity conservation is driven by a coordinated network of participating organisations collaborating to achieve mutually agreed objectives at a local level. Local outcomes in turn nest within a broader strategic context that amplifies this effort at a landscape-scale.

2.2.1 The role of partnerships in priority regions

Regional partnerships in strategically important landscapes, identified through high level analysis, is central to GER being able to facilitate outcomes at a local community level. These include:

- Improved coordination of otherwise disconnected projects and demonstration of the 'added value' of collaborative environmental activities creating further engagement in connectivity conservation
- Empowerment of local communities to build an approach that suits their circumstances, recognising that no single approach suits everyone

- Strengthening regional networks with local working groups, providing governance and structure which enables communities to collaborate on local conservation projects and strategic solutions for regional habitat connectivity
- Bringing together diverse groups who would not normally have the opportunity to work together under a common focus
- New and expanded opportunities for individuals and communities to engage in local environmental projects
- New projects and partnerships which can become a source of employment, skills and knowledge building for local communities
- Increased visibility of the investment made by the Trust Government in protecting and enhancing connectivity conservation outcomes

The vision of the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative is

to bring people and organisations together to protect, link and restore healthy habitats over 3,600 kilometres from western Victoria, through New South Wales and the ACT to far north Queensland.

2.2.2 Selecting priority regions

Each landscape within the GER corridor is not equal in terms of its potential to contribute to maintaining connectivity. With around 60% of the landscape occupying land other than protected areas, there are multiple options for management action.

A targeted approach to working in priority areas was adopted by GER to ensure resources were not spread too thinly and are invested where social, economic and environmental returns are potentially the greatest. A desk-top analysis of connectivity priorities considered each landscape in relation to four variables.

These are:

- Biological values - regional distinctiveness and species diversity
- Connectivity need - apparent discontinuity in connectedness of habitat and protected areas
- Conservation and social opportunity - active organisations with capacity and interest in delivering collaborative programs
- Program contribution - opportunity to develop and test approaches that contribute to implementing an effective GER program

This approach was used to identify or assess the merits of the new GER partnership areas established during the reporting period and will underpin future expansion into new landscapes, subject to available resources and funding.

2.2.3 The role of GER National and State Partners

GER National and State Partners play a critical role in the implementation of GER in a range of ways, such as project delivery, communications and fundraising. Together, these partners provide a broad range of services from on-ground projects, conservation agreements, community and youth engagement to research, advocacy and volunteerism.

Each has extensive communication channels that support GER's information dissemination, knowledge-sharing and messaging functions. As well-established, independent organisations, GER partners also have their own funding support, allowing GER to operate in many areas and on many levels without drawing heavily on its own resources.

2.3 Management framework

2.3.1 'Whole-of-GER' level

GER Lead Partner group - When GER transitioned from a NSW Government-led program to a community-based, NGO-led initiative, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was entered into between five Lead Partners, namely Greening Australia NSW (Greening Australia), National Parks Association of NSW (NPA), Nature Conservation Trust of NSW (NCT), NSW Office of Environment & Heritage (OEH) and OzGREEN. The role of the lead partners is to provide high level direction, coordination and governance of GER as outlined in the MoU.

The MoU was amended in 2012 to reflect the expanded involvement of national and state organisations.

The four objectives of GER

1. Connect Landscapes and Ecosystems

Improve the connectivity, condition and resilience of landscapes and ecosystems and halt further decline and loss of species

2. Link People and Landscapes

Increase the number of people working together to improve connectedness and resilience of landscapes

3. Communicate Effectively

Improve the transfer of knowledge, skills and practices through community engagement, involvement and education

4. Apply Knowledge

Improve understanding of species, ecosystems and local landscapes and their requirements for long term health



The current ten GER Regional Partnerships

The seven regional facilitators in December 2012, prior to the involvement of K2W, CVB and HBL



GER central team – A multi-discipline GER central coordination team was established in 2011 to deliver the GER program and provide an important supporting role to the regional partnerships. The central team, comprising a CEO, Conservation Manager and part-time Communications Manager, reports to the Lead Partners, through the CEO, on current activities and overall performance.

GER Science Panel – Recognising the importance of maintaining the body of science underpinning GER, a GER Science Panel, which had been established in the first phase of GER, was re-formed with a new membership and terms of reference in 2014. The Panel works with the Conservation Manager to provide specialist knowledge on ecological issues, systematic conservation planning and consultation on economic and social issues, which in turn inform GER program development and delivery.

GER National and State Partners

– During the transition phase to an NGO-led enterprise, the opportunity to engage further with national and state conservation organisations was recognised as an appropriate approach to expanding the reach of GER into new landscapes along the GER corridor in NSW and ACT, and into Queensland and Victoria. These partnerships are formalised through GER Partner Agreements which outline the commitment of both parties to work together to support the GER vision, subject to available resources, and detail how partners can support GER's core values, objectives and brand.

2.3.2 Regional level

GER Regional Partnerships – Ten GER Regional Partnerships operate under different governance structures which continue to evolve over time (see map above). The management framework

is determined by the members of the partnership, often drawing upon the experiences of GER since its inception. While regional partnerships have been established under various versions of MoU, four have established themselves as incorporated entities, namely Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance (JBA), Kosciuszko to Coast (K2C), Hinterland Bush Links (HBL) and Central Victoria Biolinks (CVB).

Regional Partnership working groups

– The strategic direction and activities of the ten GER regional partnerships is led by core groups of committed organisations and individuals, representing a range of interests. A key role of these working groups is to prioritise the work plan and activities of the Regional Partnership Facilitators.

Regional Partnership Facilitators – The Facilitators provide local leadership on GER program delivery and support communications, fundraising and governance arrangements for each regional partnership and maintain links with landowners and local communities. Facilitators are employed by a host organisation, though their role requires them to work closely with and report to the members of the regional partnership.

The management framework is shown in the diagram on p. 3.

2.4 Program Investment Model

In summary, the NSW Environmental Trust's \$4.4m funding announced in December 2011 has:

- Supported a multi-disciplinary GER central team and coordination program (\$1.05m)
- Continued coordination and alignment of regional partners' programs and capacity in five existing regional partnerships (\$1.12m)

- Stimulated the formation of two new partnerships in NSW (\$0.45m)
- Funded projects in each of the regional partnerships areas and along the full extent of the GER corridor in NSW (\$1.78m) (see map p.14).

The first year of Trust project funding was allocated to the seven Trust-funded GER regional partnerships and each of the lead partners to ensure progress against GER's four objectives was achieved as soon as possible. Investment made directly by GER through its regional partnerships into community projects was particularly effective in galvanizing interest and support for GER and connectivity conservation.

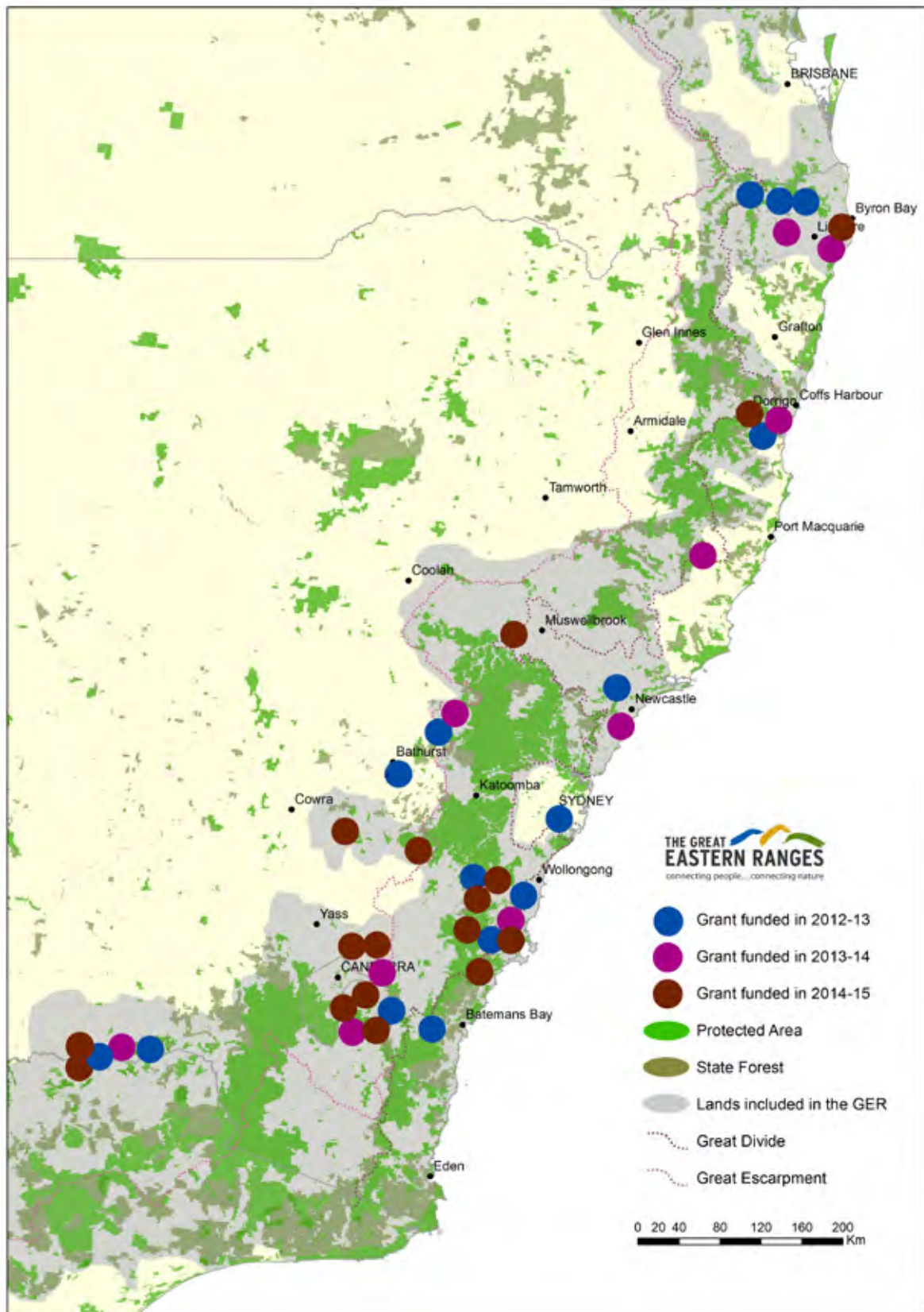
Funding in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 rounds became competitive and open to all NSW regional partnerships and GER national and state partners with administration of the grant process managed by the Foundation of National Parks & Wildlife (FNPW). This brought considerable benefits for GER including the ability to have on-line applications, extensive promotion of GER through FNPW networks and the efficient use of GER resources.

In 2014-15, a separate allocation of GER funding was allocated to GER Landcare Grants to acknowledge the 25th Anniversary of the establishment of the Landcare and made available on a competitive basis to all of the movement's community groups within the GER corridor.

Investment in central and regional capacity to build awareness, engage communities and create action, ensures that when projects are delivered a high degree of additional resources, complementary mechanisms and other funding is captured providing a multiplier effect. Investing in individual and disconnected projects cannot compete with these benefits.

This approach has proved essential in sourcing new funding and catalysing new action in priority areas (see map on p.14). The involvement of new partners and the skills and capacity they bring have proven to expand the achievements of partnerships and translate successful models for action into new landscapes. This function has played a key part in the growth of GER during the past four years.





Location of projects funded by the Trust

“One of the reasons why we need the Great Eastern Ranges is that the ranges will be one of the main refuges for species and ecosystem types in the centuries to come.”

Prof. Brendan Mackey,
Griffith University, IUCN Councillor



3. EVALUATION OF EFFECTIVENESS

3.1 Outcome hierarchy

The outcome hierarchy which underpins the four objectives establishes what GER will measure to assess its progress, and evaluates this performance on three levels:

Short-term – On-going evaluation of progress against funding agreements and operational plans providing the information necessary to inform short-term outcomes. These in turn are used to adaptively guide and refine budgeting, resource management, process development and planning.

Medium term (2011-15) – Periodic assessment of the effectiveness of GER in contributing to medium term outcomes, forming the basis for evaluating the success of the GER model.

Long term (Beyond 2015) – Evaluation of the ‘ultimate outcomes’ generated by GER including modelling of biophysical outcomes for ecological processes, calibrated and validated by site condition data.

This report addresses the medium term measures needed to assess GER’s progress. It summarises the results of surveys of knowledge, attitudinal and behaviour change in partner

organisations to confirm the extent to which GER has influenced conservation practice, allowing the following questions to be addressed:

- To what extent have GER-related program activities reduced key threatening processes to environmental values in the GER corridor? (Objective one)
- To what extent are people working more cooperatively and consistently on conservation efforts at three scales - NSW, regional and local? (Objective two)
- Whether governance arrangements and administrative management practices are fit-for-purpose given the scales of program activities and needs of partners? (Objective two)
- Whether community capacity is being built through improvements to knowledge and skills across partner agencies and the NSW community? (Objective three)
- To what extent has the community become more aware of environmental issues and more supportive of connectivity conservation efforts? (Objective four).

“Our focus was on our own farms until we were introduced to GER through the Kanangra Boyd to Wyangala partnership.”

Keith Hyde, Lachlan regional representative Landcare NSW Council

The following sections of this report bring together data collated in relation to both short and medium term outcomes to evaluate the degree to which activities during the 2011-15 period have contributed to the objectives of GER in NSW. For the purposes of this report, outputs and outcomes in Queensland, ACT and Victoria are reported only to highlight how investment by the NSW Government has proven catalytic across a wider landscape.



3.2 Objective One – Connect Landscapes and Ecosystems

Improve the connectivity, condition and resilience of landscapes and ecosystems and halt further decline and loss of species

3.2.1 Approach

GER has worked with a diverse community of landholders, industry groups, traditional owners, government agencies, conservation NGOs and others to collaborate in delivering projects to protect and restore natural ecosystems and habitat connections in priority areas. These involve a spectrum of activities from education and awareness-raising, to improved management and medium to long-term protection of native species. They combine to generate outcomes which far exceed the benefits of individual action. The resulting effect on the ground is the creation of a linked 'corridor of effort' in which land managers commit to build local corridors and 'stepping stones' allowing for species dispersal and adaptation to a changing environment.

Understanding the extent to which threats to biodiversity and habitat values exist in the GER corridor are shown through:

- What has been delivered – the number of regionally-focussed projects, organisations in regional partnerships
- How much has been delivered – quantum of outputs generated such as individuals reached, landholders engaged, hectares restored or protected
- Where delivery has occurred – the location of projects and actions in relation to priority focus areas

- The quality of delivery – efforts and contributions linked across landscapes, combining to achieve an outcome on a broader level
- Additionality of outcomes – changes and improvements that have accrued beyond what might reasonably have been expected had the GER not been undertaken.

Improvements to the connectivity, condition and resilience of landscapes and ecosystems have largely been delivered through four mechanisms:

Alignment of available instruments

– Unlike previous approaches to landscape conservation which invest directly in works in order to generate outcomes, GER has adopted an approach encouraging partners to align delivery of the conservation instruments they provide to create a 'corridor of effort' in priority areas. GER funding has not been used to directly establish these instruments, rather, GER partners have collaborated to promote the spectrum of options already available to the community. This has involved the full range of public and private conservation mechanisms, from environmental education to permanent conservation protection, examples of which include:

- Knowledge building – education and awareness raising (NPA, OzGREEN, Envite)
- Capacity building - Landcare (Landcare NSW) and natural resource management (NRM) bodies with an emphasis on restoration (Local Land Services (LLS))
- Entry level conservation mechanisms – property registration (Land for Wildlife, Wildlife Land Trust) and Wildlife Refuge (OEH)

- Term-based agreements – property vegetation plans (LLS), whole of paddock restoration (Greening Australia), restoration grants (the Trust, various private foundations), BioBanking agreements (OEH)
- Permanent protection mechanisms - conservation agreements (OEH) and covenant agreements (NCT), private protected areas (Bush Heritage Australia), Indigenous Protected Areas (Australian Government).

GER's approach to promoting targeted delivery of these private land conservation mechanisms encourages enduring management of strategic links that connect and buffer protected areas, value-add to the National Reserve System and enhance management of the public protected areas system.

Habitat restoration – In simple terms, habitat restoration has been achieved across the GER corridor through the combined use of replanting and assisted natural regeneration. GER involves a number of organisations with considerable experience and skills in environmental restoration, including Greening Australia, Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) and Wetlandcare Australia. These environmental NGOs are complemented by the localised work of state government agencies, such as OEH and LLS, Landcare NSW and other regional community and conservation groups.

Cross-property coordination – The coordinated approach adopted by GER regional partnerships encourages the alignment of specific site management needs with the most appropriate conservation action for the conditions or landholder circumstances. Landholders in priority areas are encouraged to participate in some form of conservation commitment, while public land managers are similarly encouraged to

align their activities (e.g. infrastructure development offsets) with the work of local community groups. Such alignment leads to improvements in efficiency and efficacy.

Integrated cross-tenure pest animal management – An important evolution of the GER delivery approach has involved implementation of a cross-tenure integrated management programs particularly in the area of pest animal control. This has involved:

- Awareness raising through NPA's 'Who's Living On My Land?' program, inviting landholders to workshops to learn about animal detection methods to engage and enthuse local nodes of adjoining properties contiguous to protected areas or other public lands
- Locally-organised collaborative pest animal control networks, with landholder control across all properties in a district coordinated or assisted by NPWS, State Forests or LLS
- Cross-landscape control activities including aerial cull, trapping and baiting for targeted species

- Follow-up surveillance of pest numbers on public land (via WildCount) and other public and private lands (camera trapping and reporting via FeralScan)

3.2.2 Outputs

The extent to which GER-related program activities have reduced key threatening processes to biodiversity and habitat values in the GER corridor is demonstrated through:

- Total area of native habitat restored: 57 987ha
- Total area under improved weed management: 6835ha
- Number of plantings: 168 391
- Area of Aboriginal owned land or sites of cultural significance restored or rehabilitated: 1457ha
- Area protected by fencing: 107ha
- Length of fencing installed: 101km
- Area of vegetation corridors: 985ha
- Area of connected vegetation established: 13 966ha

- Increase in number of landholders engaged in private land conservation instruments: 229
- Organisation or stakeholders adopting improved agricultural land management practices: 587
- Area protected under conservation covenants: 6581ha

These figures relate only to NSW Environmental Trust funding and the three major Australian Government Biodiversity Fund projects in NSW, being HVP 'Stepping Stones, S2S 'Bush Links' and the K2W Link.

A significant challenge throughout the reporting period has been the consistent reporting of activities and outputs generated from partner programs which contribute to connectivity outcomes in the GER corridor. Any future efforts to encourage closer alignment between partner programs and GER outputs would benefit from a more specific understanding and agreement about how these contributions can be accurately and comfortably reported on as a whole, so that both GER and its partners can be acknowledged for their collective effort. Such measures should reflect:

- Improvements to biodiversity conservation outcomes through increased uptake of private land conservation mechanisms
- Increases in landscape connectivity in the area of habitat improvement and restoration of other priority connections are being managed to suppress site threats from weeds, erosion, littering, and public misuse, particularly those outside existing regional partnership areas
- Delivery of local projects which contribute to achieving program delivery targets for other priority



programs, such as OEH Visitor Experience Programs and Saving Our Species programs, NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and LLS bio-securities projects and Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) programs.

3.2.3 Outcomes and impacts

A survey in June 2015 assessed improvements amongst GER partners in the level of understanding and delivery of connectivity conservation. The survey had a response rate of approx. 50% and was completed by 46 organisations and represented a broad cross section of GER national, state and regional partners who have been involved in GER for a number of years.

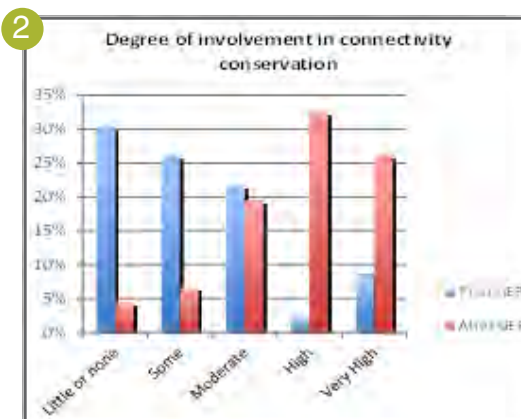
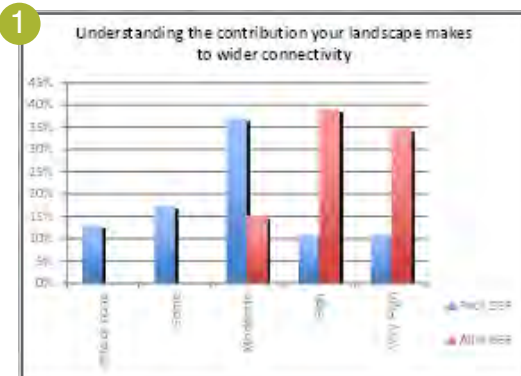
Findings included:

- 74% of organisations said that they had a high or very high understanding of the contribution that their own landscapes make to wider

connectivity after being involved in GER, compared to only 22% prior to GER (See fig. 1)

- 56% stated that they only had some or no involvement in connectivity conservation prior to GER and that this had decreased to 11% after GER. At the other end of the scale prior to GER, only 11% had a high or very high involvement, compared to 59% after GER (See fig. 2)
- 52% of organisations reported that they had high or very high focus on work in GER priority areas
- 58% stated that they had only targeted minimal investment to priority connectivity areas prior to GER, but this had decreased to 13% after GER. At the other end of the scale prior to GER, only 13% had targeted their resources in this way compared to 52% after GER (See fig. 3).

- 54% of organisations felt they had made a high or very high difference in enhancing connectivity and a further 30% a moderate difference where they work



3.3 Objective Two – Link People and Landscapes

Increase the number of people working together to improve connectedness and resilience of landscapes

3.3.1 Approach

Connectivity conservation relies on a coordinated network of participating organisations collaborating to achieve mutually agreed objectives at a local level. Local outcomes in turn nest within a broader strategic context and combine to achieve a greater goal. During the reporting period, GER has invested heavily in programs to increase the number of people working together in priority landscapes and in other areas in the GER corridor in NSW, ACT, Victoria and Queensland.

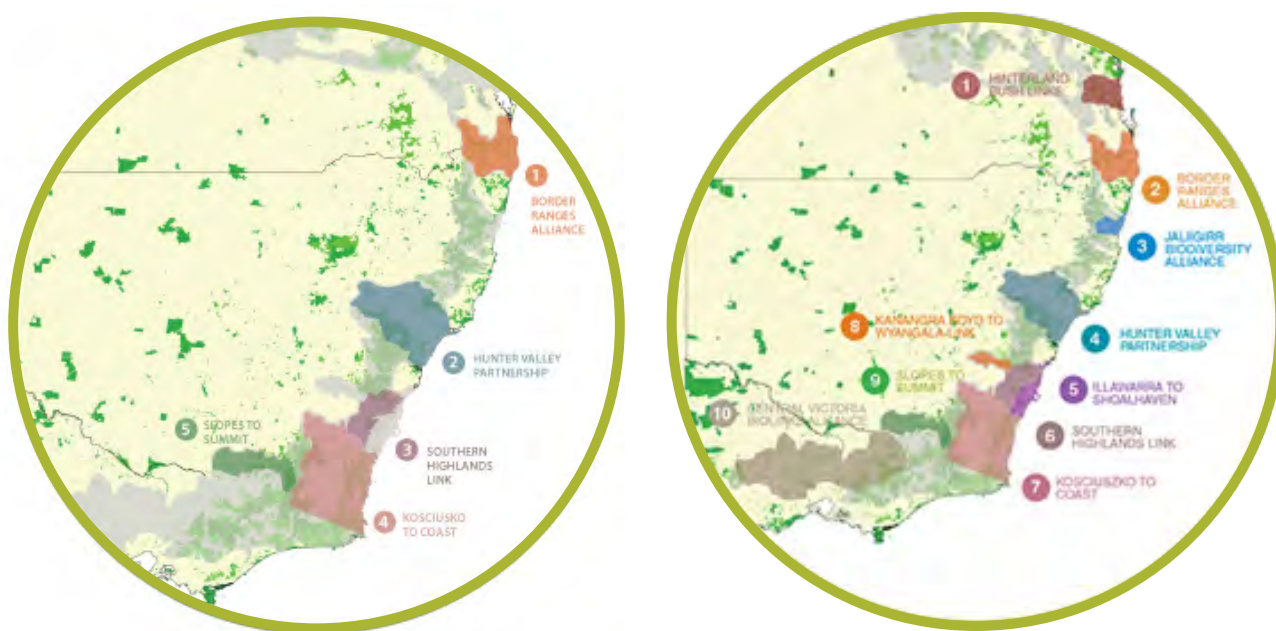
Developing the five original GER Regional Partnerships

Investment by the NSW Government has been essential in building the partner programs across the GER corridor in the original five GER regional partnership areas (Border Ranges Alliance (BRA), Hunter Valley Partnership (HVP), Southern Highlands Link (SHL), Kosciuszko to Coast (K2C) and Slopes to Summit (S2S)) and attracting new funding. This has enabled a high level of multi-partner delivery by providing for the essential program infrastructure needed to engage and enable local community involvement and ownership of projects.

At the beginning of the reporting period, these regional partnerships were relying on limited funding from non-Trust sources to maintain key Facilitator roles and continued in-kind support of regional partnership members. The commitment of further funding from the Trust guaranteed the continuation of these roles until June 2015.

Given the level of trust and collaboration that had been built up since 2007, the partnerships were able to carry through on their activities and plan for the future with some certainty. The catalysing effect of investment to support regional partnerships, and at the same time making funds available for priority projects, was an essential part of continuing the success of GER.

Some of these regional partnerships have expanded the footprint of their activity into new priority areas within their respective regions, such as increasing active delivery of connectivity projects in the Greater Garooyarroo (a cross-border corridor involving the ACT Government and K2C partners), the Merriwa Plateau and Lower Hunter corridors (HVP).



Increase from five Regional Partnerships in June 2012 to ten in June 2015

Formation of five new partnerships

The 2011-2015 period saw the formation of five new partnerships in the GER corridor, including three in NSW and one each in Queensland and Victoria (see maps on p. 20):

- Sunshine Coast Hinterland Bushlinks**
 Established January 2012, this partnership exists within a recognised biodiversity hotspot centred on the Glasshouse Mountains and supports an important linkage between the Blackall and Conondale Ranges where weed management has been the focus of the group's activities.
- Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance**
 Established May 2012, this partnership formed as an incorporated entity, covering 337 000ha from Coffs Coast to the Dorrigo Plateau. Located in a tropical, subtropical, temperate convergence, the region is an area of significant ecological diversity and the World Heritage Gondwana Rainforests of Australia.

- Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala Link**
 Established August 2012, this partnership is hosted by OEH, formed to implement a major \$2.7m project to June 2017 funded by the Biodiversity Fund, focussing on the upper Lachlan catchment.
- Illawarra to Shoalhaven**
 Established October 2012, this partnership is located where the Illawarra and Cambewarra Escarpments combine to form a narrow north-south aligned rainforest corridor linking the major sandstone reserves of the southern Sydney Basin with wet sclerophyll forests of the south coast.
- Central Victorian BioLinks**
 Established 2013, Central Victoria is a crucial region for connectivity of the GER corridor sitting at the southern end of the Great Divide and spanning from drier northern plains across woodlands and forests of the divide to cooler, more southerly hills, gorges and grasslands.

The lessons learnt from the formation of original five GER regional partnerships played a useful role in assisting the early establishment of each of these new partnerships.

Developing relations with national and State partners

A major focus during the reporting period has been on building more-effective relationships with an increasing number of GER national and state partners to fully realise their potential by exploring ways to align their operations with the objectives of GER (see partners in figure below).

These partners now play a key role in the implementation of GER through project delivery, communications and fund raising. Each provides a broad range of services from on-ground projects, conservation agreements, community and youth engagement to research, advocacy and volunteerism. They all have extensive communications channels and their own source of funding, which has allowed GER to operate in inter-state and in new areas of NSW without drawing on Trust funding.



GER National and State Partners as at June 2015

Building relations with other corridor initiatives

Since 2007, GER has grown to be recognised within the international conservation community as a leader in partnership-building and an model example of public-private partnership in practice. However, GER is still relatively young compared to programs such as Yellowstone to Yukon and Gondwana Link but is continuing to harness knowledge from reciprocal connections with these and other Australian and overseas initiatives. This is allowing GER to develop an understanding of:

- Alternative options for delivery of regional partner programs
- Integrating the work of public land management agencies
- Applying latest available science to understanding priorities
- Encouraging the development of themed projects with greater potential for philanthropic and corporate funding support.

3.3.2 Outputs

The extent to which people are working more cooperatively and consistently on conservation effort at 'whole-of-GER', regional and local scales is demonstrated through:

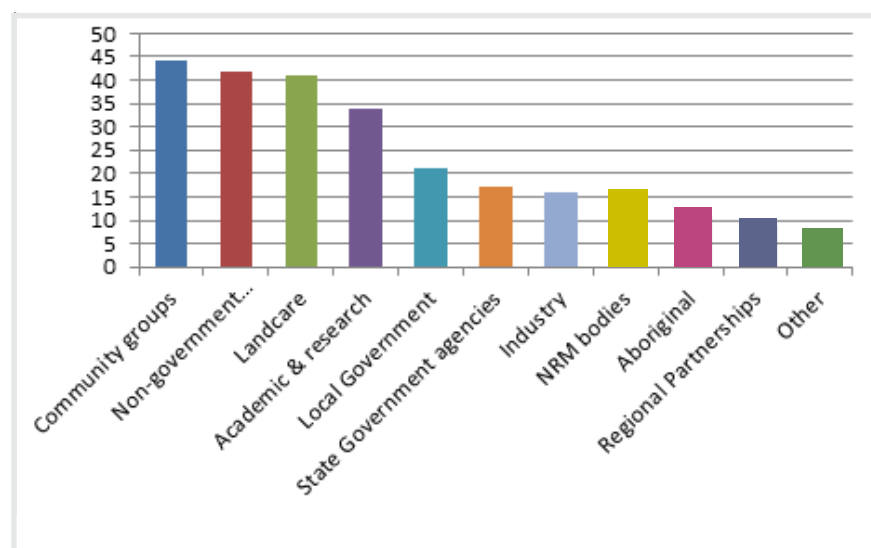
- The number of GER Regional Partnerships increasing from five to ten
- The number of active organisations comprising the GER network, which has grown over 110%, from 120 to 261 during the 2011-2015 period

- All GER regional partnerships now have representatives from NRM bodies, Local Government and Landcare
- GER now comprises an extensive network of active organisations including:
 - 174 local and regional organisations engaged through regional partnerships in eight priority connectivity landscapes in NSW and other State-based organisations,
 - 25 national organisations
 - 53 additional interstate regional organisations involved through the Central Victoria Biolinks and Hinterland Bushlinks partnerships and other interstate organisations.
 - 9 major conservation networks in Australia and overseas

NSW Government investment in GER central and regional coordinating capacity has provided it with a unique opportunity within the connectivity conservation sector. Investment in projects through such grant programs are considered successful where they attract matching or double the investment from project partners and other funding sources. GER has greatly exceeded this attracting \$6.5 for every \$1 invested by the NSW Government (see table at top of p.24). This is the result of investing in both the GER as an enterprise in conjunction with the funding of GER projects.

GER has also had some direct success in attracting funds from other sources, though these have been project based and contributed in only a small way to GER's central and regional coordinating capacity (see lower table on p.24).

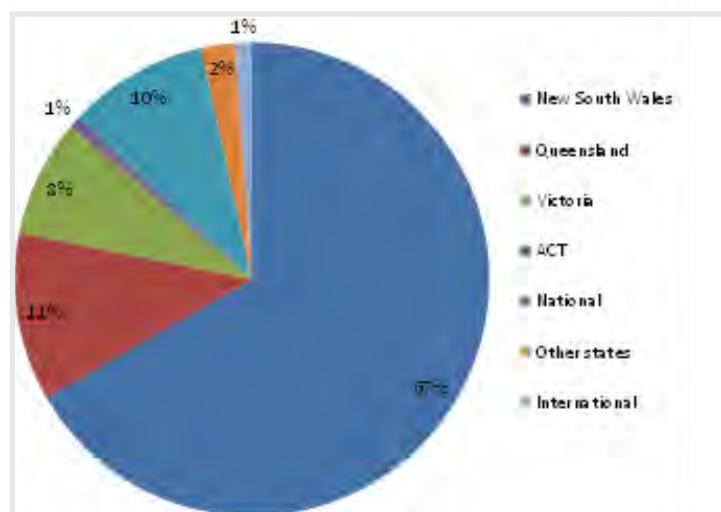
See figures below and on p. 23.



GER partners and active organisations by sector as at June 2015

Sectors	Examples of NSW partners	Number
Community groups	Caldera Regional Arts Inc.; Friends of Grasslands; Friends of the Koala; Hunter Bird Observers Club; Hunter Coal Environment Group; Richmond Birdwing Recovery Network Inc.; Wombat Forestcare	44
Non-government organisation	Birdlife Australia; Wetlandcare Australia; Wildlife Land Trust; Wildlife Tourism Australia; Albury Conservation Company; Envite Environment; Parklands Albury Wodonga	42
Landcare	Big Scrub Rainforest Landcare Group; Brunswick Valley Landcare; Coffs Harbour Regional Landcare; Fullerton Hadley Landcare; Upper Lachlan Landcare; Wilsons Creek Huonbrook Landcare, Holbrook Landcare Network	41
Academic & Research	Atlas of Living Australia; Australian Museum; CSIRO; Invasive Animals Co-operative Research Centre; Muswellbrook High School; NSW Riverina Institute of TAFE; Royal Botanic Gardens; Tocal Agricultural College	34
Local Government	Albury City Council; Byron Shire Council; Coffs Harbour City Council; Singleton Council; Southern Councils Group; Upper Lachlan Council; Wingecarribee Shire Council	21
State Government agency	NSW Rural Fire Service; NSW Trade and Investment (Crown Lands); Office of Environment and Heritage NSW	17
Industry	Coal and Allied; Forests Alive; GHD Consultants; Hunter Thoroughbred Breeders Association; Southern Highlands Corporate Events; Thurgoona Country Club Resort; John Holland Inc.	16
NRM Body	Central Tablelands Local Land Services; Northern Rivers Local Land Services	16
Aboriginal	Coffs Harbour Local Aboriginal Land Council; Cowra Traditional Ecological Knowledge group; Gumbanggir Elders; Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council; Kombumerri Aboriginal Corporation for Culture; Ngarang-Wal Gold Coast Aboriginal Association Inc.	12
GER Regional Partnership	Slopes to Summit; Hinterland Bush Links	10
Other	Yellowstone to Yukon; Gondwana Link	8
Total		261

Examples of GER partners and active organisations by sector as at June 2015



GER partners and active organisations by location as at June 2015

	<i>Trust</i>	<i>Cash</i>	<i>In-kind</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
GER central capacity	\$1.05m	\$1.64 m	\$3.65m	\$5.29m	5.0:1
Regional partnership	\$1.57m	\$13.72m	\$5.60m	\$19.33m	12.3:1
Project funding	\$1.78m	\$0.34m	\$3.54m	\$3.87m	2.2:1
Total over four years	\$4.4m	\$15.70m	\$12.79m	\$28.49m	6.5:1

Ratio of contributions by GER partners and active organisations to the Trust's investment for the four years to June 2015

<i>Landscape</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Project</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Funding to</i>
Hinterland Bush Link	Sunshine City Council	Partnership facilitation	\$150 000	June 2016
Kanangra Boyd to Wyangala	Australian Government Biodiversity Fund	Future-proofing the GER corridor in the K2W Link	\$2.7m	June 2017
Hunter Valley	Australian Government Biodiversity Fund	Hunter Stepping Stones	\$2.8m	June 2017
Hunter Valley	John Holland Inc. & Taronga Zoo	Merriwa Rail Corridor restoration	\$250 000	June 2019
Slopes to Summit	Australian Government Biodiversity Fund	Carbon plantings in Slopes to Summit to improve connectivity & habitat gaps	\$2.3m	June 2017
Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance	Australian Government Biodiversity Fund	Northern Rivers CMA Biodiversity Fund project	\$3.0m	June 2017
Kosciuszko2Coast	Australian Government Biodiversity Fund	Building restored resilient landscapes in the ACT & greater Goorooyarroo	\$216 000	June 2017
Kosciuszko2Coast	Myer Foundation grant	Monaro Grasslands Restoration	\$150 000	June 2015
Whole of GER	Australian Government	National Wildlife Corridors Plan	\$120 000	Finished 2014
Slopes to Summit	Albury Conservation Company	Albury Urban Habitat Program	\$100 000	June 2016
Border Ranges Alliance	Queensland Everyone's Environment Grants	Restoration of five critical habitats	\$98 000	June 2016
Whole of GER	Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife	Partner grants	\$60 000	December 2015
Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala Link	Australian Government Green Army	K2W Link Tussock Tamers	\$50 000	June 2015
Central Victoria Biolink	Macpherson Foundation	Development of a strategic plan for the CVB region	\$50 000	June 2015
Slopes to Summit	Dahl Trust	Eucalypts of S2S media production	\$25 000	Finished 2014
Total			\$9.37 million	

Examples of funding secured from sources other than the Trust

The primary source of this additional funding was the Biodiversity Fund. Four of the GER regional partnerships submitted applications, of which three were successful. A fourth application by OEH resulted in the formation of a new GER regional partnership. The successful projects were:

- Hunter Valley Partnership (via OzGREEN) *Stepping Stones Project* (\$2.76m) - strengthening connectivity by linking isolated patches of bushland to core habitat areas
- Slopes to Summit Partnership (via Holbrook Landcare Network) *Carbon plantings to improve connectivity and habitat gaps* (\$2.29m) - piloting a collaborative approach to rehabilitation work in seven priority areas for connectivity conservation and safeguarding and restoring source areas for habitat specialists
- Kanangra Boyd to Wyangala Partnership (via OEH) *GER corridor management and restoration of connectivity* (\$2.71m) - enabling the formation of a new GER regional partnership in the upper Lachlan catchment
- Jalligirr Biodiversity Alliance (via North Coast LLS) *Connecting communities and cultures through corridors* (\$3.0m) - restoring, managing and enhancing biodiversity conservation and increasing carbon stores, building resilience to climate change by reconnecting and rehabilitating fragmented and degraded corridors.

Other organisations have also leveraged the GER brand in their Biodiversity Fund proposals to attract a further \$24m into the corridor, some without the direct input of GER.

While this is of obvious benefit towards overall GER objectives, it highlighted the need to ensure the GER brand is appropriately represented in any bids for funding.

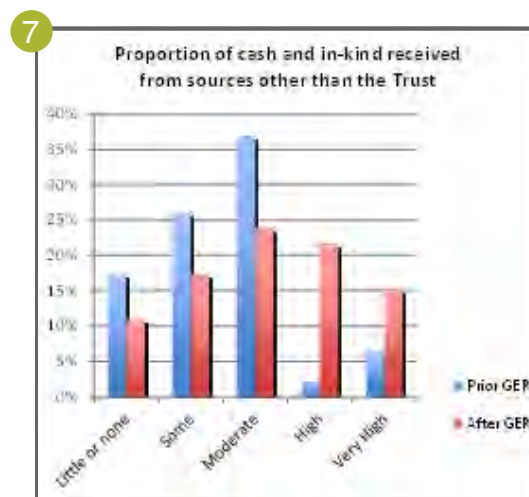
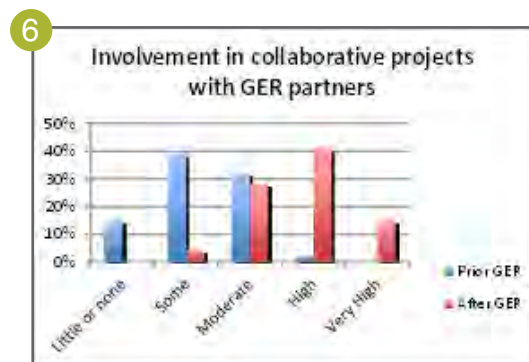
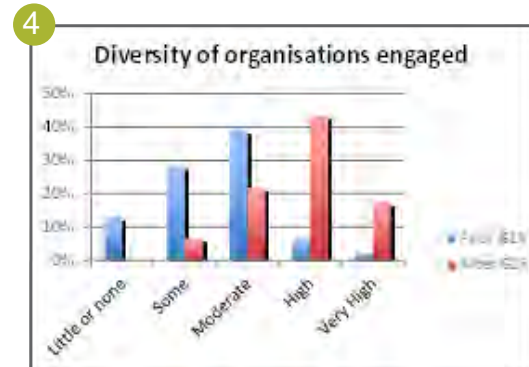
As an outcome of involvement in the development of the National Wildlife Corridors Plan, funding of \$120 000 was received from the Australian Government to complete a gap analysis and action plan for priority activities to underpin the recognition of GER as one of the six national corridor initiatives. These funds assisted with various GER activities including the development of a MER Plan, transition to a new web-site and major GER events.

3.3.4 Outcomes and impacts

GER partners surveyed in June 2015 reported a high level of activities in partnership with others, with greatly increased levels of collaboration as a result of GER involvement and increased support from partner organisations.

Findings included:

- 68% of organisations stated they had a high or very high sense of being part of a bigger picture
- Approximately two-thirds stated they had seen a marked increase in the number of contacts with other organisations in being part of GER and also noted that they considered the diversity of these organisations to be high or very high after GER compared to 10% prior to GER (See fig. 4)
- Prior to their involvement in GER only 10% of those surveyed stated that they had a high or very high knowledge of what others were doing in their landscape. After being involved in GER this increased 72% (See fig. 5)



- 80% of organisations reported that a moderate to very high level of outcomes had been achieved as a result of being part of GER partnerships with a similar result shown for improvements in the co-ordination of local biodiversity conservation activities
- 55% of organisations stated that they now were collaborating in projects with other GER partners. Prior to GER this was minimal (See fig. 6).
- The survey also showed the potential of organisations to diversify funding sources. 37% of organisations surveyed said that they had received a high or very high proportion of cash and in-kind from sources other than the Trust after being involved in GER, compared to only 9% prior to GER (See fig. 7).

As a result of the last four years of investment in partnership building, there is a clear increased acknowledgement that GER provides a unique opportunity to bring together various NRM delivery providers and community groups to agree on conservation priorities and better-align capacity and resources towards a strategic outcome. Significantly, this has included a partnership with the NSW Government where GER is aligning with OEH programs and NSW 2021 (State Plan) targets.

3.4 Objective Three – Communicate Effectively

Improve the transfer of knowledge, skills and practices through community engagement, involvement and education

3.4.1 Approach

Communicating with a broad cross-section of society is essential to achieving the GER vision for connectivity conservation. Cross-tenure approaches rely on the involvement of a range of land managers from farmers to conservation groups and public land administration agencies. These in turn require an aware and supportive community including key communicators such as media, academia and policy makers. From the outset, GER recognised good communication was pivotal to gaining the awareness, understanding and support of a wide and diverse audience.

A range of communication approaches were delivered during the period building on the GER brand and messaging which was developed in the first phase of GER. Trust funding enabled GER to develop new opportunities to refresh and expand the brand and capitalise on a growing network of GER partners to help promote GER messaging. Innovative activities were delivered at a range of scales with key communication events occurring at both the 'whole of GER' and regional levels. Progress included:

An overhaul of the GER website and circulation of e-newsletter - A complete rebuild of the GER website was completed in 2013 to allow for a more consistent and complete profile to be presented on what we do, how we do it and the contributions from GER's main delivery partners. Importantly, it has allowed us to promote the richness of experiences of multiple stakeholders

"We started our corridor project before GER, but now we feel we are not alone, we belong to a big movement, a shared vision."

Bill Pigott, Chair Berry Landcare



across broad landscapes under one overarching banner. This also enabled GER to create an e-newsletter to further promote the work of GER partners. The audience includes major partners, stakeholders and influencers in the GER corridor in Australia and overseas.

Development of Regional Partnership websites and e-newsletters - A number of GER regional partnerships have invested in websites and other online communication activities to raise their profile and promote their work. Social media and other electronic communications have formed an important part of many regional and project-related communication strategies and are a proven tool in building GER networks and sharing connectivity conservation knowledge.

Each facilitator maintains databases of stakeholder and other regional contacts, supplementing the databases of the GER central team. Local networks also enable the re-posting of 'whole-of-GER' communications extending GER's messaging to a much wider audience.

Delivery of Major events - GER has received considerable publicity and delivered meaningful communication to its key stakeholders through a series of major events, including:

- Announcement of the Trust's continued support to the GER in Sydney in December 2011
- Announcement of the first round of GER Partner Grants in August 2013, and launch of a new stream of GER Landcare grants in March 2014 to mark the 25th Anniversary of the Landcare movement

- A gathering of GER partners and members of the Australian Committee for International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for a major address in May 2014 on the role of GER in contributing to the global delivery of connectivity conservation by Harvey Locke, a founder of the Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative in North America
- The first interstate GER partners' forum, dinner and workshop in August 2014
- Delivery of a three-day field trip as part of the World Parks Congress in November 2014 visiting the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, Southern Highlands and Illawarra and cross-tenure projects in GER partnerships operating in those landscapes.

Development of GER engagement programs - With NSW Government funding, GER has been able to develop three major 'whole-of-GER' engagement programs to encourage wider landholder and community involvement and to add value to other projects. These include:

- 'GER Supporters Program' - encouraging community involvement in GER. This provides a map-based listing of existing GER supporters with online registration and a story capture portal to enable GER partners, landholders and the wider public to share their support for the GER vision (see GER website).
- 'Parks of the GER' - promoting the vital role of protected areas as the core links in the GER corridor, increasing visitation, appreciation and volunteering in parks. This included a program of OEH activities for 'Parks Week' promoting GER to urban communities, and a video distributed to NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) visitor centres showcasing the GER corridor to park visitors (see GER website for the Parks of the GER video).
- 'GER Atlas' - developing of an online citizen science portal to mobilise the functionality of the Atlas of Living Australia to record on-ground GER project achievements, enhance consistency in citizen science project delivery and reduce costs to NGOs associated with developing their own platforms.



Forums and presentations - The GER central team and regional facilitators are regularly invited to make presentations or participate in other ways at a variety of regional field days and events. These presentations have stimulated benefits for attendees including:

- Increased awareness of connectivity conservation
- Increased motivation and commitment to become a partner in the GER
- Knowledge sharing about community network formation
- Motivation for groups to form a more structured partnership with the aim of partnering with the GER.

Importantly, due to the maturity of GER and increasing involvement of researchers, practitioners and NGO staff, many presentations are also being made by GER partners and supporters. Given the geographic area of the GER corridor this has obvious savings in time for the GER central team and facilitators and is helping to build an increasing group of GER ambassadors.

Leveraging GER National and State Partner communications - The reach of communications has increased significantly through the promotion of connectivity conservation and GER in a range of long-standing and highly regarded GER partner publications.

This has included three reports and magazines distributed at the World Parks Congress (World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) 'Building Nature's Safety Net 2014', Human Society International's (HSI) 'Conserving Australia's Threatened Ecosystems' and a three page article in NPA's Nature NSW magazine), Australian Conservation Foundation's (ACF)

Supporters' Report 2014, 'Building the Dividing Range' report, Campaign Highlights 2014 and editions of its Habitat magazine, NPA's Nature NSW magazine, FNPW's Year in Review and PAWS magazines, Land for Wildlife newsletters and leaflets and articles in the OEH Conservation Partners Program newsletter 'Bush Matters'. These publications will have already and will continue to extend the reach of GER extensively through hard copy and electronic distribution.

Publications and books – The increasing profile of GER in Australia and overseas has resulted in content being included in major references. This includes the IUCN's 'Protected Area Governance Management' book distributed to universities and managers of public lands. A chapter on connectivity conservation featured a case study on GER and the GER logo is promoted as a result of a small contribution to the book's publications. A Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) publication 'Linking Australia's Landscapes includes separate chapters on GER, S2S and BRA. A third publication by the ACIUCN 'Innovation for 21st Century Conservation' includes a paper presented at a symposium in March 2012.

Video – GER has invested in the recording of several engagement events which capture important GER messages, so they can be shared with a broader audience. Of the several videos produced each has proven to be an ideal medium to provide evidence or demonstrate the breadth of community and stakeholder involvement and commitment to GER. Some have been made for major events like the GER Forum or as part of major projects like the K2W Link, while others provide snapshots of events which can be shared through social media forming an online legacy for GER.

3.4.2 Outputs

The extent to which the community has become more aware of environmental issues and supportive of connectivity conservation efforts is demonstrated through:

- Individuals engaged: 11 265
- Volunteers involved: 16 454
- Primary school students involved: 2532
- Secondary school students involved: 4068
- Tertiary students involved: 538
- Organisations engaged: 1278
- Training sessions conducted: 146
- Training sessions conducted by a Registered Training Organisation: 22
- People trained: 3009
- Awareness raising events: 449
- Attendees at awareness raising events: 36 662
- Educational products developed: 170
- Individuals potentially reached: 4.5m
- People sharing, giving or receiving, traditional Aboriginal knowledge and Caring For Country: 2495
- Partnerships established with community and/or government: 371
- Aboriginal group partnerships: 54

These figures relate only to Trust and the Biodiversity Fund GER projects in NSW, being HVP 'Stepping Stones, S2S 'Bush Links' and the K2W Link.

3.4.3 Outcomes and impacts

GER communications have been an important marketing tool for GER helping to maintain the GER brand in the conservation marketplace and wider community. This has been particularly important for GER given it is essentially a partnership of disparate organisations which benefit from having a visible presence of which supporters can identify and associate with, creating the connection between people and landscapes that the GER vision aspires to.

Maintaining brand awareness through this presence also increases GER's ability to attract additional government, NGO and corporate support for projects which would not have otherwise been delivered. The broad range of communication activities and tools employed by both the GER central team and regional partnerships has enabled a range of messaging to be successfully delivered to a diversity of audiences.

The result of this has been a general raising of awareness in society of the conservation and environmental service value of the Great Eastern Ranges and the engagement of a broad range of stakeholders and community members in GER projects.

GER communications have also provided an essential knowledge sharing tool between practitioners, fostering greater alignment of activities in the GER corridor and increased on-ground connectivity conservation outcomes.

The benefits extend beyond measurable outputs and include improvements throughout the GER corridor in:

- Knowledge of the principles of connectivity conservation and how these translate to improved practice in delivery
- Understanding of the broader strategic context for effort and commitment to regional and local investment priorities
- Awareness of connectivity conservation and how the contributions of different organisations fit into the wider delivery mix
- Access to available science and information about strategic priorities
- Showing to people that what they do fits into a bigger picture
- Resource efficiencies and effectiveness through aligning with others in the same landscape
- Keeping major issues, like climate change and the need to protect large landscapes and biodiversity, on the public agenda
- Recording current effort which future generations can build upon, documenting an important step in the human history of the Great Eastern Ranges.

"Though a mere pinprick in the scheme of things it's great to feel that my labours are contributing to the big picture GER vision."

Mandy Wilson, landowner in Southern Tablelands



3.5 Objective Four – Apply Knowledge

Improve understanding of species, ecosystems and local landscapes and their requirements for long term health

3.5.1 Approach

The size of the landscape and the dynamic changes occurring within and upon it require that the most targeted and cost-effective approaches to delivering available and emerging interventions are implemented where possible.

Science provides a rational approach to understanding the status and trends in the landscape what is required to address adverse change, where to work and how to measure changes to assist with understanding effectiveness over time.

The significance of the Great Eastern Ranges is well recognised by many land managers, policy makers and researchers. However, information generated by GER has the potential to significantly increase awareness of its extraordinary diversity, uniqueness and importance.

The scientific community provides an important opportunity to better mobilise existing knowledge and research opportunities to inform this understanding and how human communities can better protect, manage and benefit from biodiversity.

GER currently uses this knowledge in the following ways:

Prioritising investment at a 'whole of GER' level - While each landscape in the GER corridor contributes to its connectedness as a whole, investment must be targeted to ensure maximum effectiveness in addressing key threats

to biodiversity and habitat values. GER has applied a clear rationale to define where it can focus investment in development of active partnerships and encourage affiliated projects, networks, organisations and landholders to be part of the GER vision.

In early 2012, GER carried out a 'high level' assessment of all regional landscapes in the NSW section of the GER corridor in relation to these criteria based on data regarding:

- Distribution of existing reserves and tenure-based connectivity instruments
- Potential connectivity of GER habitats (Drielsma et al 2010, 2012)
- Drought refuge areas (Mackey et al 2010)
- Bird migration and dispersal routes (Smith, 2010; Howling et al 2011)
- Current vegetation condition and potential for future loss of condition at landscape scale (Drielsma et al 2010)
- NSW native vegetation management benefits analyses (Drielsma et al 2012).

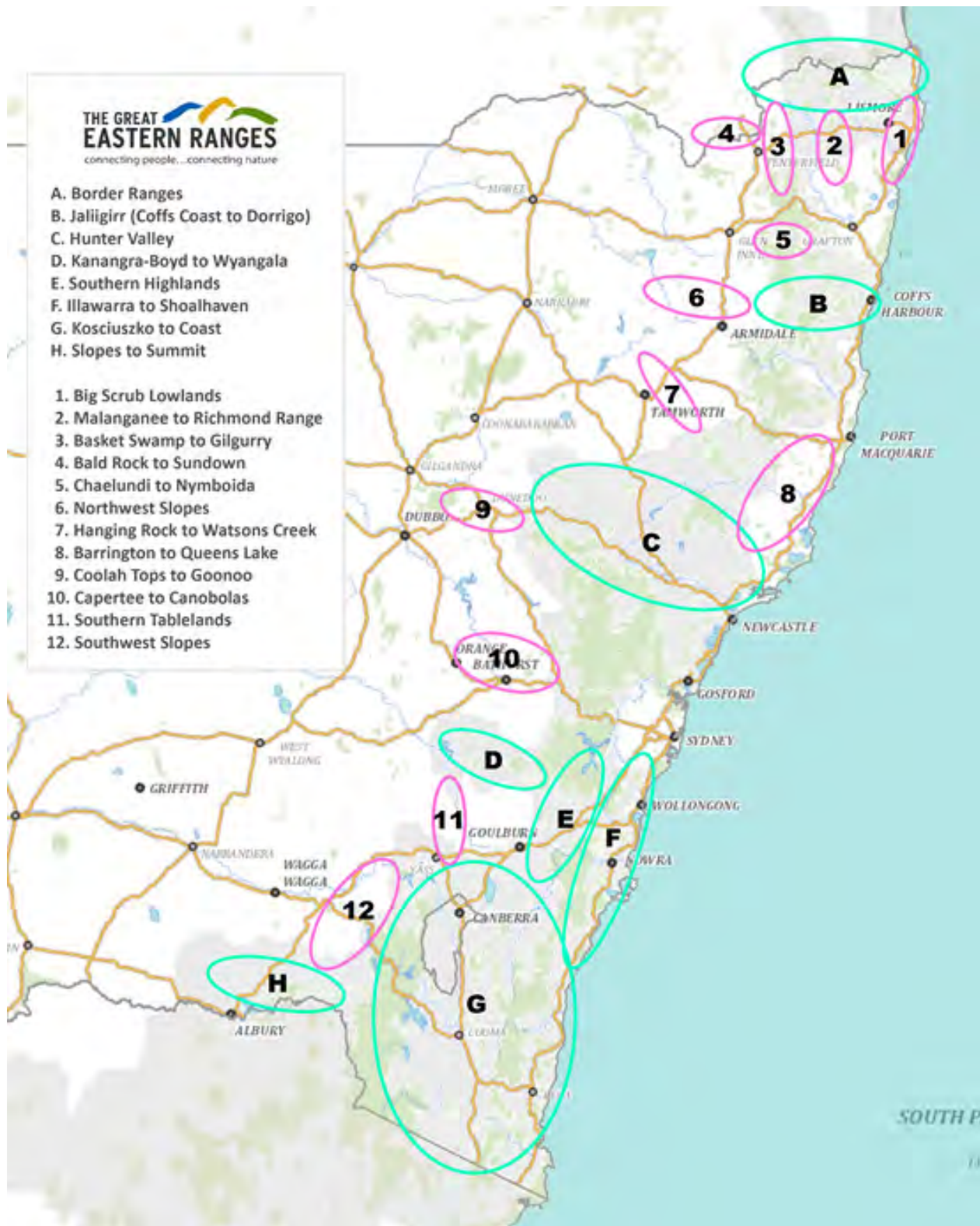
The assessment highlighted a number of areas which comprise apparent gaps or weaknesses in connectivity of the GER corridor which require filling or strengthening. These areas include core habitat areas under sustained pressure from edge effects, habitat areas which form natural or fragmentation-driven bottlenecks for species dispersal or migration, landscapes with potential for continued loss in condition with associated erosion of functional connectivity.

Each landscape is not equal in terms of potential to contribute to maintaining the connectivity of the GER corridor. With around 60% of NSW occupying lands other than protected areas, there are multiple options for action. A targeted approach to working in priority areas was adopted to ensure resources are not too thinly spread. A desk-top analysis of connectivity priorities using best-available information considered each of the landscapes in relation to four variables:

- Biological values - regional distinctiveness and species diversity
- Connectivity need - apparent discontinuity in connectedness of habitat and protected areas
- Conservation and social opportunity - active organisations present with the capacity and interest in delivering collaborative programs
- Program contribution - opportunity presented to develop and test approaches that contribute to implementing an effective GER

This desktop assessment identified 15 new regions in NSW (see map on p. 31), in addition to the five original regional partnership areas, as key linking landscapes, with three selected for targeted investment in addition to the five existing GER partnerships:

- Coffs Coast to Dorrigo on the north coast
- Illawarra to Shoalhaven on the south coast
- Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala on the central tablelands.



Map of GER priority focus areas in NSW

Trust funding facilitated the formation of new regional partnerships in each of these landscapes, being JBA, I2S and K2W. The high priority given to the K2W landscape ensured it formed the focus for investment to establish a third partnership with funding from the Biodiversity Fund.

Prioritising investment at a regional level – Development of conservation action plans (CAP) and investment plans provide an important early collaborative activity in each of the GER regional partnerships. This approach has proved effective in that it allows the integration of information derived from several key sources:

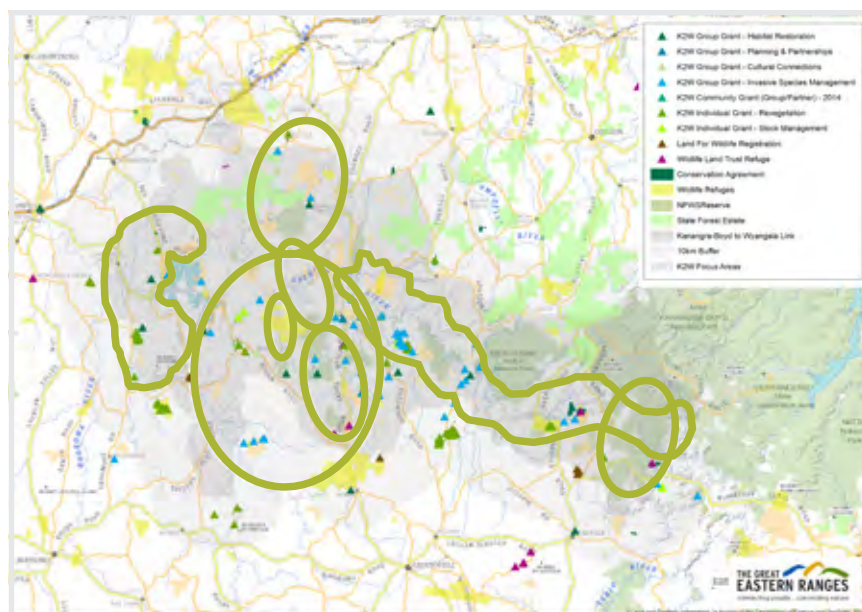
- Spatial analytical products which establish modelled metrics for vegetation condition, habitat condition and meta-population viability
- Mapping of conservation opportunities and constraints (including land tenure, conservation commitments and NRM investments)
- Local knowledge of pressures and sources of pressure acting in the landscape.

While Trust funding during the period did not accommodate investment in spatial analysis, GER regional partnerships have either developed a strategic plan or reviewed an existing plan based on best-available information to guide action and transparent decision-making in priority areas.

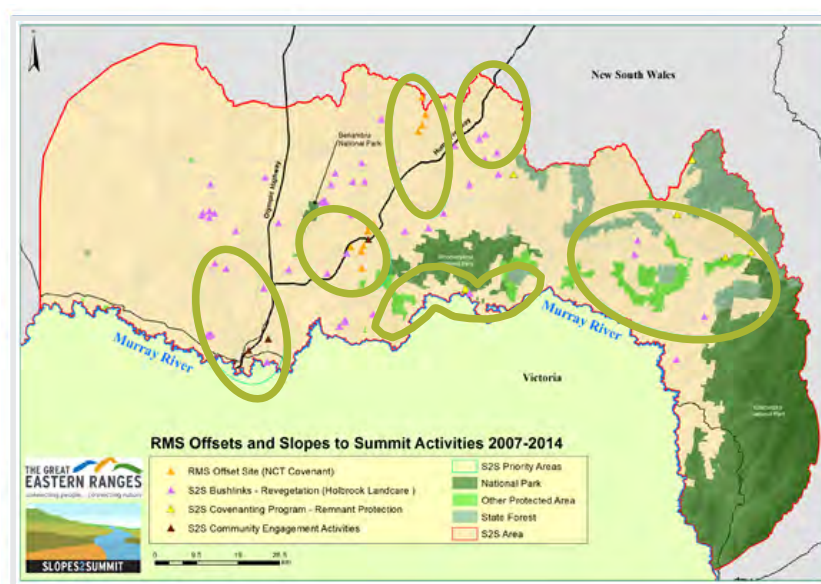
Two examples of this approach in K2W and S2S are shown on the adjacent maps. The most recent example of this approach was K2W. Using Australian Government funds, the partnership

combined local knowledge on values, current investment patterns, stakeholder aspirations and needs with available spatial analysis.

Data layers and the CAP methodology explicitly consider pressures and their drivers as the basis for determining risks associated with investment or inaction. These form the basis for risk mitigation



Prioritisation of investment in K2W



Prioritisation of investment in S2S

and management in a more sophisticated and holistic way. The approach ultimately defines assets, what action is needed, where to work, and how to proceed. It also points to performance measures appropriate to the task.

Targeting priority issues - The GER has previously adopted the use of The Nature Conservancy's 'Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation', ensuring consistency with planning approaches used by NGO partners and emerging partnerships in Victoria and Queensland. The Open Standards provide a CAP model modified and applied in landscapes worldwide, which are complementary to the NSW Natural Resource Commission's Standard for Quality NRM.

3.5.2 Outputs

The extent to which capacity is being built through improvements to knowledge and skills across partner organisations and the community is demonstrated through:

- Much greater access to information on conservation connectivity was reported
- Improved understanding of connectivity conservation
- Greater understanding of individual landscapes' contribution to connectivity
- Increased level of involvement in connectivity conservation
- Organisations reporting a greater focus on work in GER priority areas
- Most organisations stating they had made a significant difference to landscape connectivity and were increasingly targeting investment on corridors or other priority areas.

3.5.3 Outcomes and impacts

In terms of achieving improvements in the understanding and application of species, ecosystem and landscape knowledge, the 2015 survey of GER partners found that:

- Over 55% said that they had high or very high access to information on conservation connectivity
- 72% of organisations said that they had a high or very high understanding of the principles of large scale connectivity conservation after being involved in GER, compared to only 24% prior to GER (See fig.8)

GER has disseminated information through its regional partnerships, national and State partner networks to guide investment decisions.

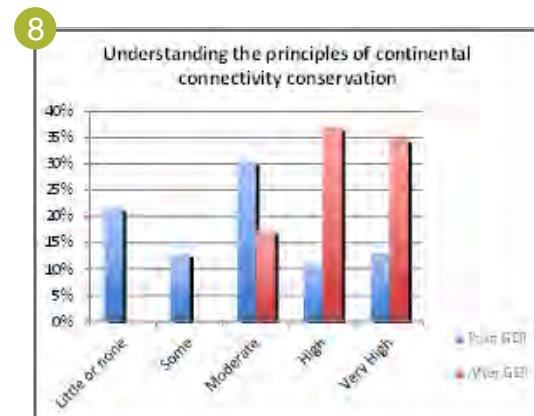
Resulting conservation assessment and prioritisation processes have in turn contributed to a greater understanding of:

- What natural assets occur within the GER corridor, making it significant in the broader continental context, and driving decisions about investment relative to other types of landscapes in other biomes
- Within the GER corridor, which regions, assets, processes, values and threats should be targeted and addressed to maximise resilience of ecosystems under future change scenarios.

Improving access to this knowledge has been fundamental to the successful delivery of collaborative efforts:

- Informing priorities for action by placing understanding of assets and values in the context of regional conservation needs and opportunities

- Demonstrating the importance of acting in the GER corridor relative to other regions by highlighting the status and significance of the ranges and demonstrating the opportunities that exist to value-add past efforts
- Rationalising decisions and demonstrating measurable success and progress, maintaining government, public and investor confidence
- Maximising opportunities to tap into the emerging 'green economy' including, BioBanking, green carbon economies, carbon sequestration, catchment yield and quality provision services
- Defining the scope and scale of funding needs and shaping future policy choices including decisions about institutional arrangements and relationships with the scientific community, funding bodies, industry, etc.



“In connecting people and natural landscapes from western Victoria to far north Queensland, the Great Eastern Ranges vision is an intergenerational investment in a better Australia and a continental response to climate change of global importance.”

Dr. Graeme Worboys,
Co-Vice Chair Connectivity Conservation and Mountains,
IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas



4. RISKS & CHALLENGES

4.1 Continued monitoring of legacy outcomes

The ultimate goal of GER is to increase the extent, condition and connectivity of habitat and enhance the persistence of native species in the GER corridor. This goal is supported by three complementary objectives which reflect the importance of collaboration, communication and the application of knowledge to ensure more effective and lasting outcomes.

Some indicators are amenable to immediate change, but biophysical indicators at a whole of GER scale will take a long time to become apparent or for data to be collected that will demonstrate change.

Resourcing will likely remain an on-going challenge for servicing an effective Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (MER) framework into the future. As far as possible, GER will need to adopt or collaborate with existing data collection, analysis and interpretation approaches to minimise the need for collection of new data. This is expanded upon in the GER MER Plan.

4.2 Coordination capacity

Experience in the GER and elsewhere demonstrates the essential role local leadership plays in the delivery of successful on-ground outcomes. Locally-based facilitators are integral to raising community and stakeholder awareness. They are able to link otherwise disparate and disconnected community groups and organisations, facilitate agreement on conservation priorities and strategies and bring together available capacity and resources. The cross-tenure, cross-jurisdictional and cross-sectoral operations of the facilitators is what makes this role singularly different to

all others operating in the regional conservation context. This is highly valued by regional partnership members who alone cannot achieve the same collaborative outcomes as what is provided through the efforts of an independent facilitator.

No other mechanism or resources currently exists to coordinate the otherwise disparate connectivity conservation activities of groups and organisations in the landscape at a regional scale. Regional partnerships provide a forum to facilitate agreement on strategic priorities, develop greater understanding of contributions made via on ground delivery and coordinate activities across a spectrum of groups and project sites.

However, the facilitator role is the most difficult to fund. Public and private granting bodies almost exclusively require investment of funds in on-ground works and materials. The current funding realities which place the role of facilitators at risk is equally relevant to the GER central team and their co-ordination capacity and its ability to:

- Continue the vital work of building the financial sustainability of regional partnerships so that they continue to provide a means of engaging local communities in developing and owning solutions for connectivity conservation
- Promote the Trust's investment in projects by communicating their broader context
- Work with GER national, state partners and regional partnerships and to align complementary programs and activities

- Expand GER programs (GER Supporters, Parks of the GER, GER Atlas) to inspire greater community involvement
- Translate lessons learned from individual projects across the wider GER corridor
- Assist with linking grant projects with other relevant Government programs and community outcomes to maximise the benefits of all investments
- Leverage the Trust's grants program to encourage broader investment from private sources.

4.3 Brokering available options for landholder involvement

GER supports a unique and essential landholder engagement mechanism by promoting the spectrum of private land instruments and options for getting involved in connectivity conservation. Feedback from newly engaged landholders demonstrates that having a variety of non-permanent, government and non-government options available is an essential precursor to attracting wider involvement which can evolve into greater commitment in future. Landholders are far more likely to approach an independent operator for advice such as a GER Facilitator.

4.4 Collaboration and cross-tenure outcomes

Regional partnerships require the involvement of a diverse range of skills and capacities in order to address the often-complex needs and challenges found in on-ground cross-tenure projects. Throughout the funded period, facilitators have performed an essential role in engaging organisations, explaining the objectives of GER and helping new

partners find a place in expanding regional networks. Maintaining this role without specific funding will see the function lost, with resulting loss of benefits to partnerships and member organisations.

In particular, facilitators are able to broker greater awareness, understanding, trust and collaboration between managers responsible for different land tenures. This is an essential prerequisite to developing commitment to contribute to a wider outcome and in many cases helps to refine priorities or scheduling of work to better complement neighbours' efforts.

4.5 Personal and institutional capacity

The survey of GER partners has highlighted the marked improvements GER has made to stimulate:

- Understanding of connectivity conservation and what others are doing to address regional priorities
- A greater sense of being part of a bigger picture and commitment to work in priority areas

- Increased contact with other organisations and involvement in projects working in partnerships with others
- Improvement in the coordination of local biodiversity conservation activities.

These improvements are reported as being directly associated with GER. They represent a major outcome from Trust investment and are among the outcomes most at risk of loss in the absence of the facilitator role.

Loss of facilitators and coordination capacity is likely to result in:

- Reduced visibility of GER state-wide and regional partnership presence
- Increasing emphasis on project management, reducing capacity to deliver social, community and institutional capacity-building outcomes
- Increased requirement for partners to take on administrative responsibilities at a time when resources available to maintain their own core operations is under significant pressure

- Limited capacity to record and promote the legacy effects of the Trust's investment.

4.6 Wind-back from large landscape scale project funding

Increasingly, public funding sources are reducing the amount available from individual grants (e.g. the Australian Government's 20 Million Trees program small grants projects are limited to \$100 000 over 2 years). This eliminates the potential to deliver integrated, multi-faceted and cross-tenure projects of the type widely recognised as essential by the scientific community.

4.7 Incorporation

Consideration was given to whether GER should become an incorporated entity and advice was sought from the legal firm Mallesons on a pro-bono basis in 2012.

The conclusion of the Lead Partners was that regardless of the costs, the strength of the GER lay in its collaborative partnership model. Indeed there was a significant risk that an incorporated entity could be seen as competing with partner organisations to source external funding.

Notwithstanding this earlier decision, when promoting new business development ideas to potential supporters, it is assumed that GER is an incorporated entity. Having to explain the current model and then identifying an organisation to host a funding agreement inevitably adversely impacts GER's potential to finalise agreements and, in most cases, adds significantly to GER's delivery cost.



“Everyone is connected to the landscape, but not connected to each other. GER is connecting them. You can tell, from the farmer to the politician, that everyone sees this is vital for Australia.”

Gary Tabor,
Director Center for Large Landscape Conservation, USA.



5. OPPORTUNITIES

5.1 Leveraging partners programs

Ultimately the effectiveness of connectivity conservation in the landscape depends on success in enabling different organisations, landholders and communities to work together. This requires an understanding of the varied social, economic and environmental values that different stakeholders operate under that has been well established by GER in recent times.

The last four years has created the conditions needed to harness widespread involvement of a cross-section of organisations with an interest in achieving connectivity conservation across eastern Australia. Significant progress has been made in relation to establishing:

- Goodwill from partners and the community
- Widespread acceptance and a positive reception from landholders and land managers
- Demonstrated success in targeting conservation instruments towards priority areas
- An effective model for integrated delivery of a suite of available conservation instruments
- Success in encouraging alignment of partners programs with GER outcomes and ability to leverage co-investment.

Current conditions ensure the potential to further leverage the knowledge, skills and capacity of partner organisations to further embed GER investment priorities in mainstream conservation programs

and enable continued long term involvement of partner organisations. This in turn provides an opportunity for GER to facilitate growth in awareness of community participation and collective investment in a range of relevant partner programs such as:

- **Foundation grants** – expanding the number and extent of financial contributions provided by private and corporate investors in turn mobilising the value of GER's brand alignment with sponsors
- **'Who's Living On My Land?'** – broadening landholder and wider community interest and understanding of native species populations found on private land, the presence of feral pests, and opportunities to engage in programs which promote cooperative cross-property management
- **Land for Wildlife** – expanding the number of landholders engaged in voluntary entry-level conservation programs and property management planning as a basis for better understanding the conservation values of their land, priorities for management, and opportunities to better connect with neighbours' efforts
- **'Saving Our Species' and public grant programs** – enabling continued investment in well-planned and coordinated on-ground restoration and species recovery projects, research and community education programs and providing context to projects which would otherwise operate in isolation from related projects

- **Green infrastructure** – raising public awareness at all levels from Government to the wider community of the importance of the GER corridor in securing ecosystem services, and the relative cost-effectiveness of investing in natural solutions for carbon storage and sequestration, clean water, nutrient recycling and other benefits.

5.2 Leveraging recent business development

GER's existing regional partnerships are an essential part of the connectivity conservation delivery model, providing the forum and catalyst for collaboration. Through regional partnerships, a wide range of partner organisations, each with strengths in a different part of the conservation solution, collaborate and contribute to the GER vision. The previous model of reliance on public investment in facilitator capacity has potential to evolve to a more targeted role of local leadership and stewardship of the GER vision with coordination capacity provided increasingly by partner organisations. New models of regional governance have the potential to at least be developed and tested in coming years.

Projects are currently being prepared by GER regional partnerships to maximise preparedness for upcoming funding opportunities including the NSW 'Bush Connect' and 'Saving Our Species' programs, national philanthropic grants and fundraising campaigns by GER partners. The GER is uniquely able to place proposals alongside existing projects in a bigger context of contributing to continental connectivity conservation with projects linked thematically across landscapes to:

- Accommodate the varied movement needs of native plants and animals comprising coarse 'movement guilds'
- Coordinate the resulting high level strategies needed to enhance connectivity of landscapes and habitats to accommodate them
- Present the range of available conservation management approaches, tailored to suit local conditions
- Provide opportunities to coordinate the range of skills, capacities and interests of partners within and across landscapes

These provide opportunities to maintain, and in time expand, engagement of partner organisations and the wider community.

5.3 Communications

The GER continues to grow the number of inspirational examples of landholder and community group engagement. These are vital in communicating the objectives of the GER and its role in complementing and supporting partnership and community projects, explaining how people can get involved and the benefits they can experience. Investment in the communications program has enabled cross-sharing of information, engagement with a wider audience and underpins the continuing growth in wider community awareness of the GER, particularly in our priority partnership areas.

5.4 Framing the next phase for GER

With funding of a further \$300 000 from the Trust in July 2015, GER partners and stakeholders have been presented with an opportunity to review the best delivery model, governance arrangements and funding opportunities for GER. The first part of the project will critically evaluate the GER to test its value proposition, supporting the continued transition to become an ever more mature public-private partnership. This process will enable:

- An updated 10 year strategic plan to deliver connectivity conservation outcomes, mobilise partner capacity, attract funding from new sources and partners, foster greater public involvement and ownership of the GER vision and track how GER is making a difference
- Revised governance arrangements, that clarify roles and responsibilities, facilitate partnerships and collaboration, ensure transparency in decision-making, demonstrate accountability, support credibility and are well understood by partners
- A clear plan to expand the diversity of financing mechanisms and collaborations to ensure the future sustainability of GER.

"The important thing is that GER is able to see complexity as an opportunity rather than a challenge."

Gabe Anderson, former Facilitator GER Hunter Valley Partnership



“Seeing the evolution of great ideas taking shape, being moulded by great champions and slowly becoming realities on the ground, that is the story of GER.”

Penny Figgis, AO
Vice Chair for Oceania IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas



6. CONCLUSIONS

GER established the first successful public-private sector partnership for delivery of cross-regional, whole-of-landscape conservation in NSW. The needs of such an approach are diverse and complex and required the development of systems, processes and mechanisms to provide partners with the confidence that their efforts will have a positive collective impact. To this end, GER has successfully:

- Developed partnerships with active regional delivery partners
- Delivered a proven model for aligning existing programs based on a shared vision
- Transferred leadership of regional partnerships and the wider GER from Government to the community.

The significance of the Great Eastern Ranges is well recognised and information generated by GER has potential to significantly increase awareness of the extraordinary diversity, uniqueness and importance of the Great Eastern Ranges.

The size of the landscape and the dynamic changes occurring within and upon it require that the most targeted and cost-effective approach to delivering available and emerging interventions is needed. The GER provides a rational approach to translating knowledge about the status and trends in ecosystems and their drivers, facilitating agreement of what is required to address any adverse changes, stimulating coordinated action in priority locations, and measuring changes to assist with understanding our effectiveness over time.

As with the previous period of Trust funding, participants have reported marked benefits from the GER in relation to coordination, collaboration, access to information, and partnerships with complementary organisations and projects. Likewise, participants report these would not have arisen without the Trust's investment in the facilitating delivery model of the last four years.

The 2011-15 period revalidated and consolidated the importance of a multi-landscape network of regional partnerships and partner projects that is GER.

However, the continued long term success of GER will rely to a large extent on continued public, industry, philanthropic and government support. This will be part of a review that was commenced with Trust support in July 2015.

We have grown exponentially over the last four years, generated increasing buy-in from partners and landholders and raised our profile in Australia and overseas.

This gives us a great deal of momentum, as we look to frame the next stage of our evolution.

The current focus is how best to harness our success and to take ourselves to the next level.

The Great Eastern Ranges Initiative must be continued, as its work is too important.

The Great Eastern Ranges Initiative will endure, as it has too much support.



APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Case studies

1. 2014, a year of international recognition and consolidation across the GER community
2. Refocussing to become a fully costed corridor partnership, sharing the Southern Highlands Link method
3. From idea to action and to the future, Jaliigirr's five lessons in 24 hours.
4. Restoring the Berry rainforest, a long-term proposition in the Shoalhaven
5. The K2W Regional Partnership, the value of bringing people together in the Upper Lachlan
6. Working with local communities to restore cultural connections in Bathurst
7. Connecting and inspiring young people across the GER corridor
8. Volunteers supporting the Capertee Valley Regent Honeyeater Recovery Program
9. New funding engages new ideas and new communities in the South-west Slopes
10. Private conservation mechanisms contribute to the GER vision
11. Everyone's Environment, Queensland's latest quest to conserve threatened species
12. Woodland Bird workshops, partnering with a national organisation to build local knowledge
13. NSW Parks Week, spreading the GER message
14. 'Who's Living On My Land?', capacity building for landholders
15. Counting koalas for conservation, GER supporting Citizen Science
16. Partners collaborate to increase Glossy Black Cockatoo habitat in K2C
17. Cultural Connections, supporting Ngunya Jargoan Indigenous Protected Area
18. 25th Anniversary Landcare Grants, small grants for community groups
19. Holbrook Landcare building 'Bushlinks' in the GER
20. GER Hunter Valley Partnership, a step closer to connectivity
21. Protecting life in the Great Eastern Ranges, a critical piece of 'green infrastructure'
22. Applying knowledge through strategic science projects
23. Reconnecting Gondwana, Dorrigo landscape linkages

1

2014, a year of international recognition and consolidation across the GER community

Galvanising support to tackle the big environmental issues of our age is no easy task. While people are concerned for the future of our natural resources, working out what you can do to make an impact is overwhelming for most. Helping people to navigate opportunities and understand that many drops in the ocean can create a tide of change is where landscape-scale conservation movements like the GER come into play. With eight years of operation under its belt, GER has created ten regional partnerships which bring together individuals, groups and organisations across all land tenures and sectors to collaborate on priority conservation projects – projects that will restore the connectivity of habitat along the length of the GER corridor.

At a forum for GER partners held in Sydney in 2014, the evolution of GER into a community-driven initiative had arrived, bringing the creators of the GER concept together with the community who now own it to be inspired, learn and contribute to planning for the future. Participants talked about the importance of a whole-of-corridor approach, the need for broad engagement with communities and the importance of securing greater certainty for the future of GER. While practitioners provided evidence of the breadth of the connectivity conservation projects underway in the corridor, leading authorities used the occasion to recap how the science that underpins connectivity conservation makes the case for GER clear and compelling. They also talked about why we should be focusing our efforts on the social side of the equation, engaging people in conservation as a key means of enabling more of the Great Eastern Ranges to be protected, enhanced and restored. An audience of over 180 heard genuine enthusiasm for GER from pre-eminent conservationists such as Canadian, Harvey Locke, who joined the forum via video to highlight the importance of GER, not just for Australians but as part of a global connectivity conservation effort.

Capturing the imagination of the global public continued as a theme for GER in 2014 with 16 delegates from 11 countries joining the GER field trip, 'Crossing the Great Divide', as part of the IUCN's World Parks Congress in Sydney. The field trip was designed to give an international audience insight into the workings of one of Australia's largest connectivity conservation programs. The group, from Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, China, Mexico, Nepal, New Zealand, Russia and the USA visited iconic landscapes such as the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, Jenolan Caves and Minnamurra Rainforest as well as regular farming communities involved in GER regional partnerships bringing a global audience to the door-step of grass-roots practitioners of connectivity conservation in Australia.



Refocussing to become a fully costed corridor partnership, sharing the Southern Highlands Link method

When the most recent round of Trust funding arrived in 2012, there was no truly functional GER Southern Highlands Link (SHL) regional partnership. There were a number of partners and organisations working hard on various projects while very aware of GER, but they had become disengaged or in some instances resistant to the idea of reforming a partnership due to the funding gap in 2011. Now, there is a functioning partnership that as a reflection of its success has a fully-costed collaborative corridor project underway and is actively pursuing additional funding, inspiring excitement in regional partners and bringing new organisations into the collaboration.

In an effort to reconnect these partners, SHL undertook a social landscape mapping exercise in mid-2012 and created a community engagement strategy which sought to deliver events, such as a regional workshop which would bring together people and organisations with an active interest in connectivity conservation. Following the successful delivery of a regional workshop, a new Working Group and governance structure was established for SHL which became pivotal to helping identify priority areas and projects through members' knowledge of existing activities and priority gaps. A follow-up workshop then gave SHL the opportunity to present the Working Groups plans back to the community and engage additional stakeholders in further developing a collective plan for action. The result was a refined set of focus corridors with agreed, embedded themes and priority projects. A program of works was designed for each project which was then costed and appropriate partners invited to be involved in the collaboration. While this was happening, a Fundraising Strategy was developed by the Working Group to secure funding to implement the projects and which, importantly, relies on all SHL partners to help execute its actions.

Having a strategic overview to what the group is doing as a collective proved to be critically important to understanding where the synergies and opportunities lay for this regional partnership. It was equally important that this overview was shared and understood by all partnership members, so that each is better-able to step out of day-to-day work and think

about how they can actively contribute to the vision and the possibility of bigger and more-inspiring things beyond what can be achieved alone.

The result of SHL's stakeholder re-engagement and consultation method has been the creation of the 'Wall to Wollondilly' Project. Since 1817, the banks of the Wollondilly River have been used for agriculture. Weed control, revegetation and protection of remnants is required to sustain the five Endangered Ecological Communities and 11 NSW listed species which remain along its reaches. The initial costing for immediate works at a pilot level is around \$600 000. This level of funding will reinstate basic connectivity and coordinate engagement of the local community around what is also a very important local water source. The partnership has so far applied for \$540 000 funding and is now preparing for engagement with corporate bodies to establish opportunities for major donors to contribute. The groups three years of discussions and planning are coming to fruition and the years ahead look exciting with other projects yet to evolve from this simple but effective partnership development method.



3

From idea to action and to the future, Jaliigirr's five lessons in 24 hours

The GER Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance (the Alliance) recently held a 'From Idea to Action and To the Future' event marking the culmination of nearly three years of collective effort to establish the new partnership. The event brought together 25 organisations for an overnight retreat in the mountains west of Dorrigo where the theme was how the Alliance has moved connectivity conservation from vision and to on-ground action in the region. The event reflected on five important lessons learnt over the period, the first of which was the essential importance of acknowledging Country and Elders in the practice of connectivity conservation. Throughout the event, Elders and officer holders in the Local Aboriginal Land Councils reminded partners of this and concretely demonstrated the need and value of paying respect when gathering on Country and planning works to restore habitat and connectivity of landscapes and people.

The second lesson was the value of publically acknowledging the body of Alliance projects as a tangible part of the GER and the contribution they make to connectivity conservation at a landscape-scale.

The third lesson revisited the value of connecting landscapes for the benefit of biodiversity. Recently completed corridor mapping by North Coast Local Land Services and Coffs Harbour City Council and a presentation on the science of connectivity confirmed the geographic and scientific setting for both existing and future Alliance projects. With this information partners are now able to better-position themselves to set future priorities which will make a difference to the long term viability of the GER corridor.

Lesson four centred on how actual completed projects both motivate and unite people and are the glue that binds a cross-sector alliance. By providing a genuine opportunity to share information about completed or on-going projects with peers, key organisations, including Local Land Services, Bellinger Shire Council, Coffs Harbour City Council, Forest Liaison

Group, Nature Conservation Trust, National Parks and Wildlife, Coffs Harbour Local Aboriginal Lands Council, NSW Office of Environment & Heritage and ENVITE, made time to attend and benefited from an exchange of knowledge in a remote location without distraction.

The fifth lesson further developed the concept of the 'feel good factor'. Participants at the retreat were able to enjoy the stunning environment of Mount Hyland, share meals, go spotlighting and network around the challenges and successes of their connectivity projects. It renewed enthusiasm for GER.

The overwhelming sense was that the Alliance had indeed moved from vision to putting significant connectivity projects in place, by providing a strategic vision and creating a platform for greater collaboration between government, land managers and community. The forum concluded with a session making new plans for 2015 and beyond.



Restoring the Berry rainforest, a long-term proposition in the Shoalhaven

The GER Illawarra to Shoalhaven (I2S) regional partnership has been supporting the community in its twenty year involvement in work on a patch of scrub adjoining the David Berry Memorial Hospital. The identification of the little-known patch of habitat as Illawarra Lowland Subtropical Rainforest acknowledges the efforts of the local Landcare group to restore the site to its former habitat value. With only fragments of this Ecological Endangered Community (EEC) remaining in the Shoalhaven, the site holds important conservation value as a stepping-stone in the Berry Regional Corridor.

The scrub has always been called the Berry Rainforest, believed to be lowland coastal rainforest, but it had never actually been classified as such. The site had had earlier interest from individual ecologists and botanists and so enough information was available to ask NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) to re-survey the rainforest remnant and determine whether it now conformed to the EEC classification. The site does have many typical rainforest plant species and structural features of the Illawarra Lowland Subtropical Rainforest, enough for OEH to determine that it conforms to the classification. The OEH survey also confirms that the ongoing work of the Berry Landcare group has helped the vegetation return to a state where it has become significant habitat.

The Berry Rainforest was part of I2S's start-up project in 2014. I2S produced a promotional video on the work of the Berry Landcare group in which you can see a change in vegetation between the present day and when the work began. I2S recognised that there are very few of these remnants protected as a park or reserve, and while it is only a small patch of vegetation, it is important that its value at a landscape scale is understood and protected. To help further protect the site, information on its values has been provided to Shoalhaven Local Council who have upgraded their biodiversity mapping layer as a result. I2S has also met with hospital administrators in the hope they will be interested in helping to protect the site's ecological values from ongoing threats such as weeds, fire and feral animals and urban development.

It's a great story, but one that shows how long it really takes to see the outcome of habitat restoration and rehabilitation work. It tells of how twenty years of consistent effort by volunteers has resulted in an improved flora landscape. It is evidence that people can reverse a damaged landscape through a long-term commitment, which without this site would have remained a haven for weeds and pest and most likely would have been burnt, destroying any hope for restoration. Given enough time and resources, all sites have the capacity to turn into something much better, and that's the reason why Landcare do the work they do, but it is also important to recognise that weed control, fire and feral animal management are not something that can be dealt with in a single round of funding. Environmental work, by its very nature, is long-term work and the good-will of landholders and volunteers will only go so far.



5

Regional Partnerships, the value of bringing people together in the Upper Lachlan

Each of the GER regional partnerships hold regular forums to provide members with an opportunity to get together and share recent activities, experiences, issues and opportunities. An inspirational video of a Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala (K2W) forum in 2014 showcases inspirational messages about the benefits of working cooperatively across land tenures to restore and maintain connectivity, sharing these with other partnerships. Set at The Corridor Project, an arts, education and environment venue based at Riverslea Station Woolshed on the banks of the Lachlan River, fifty-five people including researchers, farmers, conservationists and government agencies, reflected on the achievements of K2W and talked about what their future will be.

Keynote speaker, Bob Debus, highlighted the tremendous importance of GER towards conserving Australia's iconic landscapes and biodiversity, speaking about how the ongoing success of the GER vision is reliant on every one of the people that are part of it. Other speakers included Neil Ingram and Greg Ingram from Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council, who talked about the Gaambuwananha Ngurambang Bringing Back Country program. Geoff Kay from the Australian National University spoke on research looking at the influence of natural phenomena on patterns of biodiversity and connectivity and Dr Paul Rymer from the University of Western Sydney talked about the genetics of ecological restoration. Gordon Refshauge, of Hovells Creek Landcare, provided an update on the K2W grant project action plan for habitat management on farmland.

With such a great range of speakers, it set the scene for an afternoon of fruitful discussion about local priorities for pest and weed management, promotion of conservation instruments, funding incentives for revegetation work and a K2W cultural connections program. The day concluded with a session looking at new project ideas and partnership development.

It was pleasing to see the level of interest in K2W double from the previous forum, with many more groups, stakeholders and new partners represented such as Forestry and Taronga Zoo. The forum provided a great opportunity to bring the K2W community together and reflect on its achievements since the partnership's inception in 2011, following funding of \$2.7m from the Biodiversity Fund. It was also an opportunity to be reminded of the essential contribution played by individuals and conservation on private land in the maintenance of broader environmental values across the GER landscape.



Working with local communities to restore cultural connections in Bathurst

Wahluu Gamarra means ‘Awakening the Mount’ and is an area of 141 acres of woody grassland at Mount Panorama, at Bathurst in NSW. It is a significant site with connections directly through story lines to the Great Eastern Ranges. Formally known as the Sir Joseph Banks Nature Reserve, the site has been the focal point for an exciting GER project between Greening Australia and the Bathurst Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC). Due to this area’s important cultural significance, Wahluu Gamarra was recently returned to the Bathurst Aboriginal community, who together with Greening Australia are undertaking targeted actions to eradicate feral species, encourage regeneration of the site and improve its biodiversity through revegetation. The intention is to manage the site long-term to promote the cultural significance associated with managing and healing Country, through direct, on-ground experiences.

Funding from the Trust has allowed the project to maintain its momentum and to develop Wahluu Gamarra as a space for cultural learning and sharing for the broader community. Future maintenance of the site will be carried out by visiting school, community groups, and other agencies seeking access to Country. It is also hoped that the site’s prime location on Mt Panorama will assist in helping to secure a major corporate sponsor to support it. The project has attracted a lot of attention including initial visits from the then Governor General Quentin Bryce and the NSW Aboriginal Land Council State Councillor Craig Cromelin. All labour with the exception of the project manager is completely voluntary, with 28 volunteers from a range of organisations currently working on the site in its early stages making great headway with the eradication of weeds, in particular an 80% reduction of Blackberry.

The variety of different groups working together and the sharing of ecological and cultural knowledge have led to the establishment of new networks and support for the Bathurst LALC’s ongoing work. The practices and methodologies applied on the site have in turn assisted them in the better management of their own land. This collaborative project is serving to re-establish connectivity between cultural landscapes and has highlighted broader community benefits, which the Bathurst LALC can now target. The site forms a unique and valuable part of the GER corridor that enhances connectivity at all levels – cultural, spiritual, environmental and social.



Connecting and inspiring young people across the GER corridor

In November 2012 with funding from the Trust, OzGREEN launched its 'Youth Leading the Great Eastern Ranges (YLTGER)' program. The program was designed to educate, inspire, engage and connect hundreds of young people along the length of the GER corridor. Participants learnt about sustainability and the challenges facing GER locally, they developed their own youth vision for creating sustainable, resilient ecosystems and communities and planned actions to achieve it. The project forms part of OzGREEN's established program, 'Youth Leading the World' (YLTW). The project involves four phases: intensive facilitator training to build the capacity of local people to run YLTGER in their own region; three day Youth Congresses which bring people together to share their ideas and further develop projects; youth-led Forums to present the outcomes from the Congress to external stakeholders; and, implementation of the projects, including community events and planting days.

YLTGER kicked off in 14 locations along the GER and has links to 42 locations nationally and globally through the YLTW Congress network which involves 700 young people. A further 273 people attended the Community Forums where they were educated and inspired about sustainable ecosystems and GER and developed plans to contribute to the projects outcomes. Feedback indicated around a 200% increase in knowledge and motivation to reduce environmental impact and increased self-confidence to be leaders of change. The program brings with it many social benefits including an increase in youth confidence, leadership capacity, understanding of connectivity conservation, and an opportunity for young people to engage and make new contacts, along the GER corridor. Participants have reached a massive 14 biodiversity targets since then - restoring an urban creek in Bellingen, launching a 'Hug a Tree' campaign on Facebook, doing tree plantings and assisting in bird field surveys.

Fifty three YLTGER facilitators have been trained and tailored GER and regional training materials have been developed to help extend engagement and activities to the wider community. In November 2013, 90 locations, twice as many as in 2012, were delivered as part of the next round of YLTW Congresses and Forums, 28 of which fall directly in the GER corridor.

The project has delighted all involved and exceeded expectations. It serves as an excellent example of the advantages of tapping into an existing program, and leveraging the strength of trained local facilitators within a national and global network. It is an excellent example of how the reach of the GER can be expanded in partnership with a national organisation, in this case one focused on building youth leadership.



Volunteers supporting the Capertee Valley Regent Honeyeater Recovery Program

With funding from the Trust, Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) has managed a successful volunteer program to build on a well-established Regent Honeyeater Recovery Program in the Capertee Valley. This Box-ironbark Woodland in the Hawkesbury-Nepean area of NSW is a vital breeding stronghold for the species.

The project provided an important boost to planting and weeding in the valley using methodologies that have been employed by the Recovery Program since 1994. CVA coordinated the project using 23 volunteers, two of whom have completed the Volunteer Training Program Certificate. Volunteers span a range of organisations including Wilderness Society travellers from the UK, Korea, Hong Kong, Germany and France, students from the University of NSW and retirees. Two local contractors were also employed to provide and plant local native plants.

Four weeks of concentrated work resulted in 2565 native trees being planted over an area of 5.5ha and maintenance of 600 existing trees through the removal of weeds, watering, and the placement of tree guards over an additional area of five hectares. One of the key features of the project was the great contribution of two local landowners, April Mills and George Lus, who purchased and planted over 400 seedlings with materials provided by the project. In addition to the participation of landowners, a major strength of the project has been the active collaboration between local conservation groups within the Capertee Valley.

Overall, the project has been a success. While the number of plants and areas of weeding did not meet original targets, the outcomes so far have been noteworthy and the quality of work has been high. Because of this, local funding has been pledged to ensure continuation of this valuable project to ensure the safeguarding and restoration of prime habitat for the Regent Honeyeater.



New funding engages new ideas and new communities in the South-west Slopes

Thurgoona Men's Shed, just outside of Albury, is like many other across Australia which provides a place for men to learn new skills, contribute to the local community and socialise. Established in October 2012, the Shed has undertaken a number of projects for local organisations in need, but few would have predicted that the group would turn their attention to providing homes for squirrel gliders. More than one hundred squirrel glider nest boxes have now been made by the group of willing volunteers and installed in backyards of residential and small rural properties on the outskirts of Albury. Thurgoona is very fortunate to have a significant population of squirrel gliders and maintaining a viable population is a key focus of the Albury Conservation Company, who is managing the nest box project on behalf of the Slopes to Summit (S2S) partnership. The specially designed nest boxes complement tree hollows found in mature or old growth Box-Ironbark woodlands, River Red Gum forest and Blackbutt-Bloodwood forest, the preferred but diminished habitat of the Squirrel Glider.

The Squirrel Glider nest box program is part of the S2S Partnership's Community Engagement Project: 'BioBlitz, Big Trees, and Boxes Project – connecting communities with biodiversity across southern NSW' funded by the Trust through the GER Grants Program and designed to use innovative activities to introduce new communities to conservation. A 'BioBlitz' is where the public have the opportunity to join expert ecologists in a local wildlife survey and help contribute species records directly to the Atlas of Living Australia. First conducted in May 2012, this event engaged over 300 local students and residents in 36 wildlife surveys within a designated area in Thurgoona, covering private and public land in urban and rural areas. Over 100 species of fauna were recorded, including regionally significant animals such as the Brown Falcon, Sloane's Froglet and the Squirrel Glider. S2S also hosted another innovative event in June 2013, the S2S 'Bioflix', an amateur short film competition themed around local biodiversity – a kind of 'Tropfest for conservationists'. The event was well promoted and winning entries were announced and screened to a sell-out audience at the Regent Cinemas in Albury.

The idea to have a S2S Big Tree Competition, where people could share a story about their favourite big tree, followed as part of a new focus on the importance of trees. In 2012, the partnership created a film about local Eucalypts called 'Snow

Gums to River Reds', which featured a selection of the over 30 Eucalypt species in S2S and the stories of some of the people who share the same landscape. Then in 2014, S2S ran a community study of the region's historic survey-marker trees as part of the S2S 'Connecting the Old and the New project', also funded by the Trust. The survey not only recorded the location of these historically significant trees, but also engaged the community in a conversation about their cultural and biodiversity value. The S2S 'Big Tree Competition' provided an opportunity to carry on this conversation by inviting people to share a broader range of stories about their favourite large tree in the S2S landscape and why it is important to them. By connecting the cultural value of these trees to their ecological value, awareness of their role in the landscape and the need to maintain them throughout the GER corridor is raised. The winning entrant's tree had a circumference of 1 155cm.

Such broadly appealing events increase the likelihood of community participation in S2S and encourage proactive conservation practices in the community in general.



Private conservation mechanisms contribute to the GER vision

With less than 10% of NSW's precious biodiversity secured in our National Reserve System (NRS), responsibility for protecting Australia's natural heritage falls largely in the hands of private land managers. The Nature Conservation Trust of NSW (NCT), a not-for-profit organisation established under the NSW Nature Conservation Trust Act 2001, delivers mechanisms to encourage private land owners to protect our most vulnerable and valuable plants and animals. Through an NCT in-perpetuity conservation agreement, landowners are able to play a significant part in the ongoing protection of biodiversity across the State. The NCT Revolving Fund is one of the ways the organisation delivers these voluntary but legally-binding conservation agreements. The Revolving Fund is a simple concept where properties of high conservation value are purchased and re-sold with a conservation agreement in place protecting the natural assets of the property. When the property changes hands, the new owner manages the property under the conservation agreement and joins a growing community of private land owners committed to creating a network of private conservation reserves. Funds from each sale are re-invested in further purchases.

Severn Park East, a 1017ha merino sheep grazing and fine wool production property located 50km south west of Cooma on the Monaro plateau, is a recent addition to the NCT's portfolio of properties. It lies within the GER Kosciuszko to Coast (K2C) partnership region and adds around 300ha of Natural Temperate Grassland (endangered under both the EPBC and TSC Acts) to the NRS, increasing the total protected area in NSW by around 15%. It also contains the nationally endangered Upland Wetlands of Monaro Plateau community (listed under the EPBC Act) and areas of Tablelands Snow Gum, Black Sallee, Candlebark and Ribbon Gum Grassy Woodland (listed as endangered in NSW under TSC Act).

These Endangered Ecological Communities provide important habitat for one of Australia's most endangered reptiles, the Grassland Earless Dragon. The Severn Park East conservation agreement covers one-third of the total area of the property

and will be supported by the NCT Stewardship Program which provides ongoing advice to conservation agreement owners as they manage their property into the future. Importantly, the conservation agreement will seek to continue the grazing regime established by the previous owners which has allowed the conservation values of this property to persist.

The Revolving Fund model is also used to protect private land in the Queensland and Victorian sections of the Great Eastern Ranges, through Queensland Trust for Nature and Trust for Nature Victoria, who are both GER partners. All three organisations play an important role in linking landowners and local communities across the GER corridor to support them to actively manage, protect and restore the habitat and biodiversity values of their own part of the Great Eastern Ranges.



Everyone's Environment, Queensland's latest quest to conserve threatened species

The Scenic Rim is a special part of South East Queensland, a fertile mountainous region home to a beautiful array of native plants and animals. It is also critical habitat for a range of threatened species including the Eastern Bristlebird, Koala, Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby, Spotted-tailed Quoll, Red Goshawk and Glossy Black-cockatoo. A new habitat restoration program, funded in 2015 by the Queensland Government's Everyone's Environment Grant program, is working to support landholders in the upper reaches of Teviot Brook, Burnett Creek, Christmas Creek and Clayton Gully to manage private land in ways that will benefit these animals.

Delivered through the Border Ranges Alliance, the project is targeting known and potential habitat of the six species seeking to improve weed and fire management practices and conserve both large tracts of native vegetation and specific areas of habitat. Control works, particularly in upper catchment areas and along creek-lines, aim to prevent weed incursion into protected areas and reduce the extent of downstream weed issues in the future. Revegetation across the upper, mid and lower slopes and along selected waterways will improve the condition of existing habitat, enhance connectivity and facilitate wildlife movement through the landscape. The inclusion of fire planning activities will improve fire management practices on land adjoining national park. Installation of fire trails will help protect project sites from unplanned fire and enable planned mosaic burns appropriate to ecosystem requirements. Lantana removal as part of the weed control program will also complement fire management outcomes as Lantana thickets frequently compound local fire management issues.

The project includes fauna surveys on selected properties to confirm the presence of any or all of the six targeted species using a combination of wildlife camera monitoring and an Eastern Bristlebird detector dog with data to be contributed to state and national wildlife databases. A significant part of the project relies on funding landholders directly to undertake weed, fire and revegetation activities on their property. Under

contract with South East Queensland Catchments, property owners will be required to co-invest in activities on their land. This approach enables short-term cost-sharing and is proven to lead to greater landholder commitment to site maintenance.

With the assistance of the Queensland Government through its \$99 000 Everyone's Environment Grant, the Alliance is able to strengthen its unique cross-border partnership and implement recovery actions within the Queensland priority Conserve and Repair precincts of the Border Ranges Rainforest Biodiversity Management Plan, a national recovery plan. Works undertaken will improve connectivity between national park and Gondwana World Heritage areas, strengthening the backbone of the GER corridor and address specific high priority threats identified as key actions in other state and national Recovery Plans for the six targeted species.



Woodland Bird workshops, partnering with a national organisation to build local knowledge

Picking a Buff-rumped Thornbill from a Striated Thornbill became a little easier for avian enthusiasts from Cowra on the NSW Central Tablelands thanks to two workshops delivered in partnership with BirdLife Australia, Neville Landcare and Hovells Creek Landcare. Directed at local landholders, the workshops taught participants about the diversity of bird species found in temperate woodlands and why many of these birds are now threatened. Led by BirdLife Australia's Woodland Birds for Biodiversity project coordinator, Mick Roderick, participants learnt survey techniques as well as bird identification, call recognition and how to separate similar species by sight and sound in a forest environment.

Monitoring of birds was also discussed as it is one of the most important tools for assessing the ecological health and resilience of the temperate woodlands of South-eastern Australia, one of the most diverse but scarce habitat types within the GER corridor. Traditionally, bird monitoring and data collection has been done by birdwatchers and hence there has been a bias towards roadsides and public land, so the aim of the workshop was to broaden knowledge and interest of landholders so that they can contribute to this research effort. In return, landholders seem generally keen to learn which birds exist on their property and willing to help better understand how that may change over time. Once the theory session was over, participants armed with binoculars, notebooks and bird field guides walked local woodland to practice their newly acquired skills, identifying birds from shape, size, behaviour and calls in addition to colour and other obvious features. A good array of birds were seen and the group had the opportunity to illustrate the importance of learning individual bird calls as many species were heard but not seen despite their best efforts to locate them.

The Woodland Bird workshops were part of the BirdLife Australia's Systematic Monitoring of Woodland Birds to Inform (Landscape Scale) Priority Habitat Conservation project funded by the Trust through the GER Grants Program. With more than 60 participants at the workshops there seems solid interest in woodland birds, inspiring organisers to consider running future similar events. The workshops were a huge success not only from the perspective of learning about bird-watching, but also as a community engagement tool introducing new people to GER and their local Landcare community.



NSW Parks Week, spreading the GER message

Parks Week is an annual event celebrated in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, highlighting the role national parks play in connecting local communities with the environment. With support from the GER Partners Grants Program, NSW National Parks and Wildlife (NPWS) ran a number of GER events as part of the Parks Week 2015 program. The theme was Connect with Nature and celebrated the NPWS's partnership with GER with seven events featured in a week-long program of talks, walks and other activities at iconic locations around NSW.

The primary aim of these events was to enable people living in urban areas to experience nature and become more aware of the national parks which form the backbone of the Great Eastern Ranges. The activities also encouraged interest from local communities in making an ongoing contribution to the conservation of the GER corridor. A great example was the Slopes to Summit regional partnership which hosted a cultural awareness day at the Blue Metal Travelling Stock Reserve, near Woomargama National Park. The event saw 60 people watch demonstrations of traditional Aboriginal practices by NPWS Aboriginal Discovery Rangers, Shane Herrington and Talea Bulger. Using natural materials from the surrounding area, participants learnt to make string and rope, create fire, throw a boomerang and fashion stone tools. The event encouraged people of all ages to view the landscape not just in terms of native vegetation and fauna but through a deeper cultural perspective.

Other GER Parks Week events included a historical tour of the south coast, exploration of Corroboree Frog territory in Kosciuszko National Park, an open day at Glenrock State Conservation Area and the Blind Valley Festival. This festival saw up to 600 people visit the Wombeyan Karst Conservation Reserve to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the conservation of the limestone caves site. Special caves and camping packages were available with over 300 people taking up an offer from NPWS to stay on-site where wildlife displays, community stalls and musical performances, including a special choral performance in Victoria Arch contributed to a memorable weekend.



Who's Living on my Land? capacity building for landholders

An innovative citizen science survey 'Who's Living on my Land' has engaged landholders in parts of the GER corridor to use infrared motion-detection cameras to investigate the wildlife sharing their land, both native and invasive. Run by the National Parks Association of NSW (NPA) through a GER Partner Grant with funding from the Trust the project assists landholders to better understand the habitat value of their land and initiate coordinated pest control measures if needed. The initial pilot project was developed in collaboration with the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the Illawarra to Shoalhaven (I2S) partnership area near Barren Ground Nature Reserve and the Kangaroo Valley.

First launched in December 2013, the project is being progressively rolled out in other parts of I2S and also in the Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala partnership region. Landholders are engaged through an introductory workshop run by NPA's Project Officer, which familiarise participants with the use and set up of the infrared cameras. Interested landholders are encouraged to purchase a camera which they then place in strategic locations on their property. The motion-sensitive cameras have the ability to detect a wide variety of different size animals enabling a good snapshot of current biodiversity levels to be recorded.

Results so far have included close to 1000 images, including a multitude of native fauna species, such as Swamp Wallaby, Bush Rat, Long-nosed Bandicoot and the Common Wombat. Bird species caught on camera included Collared Sparrowhawk, Eastern Yellow Robin, Wonga Pigeon, Rufous Fantail and Superb Lyrebird. Feral species such as the Red Fox, European Hare and European Rabbit were also captured at some properties, often to the surprise of the resident property owner. In instances where native species are found, landholders are encouraged to implement habitat improvement activities, such as planting of native trees, fencing isolated paddock trees or retaining fallen logs, taking into account impacts on land management. In the case of pest species, landholders can use the information to initiate appropriate pest control measures.

In 2015, I2S, in conjunction with the NPA and South East LLS offered an integrated 'Who's Living On My Land?' and Pest Animal Control workshop for landholders in the area east of Robertson near the Illawarra Escarpment. This workshop provided accredited training which allows landholders to purchase and use products (1080 & Pindone) for the control of pest animals on their land, such as foxes and rabbits.

The 'Who's Living on my Land?' survey is proving to be a highly successful method of engaging and inspiring communities, helping landholders to better understand their land and initiate coordinated pest control measures. In addition to raising awareness, the project is serving to forge valuable relationships, with observations often collaboratively shared between participants. Continued collation of information on pest species in these regions and the promotion of a more coordinated and long-term approach to pest control by landholders will serve to further strengthen conservation efforts in the GER corridor.



Counting koalas for conservation, GER supporting Citizen Science

In November 2014, the National Parks Association of NSW, in partnership with GER, ran a successful pilot citizen science project, the 'Great Koala Count'. Over 850 people took part in the eleven-day survey, including farmers, landholders, conservation organisations and members of the public, who went searching for koalas in their local area. Over 1 200 records were collected from across NSW and parts of south-east Queensland, 950 of which were koala sightings, with the remainder being valuable absence data.

The aim of the survey is to build a more comprehensive picture of koalas and their habitat use, providing a valuable resource for planning future conservation projects. The count will be repeated annually so that changes in populations, along with the impact of events such as drought and fire, can be monitored over time. In particular, it is hoped that the results of the Great Koala Count can inform GER's work with landholders, to plant important food and habitat trees to help reconnect koala populations. With most of NSW's koalas occurring primarily on private land in NSW, this valuable project will restore prime Koala habitat, helping to conserve not just this iconic species, but other vulnerable woodland residents as well.

A GPS-enabled smartphone app 'BioTag', which links to the Atlas of Living Australia, was developed especially for the count. 'BioTag' allowed users to easily and accurately record the location of each koala, along with a photograph and the answer to a series of observational questions about the koala's habitat, health and behaviour. An online portal was also developed which allowed users to view their data on a map, learn more about the count or enter records directly to the site. Results are analysed and compiled into an annual report and the full dataset is available to any organisation or individual who requests it for use in developing future conservation strategies and planning.

With the assistance of the GER Border Ranges Alliance, Friends of the Koala, Tweed and Byron Shires' Koala Connection teams and GER central team, the pilot was designed and promoted across the state receiving wide media coverage with the story making the ABC national news, Reuters and the front page of the Wall Street Journal.



Partners collaborate to increase Glossy Black Cockatoo habitat in K2C

Six GER Kosciusko to Coast (K2C) partners have formed a highly successful collaboration to increase the foraging habitat for the vulnerable Glossy Black-cockatoo (GBC) through the planting of 10 000 She-oaks, the birds' key food source. The project took place in the upper Murrumbidgee Region between Queanbeyan and Cooma and complements previous plantings in the nearby ACT improving connectivity between the regions. Since the project's formation in October 2012, over 6000 Drooping She-oaks have been propagated by Greening Australia with the bulk planted along the Murrumbidgee, Queanbeyan and Molong Rivers. The plantings required the engagement and cooperation of 25 landholders who have signed voluntary agreements detailing their levels of contribution. This component of the project was facilitated by project partner Queanbeyan Landcare, highlighting the collaborative nature of this successful project.

In 2014, Greening Australia successfully applied for \$50 000 under the GER Partner Grant program to extend the project and further increase the extent of GBC foraging habitat in the K2C Partnership region. The funds build on a previous GBC project that has been undertaken in the Northern Monaro-Burra district and moving further afield in the Tarago-Bungendore district. Seed was collected and over 2000 plants were propagated for the project. The plants were predominantly *Allocasuarina* species chosen to provide a food source for the GBC. Other species propagated as part of the project include a range of *Eucalypts* which could potentially form hollows and provide breeding habitat in the future. Over 30 landholders were contacted directly, and many more were made aware of the project with information spread through networks such as Royalla Landcare and Taylors Creek Landcare Groups.

Site visits and site assessments were conducted on properties to identify suitable sites for planting forage trees for the GBC. Suitability was determined by site proximity to known records of GBCs, presence of *Allocasuarina* species on or near the property, or a potential to provide connectivity between populations. Where sites were assessed to be less suitable landholders were re-directed to other funding opportunities for revegetation works. Twelve site agreements were signed for the most suitable sites. The site agreements ensure that that landholders will undertake the work as agreed, maintain the plantings as required and allow monitoring of the project

to occur for a 10 year time frame. Through the site visits and assessments an area south of Tarago was also identified as being a place of focus for current and future plantings.

The 2000 trees were planted by a combination of different community and youth groups Landcare groups (Braidwood and Taylors Creek), a Green Army team, Greening Australia volunteers and private landholders. Because the project will result in direct benefits for the threatened GBC, there has been a strong response from the community. Individuals have taken on the responsibility of collecting seeds, writing articles for the media, identifying suitable planting sites and getting involved in plantings. This level of community involvement has greatly assisted the project and suggests future projects will benefit from this momentum.



Cultural Connections , supporting Ngunya Jargoon Indigenous Protected Area

Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) received \$50 000 under the GER 2013 Grants program to support implementation of management actions for the recently dedicated Ngunya Jargoon Indigenous Protected Area (IPA), south of Ballina in northern New South Wales.

The IPA is one of only two in the GER Border Ranges Alliance region. An IPA is an area of Indigenous-owned land or sea where traditional owners have entered into an agreement with the Australian Government to promote biodiversity and cultural resource conservation. IPAs make up over a third of Australia's National Reserve System and are managed under the IUCN for conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources.

Ngunya Jargoon protects 1114 ha of the Richmond River floodplain. It is a refuge for an extraordinary number of plants and animals, including 38 threatened animal species, five threatened flora species and eight Endangered Ecological Communities. With more than 400 native plant species, its biodiversity values are significant. In a region suffering wide-scale habitat loss, Ngunya Jargoon is the last remaining intact area of native bushland on the lower floodplain within Ballina Shire. Containing heath and woodlands, rainforest and eucalypt forest, it forms an important stepping stone in a corridor between Tuckean Swamp and Uralba nature reserves and Broadwater and Bundjalung National Parks. Key threats to the site include weeds, feral animals, inappropriate fire regimes and illegal uses such as rubbish dumping.

Jali LALC is one of a number of Aboriginal land management bodies in the Border Ranges region which are actively managing community land. For more than 10 years, Jali's Mibinj Green Team, made up of solely of local Bundjalung people, has been working on Jali country to protect and restore ecological and cultural values. The team has undertaken extensive rubbish collections, cultural surveys and revegetation and fencing activities on the Nyunga Jargoon site in preparation for the IPA. In 2013, Australian Government funding was provided to Jali LALC to establish the IPA, which included the development of a plan of management, though additional funding would be needed to implement ongoing management actions.

Funding provided by the Trust through the GER Grants Program has enabled the Mibinj team to mitigate threats from Bitou Bush, Coastal Morning Glory, Coral Tree, Camphor Laurel, Privet and exotic grasses at three priority sites, as well as engaging neighbouring landholders in cooperative weed control measures to restore the condition and resilience of 120ha of habitat. Working alongside the NSW Rural Fire Service and Nature Conservation Council Firesticks program, the funding has also enabled the team to finish preparations for hazard reduction and ecological burning on which important species such as Long-nosed Potoroo rely.



25th Anniversary Landcare Grants, small grants for community groups

In 2014, GER delivered a special 25th Anniversary Landcare Grant Program in partnership with the Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife (FNPW) and Landcare NSW. Small grants of up to \$10 000 were offered to Landcare and other community groups for connectivity conservation projects in the NSW section of the GER corridor. Nine local projects which improve the connectivity, condition and resilience of landscapes and ecosystems were funded. The projects are inspiring examples of how collaboration between community groups, government and other organisations can achieve important local environmental goals with just small amounts of funding, while contributing to connectivity at a landscape scale.

In the Southern Highlands, the Wingecarribee Landcare & Bushcare group undertook a project at Stingray Swamp. The two part project examined the floristic values of the swamp and addressed inappropriate use of the site by installing security cameras and gates to deter vandalism and restrict recreational to walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Stingray Swamp and surrounding native woodlands are classified in the Central Tablelands Botanical Subdivision into five vegetation types: shale-basalt sheltered forest, Shoalhaven sandstone forest, Morton sandstone heath woodlands, Tableland swamp woodland and Tableland bog. An ecological survey of the site found 194 native plant species, including two threatened species, confirming the exceptional biodiversity of the swamp. A report has been prepared entitled 'Stingray Swamp floral survey' and will inform future management of the site.

On the coast, Shoalhaven Landcare Association received funding to revegetate fragmented landscapes to facilitate the dispersal of animals using endemic species that provide food resources (nectar, seed and fruits) for mammals and birds. Educating landholders on the biodiversity and habitat values of their land formed a key part of the project, with the opportunity to prepare vegetation designs for individual properties. Priorities for replanting included high biodiversity value species that are rare and uncommon in the area and the native colonisers that are known to rapidly provide canopy cover over areas recently cleared of Lantana. Over 700 plants were provided to participating landholders helping to improve the connectivity, condition and resilience of local corridors.

Over in Yass, Yass Landcare Group undertook the Flat Rock Crossing Rehabilitation project which saw a collaboration between Yass Landcare Group, Yass Valley Council and the Skillset Green Army team. Together they transformed the riparian zone above Flat Rock Crossing on the Yass River which was completely overgrown with blackberry, phalaris and other invasive weeds. A reed bed to prevent urban storm water running straight into the river was also created and access on the southern side of the river re-opened enabling the site to be maintained by the Council on an on-going basis with help from the community. Assistance through Green Army funding made it possible to clear the willows from this section of the river where it was once impossible to see the water and appreciate the beauty of the Natural Temperate Grassland which lies along the top of the cliffs and emerges in places along the riparian zone. Work at the site continues with Greening Australia and Green Army planting 1000 tube stock and tackling weeds in an area further upstream.

In the north of the State, Big Scrub Landcare furthered their work to restore lowland sub-tropical rainforest building connectivity along Duck Creek, near Alstonville. Professional bush regenerators implemented systematic bush regeneration work over seven ha of the critically endangered lowland rainforest on Council land and private property directly downstream. Weeds controlled included Lantana, Madeira Vine, Climbing Asparagus, Privet, Camphor Laurel, Ochna and Tradescantia. Twenty-five days of weed control work was completed with the funding helping to implement a vegetation restoration plan for the site. Green Army teams assisted and learnt about lowland rainforest restoration working alongside professional bush regenerators. The project also helped increased restoration knowledge, skills and practices in the broader community by supporting the group's annual Big Scrub day which had 1500 people attend.

Woolshed Thurgoona Landcare Group, located near Albury in New South Wales, used their grant to buy native trees and shrubs and support community planting events over a four month period during the planting window for this area. The project connected targeted areas of vegetation to improve ecosystem resilience for the threatened Squirrel Glider. Planted trees and shrubs will increase the diversity of plant species, food supply and medium to high level structure for gliders,

other arboreal mammals, birds and eventually reptiles as litter builds up. The provision of 'jumping trees' reduces the time that squirrel gliders spend on the ground, reducing their risk of being taken by cats and foxes. The plantings aim to increase the connectivity and resilience of these special ecosystems in Thurgoona to offset the urban development that is occurring here.

Molonglo Catchment Group (MCG) and Queanbeyan Landcare (QL) combined their respective grants into a single project to provide economies of scale and enhance collaborative effort. The Jerrabomberra Creek Small Bird Habitat project at Fernleigh Park saw MCG create a 10 ha area of habitat, in-filling a paddock between existing remnants. The site was fenced to exclude stock and planted with 1075 local Eucalypt trees and native shrubs. The aim of the planting is to facilitate the movement of small birds across the landscape providing approximately 2.2km of additional connectivity, improving access to the riverine environment. The region is home to several small vulnerable bird species including the Hooded, Scarlet and Flame Robin and the Diamond Firetail. The Glossy Black-cockatoo, Diamond Firetail and the Varied Sittella, all threatened species, were recorded amongst old growth trees at an initial bird survey along the newly planted connectivity link. The QL project established an additional five small 'stepping stone' plantings of 35 plants each between this new habitat patch and two other 10 ha patches of remnant vegetation in the vicinity. The project strengthens habitat connectivity in the area southwest of Mt Jerrabomberra, an important link in east/west connectivity across to the Murrumbidgee River valley and the Bullen and Brindabella Ranges. The plantings also complement recent works at Holcim quarry and the K2C Glossy Black-cockatoo habitat project funded through the GER Grants Program and form part of a larger focus on this 'gap' by a range of organisations.

The small bush bird theme continued with the Mundoonen to Yass River Land Connect project where Murrumbateman Landcare complemented previous works on neighbouring properties by creating an additional three stepping stones

within grazed paddocks to reconnect remnant vegetation patches and exclude stock from woodland areas. Plantings included Eucalypts and native shrubs to encourage the return of species such as the vulnerable Flame and Scarlet Robins and Diamond Firetail and Jacky Winter. Large contour swale banks were also constructed to divert water from the site, reducing the volume and velocity of water causing erosion downstream. The community collaboration between neighbours that has occurred as a result of this project has effectively secured sections of the landscape for habitat renewal and species regeneration creating corridors between revegetation projects and the last remaining large woodland remnants in the area.

The nine community projects were allocated \$71 000 in funding through the GER 25th Anniversary Landcare Grants and provided positive conservation outcomes across 735ha of the GER corridor. Projects engaged 54 organisations and resulted in 7843 volunteer hours. Almost 2700 native species were planted, revegetating a total of 22ha while restoring a further 173ha of remnant habitat through weed control and other management works.



Holbrook Landcare building 'Bushlinks' in the GER

With funding from the Biodiversity Fund, the Slopes to Summit (S2S) Bushlinks Project is implementing on-ground works to build landscape-scale connectivity across private lands in the South-west Slopes of NSW, extending from the wet and dry forest ecosystems of the upper catchment and reserves to the threatened Grassy Box Woodlands of the lower slopes and plains.

This six year project, managed by Holbrook Landcare Network in partnership with Murray Local Land Services, was developed after several years of scientific planning and landscape prioritisation by S2S partners. The increasing isolation of plant and animal populations in 'island' reserves scattered through an agricultural landscape is a well-recognised threat to the long-term viability and resilience of ecosystems particularly in the face of climate change. If viable breeding habitat and areas for dispersal can be increased through off-reserve remnant conservation and increased connectivity, it may assist to increase the populations of some species – the Squirrel Glider and threatened woodland birds in particular.

The S2S partnership connects key research agencies and experienced project managers and land manager representatives to design and deliver maximum connectivity outcomes. Scientific principles are applied to the assessment and evaluation of sites, which then determines the level of investment in each area, with high scoring sites receiving the highest rates of rebate. Low scoring sites, whilst allocated less funding, are still viewed as important as they encourage a culture of caring for the land by fostering participation in re-vegetation programs.

Building on the established community connections of the delivery partners, the Bushlinks Project handled over 200 expressions of interest from landholders, with over 800ha of revegetation and habitat protection funded to date. There are many more in the negotiation stage, including cross-property projects which maximise the size and connectivity benefits, and also increase land manager engagement in the project.

Promotion of the project through field days and events held by partners, such as the 'Revegetation Celebration Bus Tour', wildflower walks and a spotlight nights, and the 'Wildlife in our Landscape: are we making a difference?' conference in 2014 has exposed the wider community to connectivity conservation. To encourage community participation in monitoring and evaluation, the public will also be encouraged to contribute wildlife sightings and other data to the S2S portal of the Atlas of Living Australia.



Hunter Valley, a step closer to connectivity

Facilitated by GER Hunter Valley Partnership (HVP), the Hunter Valley 'Stepping Stones' project seeks to strengthen connectivity and enable species movement across the Hunter Valley - a critical pinch point in the GER corridor and gap for both north-south and east-west species movement.

The Hunter Valley has been extensively cleared and only 18% of the original vegetation remains, much of which exists as 4350 isolated patches of bushland on private property. GER Hunter Valley partners are working together to reconnect these remnants to the mountainous backbone of the Great Eastern Ranges by creating a series of 'Stepping Stones' across the valley floor. Restoring connections will increase ecosystem resilience to climate change and help sustain local flora and fauna in the face of other threats such as urban development.

Resources are being targeted to the highest priority sites within the landscape and the partnership is actively engaging the wider community in voluntary efforts on their own land. Through the 'Stepping Stones' project support has been made available for landholders for on-ground works such as weed control, bush regeneration and fencing, and project and property planning.

At the end of stage six of the Australian Government funded project, significant improvements to connectivity have been made across the large grazing community of McCully's Gap, where over 40ha were replanted or rehabilitated. A further 11ha was achieved in Martindale and 3ha in the Lower Hunter, with a total of 8 425 stems planted across the project area. Part of the success of the McCully's Gap site has been the support of Muswellbrook Shire Council who have committed \$50 000 to the project, increasing the amount of assistance able to be provided to landholders.

Other key highlights during this period have been the projects work with local schools. Bird watching excursions are very popular and booked out all year. Stage six saw the summer and autumn excursions take place with students from Denman Public School. This school has sent all their year 4, 5, and 6 students on the bird watching excursion for the past two years. Denman Public School is particularly interested in everything that 'Stepping Stones' has to offer. They have been a main participant in OzGREEN's Youth Leading the World congress with students attending the last two years and plan to attend

again this year. In particular, one of the local High Schools, St Josephs at Aberdeen, has made the event mandatory for all of their year 7 students. Some of the projects that the students have developed through the congress include fundraising for conservation, tree plantings at the schools, various waste and water sustainability projects, and awareness raising events. As of June 2015, over 2000 students have been engaged through the projects school based activities.

'Stepping Stones' has also successfully supported the establishment of a Martindale Landcare group. In 2014, the Martindale Community participated in a weed control program that affected almost the entire length of Martindale Creek. Months of weed control works were carried out with the assistance of 'Stepping Stones' project partner Conservation Volunteers Australia. The community came together and led by 'Stepping Stone's and a few key landholders, the Martindale Creek Catchment Landcare Group was formed. The group has since held a number of community information days, supported by 'Stepping Stones', Landcare, and the Local Land Services.



Protecting life in the Great Eastern Ranges, a critical piece of 'green infrastructure'

The protection of the Great Eastern Ranges in eastern Australia is a top priority for the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF).

The ecological integrity of this highly populated yet biologically diverse landscape is essential to life as we know it in Australia – especially in world made unpredictable by global warming. Yet despite its ecological significance, the ranges is under threat. Reckless development and climate change are further fragmenting and degrading critical habitat. Protecting, connecting and building resilience in this landscape is therefore fundamental to the survival, not just of threatened species of plants and animals, but to the survival of urban and rural communities as well.

As part of its work to protect the ranges, ACF became a partner in the GER in 2013. With its core focus on environmental education and advocacy, ACF has been campaigning nationally for both protection of Great Eastern Range landscapes and ecosystems and for Australian Government support of the GER.

Since that time ACF has partnered with GER to run planning and exploratory workshops with leading Australian ecologists and economists, hosted public forums and discussion panels and presented at local, national and international conferences, including the Sustainable Living Festival in Melbourne, the ACIUCN Ecosystem Services symposium in Brisbane and the Work Parks Congress in Sydney.



ACF has participated in GER's own planning and evaluation forums and featured stories about the GER on its website and 'Habitat' magazine. The ACF team has met GER scientists, Facilitators and local farmers on inspiring GER site visits. ACF has also led lobby trips to Canberra with GER partners to meet and speak with politicians from across the political spectrum about the incredible role played by GER in looking after this important part of Australia.

ACF has undertaken social research on the best way to communicate to everyday Australians on the important role the ranges play as a critical piece of 'green infrastructure' – providing services that are essential to life.

ACF commissioned in-depth research on the breadth and value of ecosystem services provided by the ranges to the nearly 16 million Australians that live within or adjacent to the GER corridor and has demonstrated the failure of existing environmental protection frameworks to safeguard the habitat of its threatened species. This research has informed an exciting new ACF report entitled 'Our Great Dividing Range', which details how the Great Eastern Ranges is the heartland of eastern Australia. The report features inspiring stories of everyday Australians, playing their part to protect wildlife and ecosystems, local water catchments and ancient tall forests.

Most recently ACF has produced a powerful short film also titled 'Our Great Dividing Range' featuring footage of both remote and well-known natural icons. It tells the story of three very different Australians from diverse corners of the ranges who are each working, like so many other Australians, within their communities to protect and restore the integrity of this landscape.

Now ACF is launching a national Great Dividing Range campaign that brings together all these strands and more. The campaign will build community power across the country to ensure that the Great Dividing Range gets the attention and protection it deserves and that GER gets the support and resources it needs to get the job done.

Ultimately the campaign aims to ensure a national nature protection framework is delivered that is capable of addressing all threats facing the Great Eastern Ranges and ensuring both people and wildlife have the safe climate and healthy habitat they need to survive.

Applying knowledge through strategic science projects

Since its inception, GER has placed a strong emphasis on the need for an evidence-based approach to connectivity conservation. The application of relevant science through planning and delivery approaches is acknowledged in GER's fourth objective to apply knowledge to improve understanding of species, ecosystems and local landscapes and their requirements for the long term. This was a driving factor in the decision to establish a reformed GER Science Panel in 2013. GER has been a partner in several important science collaborations, each helping set the foundations for an initiative which is achieving its vision of connectivity conservation.

Funded by the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (\$702 000), the first of these research projects identified the overarching design principles for biodiversity management in multi-use landscapes. 'Architecture of climate-resilient landscapes' (2013 Veronica. Doerr et al), provides connectivity conservation practitioners with guidance for improving the design of re-vegetation and connectivity conservation projects to better accommodate climate variability. The work looks at how we can maximise population size and resilience of native species and reduce direct threats such as invasive species. It establishes the likelihood of accomplishing the above regardless of the type of ecosystem, the precise effects of climate change on native vegetation and degree of future change in land use. Outcomes from the research have informed the design of conservation action planning approach adopted in the most recent Trust-funded GER partnerships: Illawarra to Shoalhaven and Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala. A greater clarity of understanding of potential climate change response scenarios is critical to ensuring that natural seasonal migration and climate adaptation pathways are considered in the context of how they might need to respond to widespread environmental change.

'Priorities for biodiversity adaptation to climate change' (2012 P. Smith et al) was a similarly themed collaboration funded by OEH through their internal climate change resourcing (\$40 000). In this project GER co-organised a workshop for forty-five researchers, land and water managers to build on expert knowledge and available research concerning predicted climate change effects on biodiversity and biodiversity threats to begin to define the needs, priorities and common ground for responses by conservation managers and researchers.

Outcomes from the workshop were used to agree on the main approaches and principles used to identify landscapes prioritised for management to support species adaptation to continuing and emerging pressures as climatic conditions change. Recommendations on how existing knowledge and priorities might better be converted to on-ground management action in current and intended future conservation management programs were also formulated, in turn translating into three strategic climate change research hubs established by OEH.

Funded by the Biodiversity Fund (\$282 500), 'Identifying & prioritising future weed threats in biodiversity corridors' was a collaboration with local NRM practitioners in response to recognition that weed invasion is a key barrier to the success of revegetation and the establishment of biodiversity corridors. The project was a large-scale effort to synthesise knowledge on the identity and best means of controlling problem weeds in different corridors across southeast Australia. The study drew on existing expert knowledge and datasets to identify high priority weed species in the Kosciuszko to Coast, Slopes to Summit and Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala Link regions and examines management practices. The project culminated in the development of a user-friendly web-based delivery platform which is assisting Landcare groups, public land managers, bio-security bodies and other practitioners to understand the pattern of the future spread of weeds and prioritise emergent weed outbreaks for immediate treatment before they take hold in a landscape.

'Mapping national connectivity priorities for investment in the GER Corridor' (2013, G Howling) was commenced in late 2012 as part of the development of a major funding proposal in collaboration with CSIRO, Griffith University, University of Queensland, James Cook University, OEH and BirdLife Australia. The project sought to collate existing data on regional priorities for a variety of plants and vertebrate and invertebrate terrestrial fauna and apply techniques previously trialed by GER (habitat condition, connectivity modeling, species turn-over and drivers of migration and regional adaptation) to identify key areas with potential to maintain or restore condition or connectivity and contribute to the resilience of the GER corridor. The result of this work identified and characterised 20 of the most significant connectivity landscapes contributing to future security of connectivity in the GER corridor in NSW.

This in turn has been used to provide context for projects and practitioners across the GER, and enabled the selection of three new partnership areas based on their connectivity significance and likelihood of impacts from future pressures.

‘Quantifying the environmental effectiveness of on-farm environmental management to significantly improve vegetation management, re-vegetation programs and biodiversity conservation’ (2014 D. Lindenmayer) was a project undertaken with ANU building on the network of 794 large-scale, long-term research and monitoring sites established by Dr. David Lindenmayer and his ANU team throughout the NSW wheat-sheep belt to address the major knowledge deficiencies on the environmental effectiveness of management interventions on the western flank of the GER. The project has successfully evaluated data from the long term monitoring program to isolate factors that contribute to enhancing site condition and habitat connectivity. These in turn will derive advice to landholders on practical management approaches and will highlight suggested indicators for use by landholders to monitor improvements in condition.

These examples show GER’s strength in facilitating connections between researchers and on-ground needs, translating science into practical advice and actions relevant to regional partnerships and a wide range of NRM practitioners in areas which benefit connectivity conservation in the GER corridor. These relationships have been vitally important for GER, assisting in the prioritisation and selection of partnership regions to expand from five partnerships in NSW to ten partnerships in three States in the last four years.

While significant investment was made directly into connectivity conservation research in the first phase of GER, the most recent funding of \$4.4m has been applied to on-ground action rather than research. This has meant that more focus has been made to maintain existing and develop new science collaborations with academic institutions and the environmental research community. These relationships remain a vital aspect of the GER’s growing and evolving collaborative network, enabling GER practitioners to access and apply data, research and interpretation they would not otherwise engage with other than through the GER.



Reconnecting Gondwana, Dorrigo landscape linkages

The Reconnecting Gondwana project, funded by a 2014 GER partner grant with the Nature Conservation Council (NCC), developed initially from a network of local landholders who were seeking assistance to carrying out conservation planning and repair work across the Western Dorrigo Plateau. Most landholders were seeking better fire management outcomes to ensure the health and viability of the internationally significant landscapes and corridors of the Dorrigo Plateau. The Dorrigo Plateau is an exceptionally diverse and globally significant landscape and many landholders have a strong interest in maintaining and sustainably managing the biodiversity on their properties.

The project focused on providing best-practice fire and biodiversity management advice and planning to address inappropriate fire regimes and the degradation of World Heritage value rainforest and nationally-significant high-elevation grassy under-storey eucalypt forest. It also facilitated the protection and restoration of identified hotspots of endemic and threatened species and helped build capacity across the community, including Aboriginal custodians, to enable landholders to respond to key conservation priorities.

A highly successful fire management workshop was held at Dundurrabin Community Centre with 32 participants attending. Filming of this workshop and the landscape took place in order to develop a series of six locally relevant and instructional biodiversity management videos. A total of 14 landholders expressed an interest in property visits and on-site workshops. During property visits, sites were identified for the establishment of buffer plantings and confirmed for Spring planting. Approximately 2000 advanced rainforest plants were grown and generously donated to the project by Billy's Creek local tree grower, Barry Hicks. A series of three information sheets were also developed for landholders, detailing the values and management needs of Dorrigo Plateau rainforests, grassy high-elevation eucalypt forests and hollows/habitat trees.

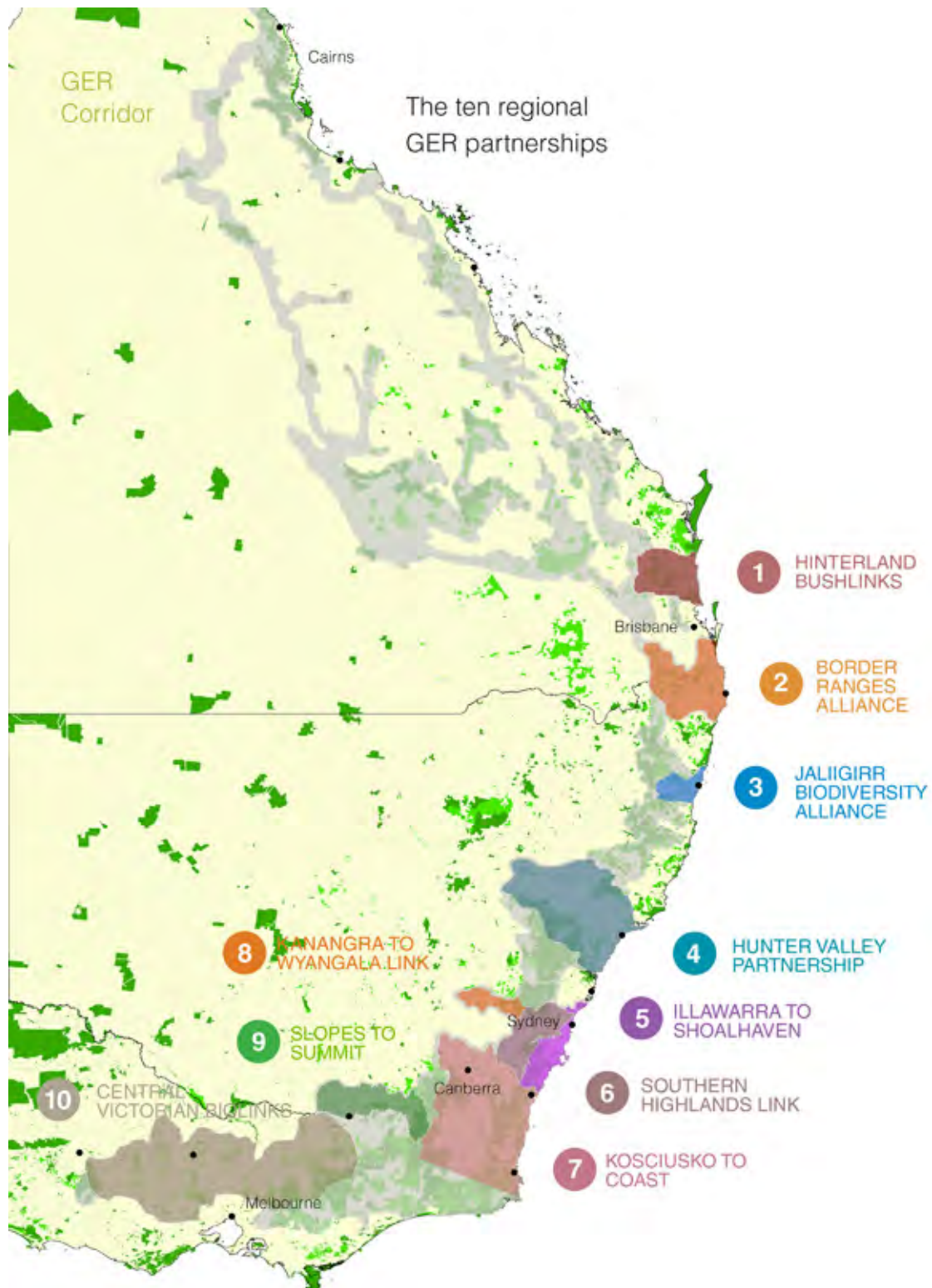
A total of 14 land management plans were developed across over 3000ha of the key areas of Billy's Creek, Dundurrabin, Upper Nymboida, Tyringham, Bostobrick and Eastern Hernani at the Rim of the World. Individual property planning included assessment for biodiversity attributes, best practice fire management, weed and pest management

control measures, identification of threatened species and core habitats within properties and mapping detailing corridors and key habitats. Together, approximately 500ha of key corridors are now better managed for conservation purposes as a result of the project and 49 landholders gained knowledge and practical experience of better soil, carbon and water management practices, specifically achievable through better fire management.

The project resulted in the strengthening and growth of a community network that seeks to achieve better land management outcomes across the western parts of the Dorrigo Plateau, a key focus area for GER and the GER Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance. The network is interested in participating in an ongoing multi-property ecological restoration program and the educational products prepared for the project will contribute to broader improvements in land management practices across the Dorrigo Plateau. The project also strengthened relationships with key partner organisations including the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW Office of Environment & Heritage, NSW Rural Fire Service and Blinks River Guardians, a local community environmental group.



Appendix 2 – Overview of the ten GER Regional Partnerships



1. Hinterland Bush Links

Formation and Focus

Hinterland Bush Links (HBL) was established in the Sunshine Coast region in 2011 and has until recently been hosted by Barung Landcare. The organisation has engaged over 500 landholders and other community members in on-ground conservation work and educational activities, and partnered with 14 organisations. HBL is aiming for the long-term conservation of native plants and animals in the Sunshine Coast region through connecting, restoring and protecting habitat on both private and public land. Over the last four years, HBL has focussed on the restoration of habitat in key corridors across the Blackall and Conondale ranges and through the Upper Mary Valley.

Achievements

Funding of \$150 000 from Sunshine Coast Council over the past three years has supported a part-time HBL Coordinator and covered some operating costs of the partnership. A further \$60 000 from major donors over this period has assisted with project costs and more

recently enabled the employment of a part-time project officer. The HBL Coordinator has overseen a range of projects, including work to eradicate Weeds of National Significance in the Upper Mary Valley, supported by funding of \$100 000 from Burnett Mary Regional NRM Group over three years. Regular community workshops, offering advice on biodiversity and effective approaches to habitat restoration and connectivity have been a feature of HBL's program. These included special events featuring key speakers, such as Harvey Locke, a founder of the Yellowstone to Yukon initiative. A key achievement since HBL's establishment has been the development of its 'Roving Restorers' program – a mobile volunteer bush restoration team which assists landholders with weed management and revegetation work. It has involved up to 35 people in working bees twice a month. Along with other HBL activities, Roving Restorers has contributed 8 800 hours towards connectivity conservation works over a three year period.

Future

HBL has recently become an incorporated entity, partly as the result of this being a requirement for continued funding from the Sunshine Coast Council. Moving forward, HBL will retain a close working relationship with its former host, Barung Landcare, while increasing its reach to a wider range of organisations in the region as part of the wider GER.



2. Border Ranges Alliance

Formation and Focus

Border Ranges Alliance (BRA) was established in 2007, as one of the initial five GER Regional Partnerships. BRA is a unique, cross-border collaboration with a mandate to strengthen Qld-NSW conservation partnerships. Hosted by the Nature Conservation Trust of NSW, BRA has around 50 member groups with a small group of state government and community organisations operating as a Working Group to govern the activities of the partnership. These include South East Queensland Catchments (SEQC), North Coast LLS and OEH. The partnership's focus is the promotion and implementation of the Border Ranges Rainforest Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP) (2010), a national statutory recovery plan. BRA seeks to value-add to the BMP activities of member groups by providing a strategic coordination role across the Border Ranges Gondwana World Heritage Area.

Achievements

BBRA has successfully completed four community projects in priority corridor areas (Upper Brunswick Riparian Links, Wilsons Creek Huonbrook Rainforest Links, Wompoo Gorge restoration, Upper Rous River Vegetation Connectivity

Enhancement) with Trust funding of \$100 000 in 2012. In 2013, it secured a further \$49 750 to undertake conservation works in the Ngunya Jargoona IPA. Other key achievements during the reporting period include the successful piloting of the Border Ranges Atlas of Living Australia activity recording project; delivery of a guest lecture program at Southern Cross University; and representation in regional networks, forums, conservation field days and community events. A case study on the BRA was also written as a chapter in the Linking Australia's Landscapes book.

Having implemented the objectives and activities of its initial Terms of Reference set in 2008, the Working Group has developed a new strategic plan which will facilitate future productive regional conservation partnerships focussing on the development of new on-ground collaborative projects in priority connectivity areas. A revised priority areas map has been prepared using data from OEH and SEQC, and consultations with a wide range of regional partners has had the added benefit of re-engaging members and attracting new interest in GER and BRA-led collaborative projects under the NSW 'Saving our Species' and 'Bush Connect' funding programs.

The Alliance working group have also developed 13 new priority projects under its new strategic plan which range from Cloud Forest research to Forests of Eastern Australia Global Hotspot promotion, projects surrounding cultural landscapes and access to Country for traditional burning practices, riparian restoration in priority rural areas (Qld) and Northern Upslopes fire management (Qld). These proposals will contribute to the Alliance partnership by working in areas of peak interest where members are seeking external support to address key conservation issues. To date, the Northern Upslopes project has been successfully funded through the Queensland Government's Everyone's Environment Grant (\$98 250) and will draw in the resources of Qld partners, linking with other funded projects.

Future

Since 2011, the BRA Facilitator has invested significant amounts of time coordinating and assisting grant applications for projects in the region. Unfortunately, few major partner applications have been successful. The Working Group continues to work with member organisations to maintain enthusiasm and seek new opportunities for collaborative bids under funding programs as they arise.



3. Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance

Formation and Focus

Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance (JBA) formed in 2012, shortly after joining GER as one of the two new regional partnerships established in the period with Trust funding. An incorporated body of 20 member organisations in the Coffs, Bellingen and Dorriggo Plateau area, much of the focus over the first three years has been on defining how the group can value add to the already comprehensive conservation effort occurring in the region. Recognising that the partnerships value lies in the wealth of scientific and land management expertise it brings together, the group's focus has been on increasing cooperative arrangements between partner groups with respect to on-ground biodiversity actions to increase efficiency and efficacy. Increased appreciation of Aboriginal cultural heritage has been a key theme, regarded as a core element of biodiversity conservation. Greater inclusion of Aboriginal work teams across the region is one of JBA's key outcomes.

Achievements

After its establishment as part of GER, momentum was built with \$100 000 from the Trust through the GER Grants program to fund projects to target indigenous, youth engagement and wetland rehabilitation projects. During this period, JBA has successfully delivered its three operational goals: Build the brand; Build the Business; and Build the Knowledge. It has consolidated its culture by putting ideas and goals into immediate action and planning with its partners for its future sustainability. On-going Working Group meetings, themed partners events, presentations to key stakeholders, regular media releases and social media updates have been key mechanisms for partner engagement. As a result, the GER and Jaliigirr brand is now established in the local conservation industry and community. Good business development has been ensured by leading, representing and organising biodiversity conservation action in the partnership region. Partner organisations now view being a part of JBA as core business and improvements in working

relationships and communication have meant that partners are better aligned to achieve landscape-scale conservation outcomes.

Future

The creation of the JBA as an incorporated entity has been a positive and necessary response to deliver multi-faceted, multi-tenure and multi-functional projects. Effective governance of this arrangement requires dedicated support services and leadership that is both stable and independent of any particular project action. It must also be sufficiently independent and flexible to support the needs of the partnership arrangement as they arise. Looking ahead, JBA's greatest challenge will be locating and gaining access to funds that will pay for this cost of service which will be essential to its survival.



4. Hunter Valley Partnership

Formation and Focus

The GER Hunter Valley Partnership (HVP) was established in early 2009. Hosted by OzGREEN, the 30 organisations forming its membership are unique in their diversity bringing together the thoroughbred, viticulture and coal mining industries with main-stream conservation organisations. The early days of the partnership focussed on determining where the group would focus its effort. The initial area was the Upper Hunter where historically there had been less attention and investment in connectivity conservation projects. This has since grown to five additional priority sites. A broad range of activities have been delivered during this time from on-ground works to community and landholder engagement events, training opportunities and awareness raising activities. However, the Partnership's primary role during this period has been to bring people together under a strategic framework, better-aligning individual efforts towards landscape-scale connectivity outcomes.

Achievements

HVP has been extremely successful in attracting state and federal funding through its multi-partner bids. This

includes a \$2.7m grant for the 'Stepping Stones' project from the Biodiversity Fund in 2012 and an additional \$100 000 from the NSW Environmental Trust through the GER partnership grants. More recently, HVP have received \$50 000 from John Holland and Taronga Zoo for a dis-used rail corridor restoration project, with the potential for an on-going project partnership attracting further funding in the future. The funding complements other significant investment in conservation projects in the region and in-kind contributions by HVP partners.

The 'Stepping Stones' project recognises the key role of private landholders in connectivity conservation. With 4350 isolated patches of bushland on private lands in the Hunter Valley, the project is supporting landholders to reconnect these areas to the GER corridor by creating a series of 'Stepping Stones' across private land. To date, the project has connected 153 hectares of vegetation, restored 707 hectares and planted over 25 000 trees with approx. \$500 000 provided in additional cash and in-kind contributions.

The Hunter Valley Bird Monitoring Pilot Study is another of HVP's successes, which is looking at the most appropriate methodology to increase the quality, reliability and frequency of reporting on

birds as an indicator of ecosystem health. The study provided recommendations for the development of a GER Bird Monitoring Project using birds to assess the impact of on-ground works in Hunter region. It also provided important feedback to the Atlas of Living Australia to develop tools for community engagement in citizen science and to improve its software, tools and services to meet the needs of regional groups and the community

Future

As GER comes to the end of its current round of Trust funding, HVP continues with the support of its Biodiversity Fund support. HVP intends to keep the connectivity conversation going between regional partners and continue to align the conservation efforts of a diverse group of organisations, people and interests. The partnership continues to seek additional funding for partnership projects through government, philanthropic and industry opportunities.



5. Southern Highlands Link

Formation and Focus

Established in 2011, Southern Highlands Link (SHL) has been transformed in the period from a loose association of active organisations to a functional GER Regional Partnership which plans collaborative projects and aligns funding sources to support co-designed goals. Hosted by Greening Australia, SHL is made up of local Landcare, national not-for-profit organisations, landholders, local government, state government and local businesses. The partnership initially focussed on the identification, assessment and prioritisation of regional corridors and projects. From a list of seven potential corridors and 52 projects, two corridors and three projects were selected. These sites will deliver the highest connectivity improvements with the best potential for delivery within the current group of partners as well as having the greatest potential for engaging new groups.

Achievements

Examining which groups are active in the region, SHL has established a database of geographic locations and activities of all current and recent NRM projects in the Southern Highlands region. Based on this database, and the assessment of priority corridors and projects, SHL has been successful in attracting significant grant funding from a range of sources and in-kind partner contributions. These direct seeding and community engagement projects, along with a \$90 000 Regent Honey Eater recovery project funded by the Trust, have contributed to the delivery of 45 community workshops, 50 private conservation agreements, over 1000ha of revegetation and 180 000 plantings.

SHL has also successfully delivered a GER Grant project with \$95 600 from the Trust through the GER partnership grants. The 'Southern Highlands Seed' project has helped deliver the Southern Highlands seed supply strategy. On-

ground outcomes include a vegetation survey of a highly endangered upland swamp, opportunities for TAFE student field-based practicals, 30 people trained in FloraBank seed collection and 3000 plants planted in an endangered ecological community.

Future

SHL has \$540 000 worth of grant applications submitted under the BushConnect program and with South East LLS and will be actively developing further grants over the coming year based on the collaborative prioritisation and community project database. Securing these funds will help secure the future of the partnership.



6. Illawarra to Shoalhaven

Formation and Focus

Illawarra to Shoalhaven (I2S) was launched with a forum held at Wollongong University in early 2013 as one of the two new GER regional partnerships established with Trust funding in the period. Thirty-eight people attended representing fourteen organisations. The forum led to the formation of the I2S Partnership which comprises a core Working Group of nine organisations. Hosted by the National Parks Association of NSW, I2S consists of nine members including Landcare, Conservation Volunteers, OEG, South East LLS, Southern Councils Group, university and Aboriginal community contacts. Establishing ten focus corridors has been the key driver for decision-making for the partnership providing knowledge of community activity and key flora and fauna species and communities within the I2S region. This along with other existing biodiversity and planning documents and partner programs has enabled the Working Group to make informed decisions about where and what to focus its attention and activities on.

Achievements

Under the I2S Structure and Governance Framework, regular partnership meetings have been conducted since establishment and have been instrumental to encouraging communication and discussion between partners and the wider community. This broader audience has also been engaged through the I2S Communications Strategy bringing other cultural, social and environmental science associates, including the Aboriginal community and university contacts, into the mix when planning I2S projects. The I2S Partnership has capitalised on existing information and data to learn more about what environmental projects can be expanded into wider areas of the I2S region. An example of this is the Illawarra Landcare Rainforest and Woodland project which will be expanded into the Shoalhaven and Wingecarribee Council area subject to successful Bush Connect grant applications. With \$125 500 funding from the Environmental Trust through GER grant programs, I2S has successfully delivered a I2S Start-up Project and two Landcare corridor projects in priority areas. The I2S Start-up Project centred on the Berry and Saddleback corridors and included motion detection cameras,

wildlife surveys on private lands, weed control, feral animal control training, revegetation, art and environment workshops and site tours. Overall knowledge of environmental need has increased and has formed the basis for additional grant applications under the NSW Environmental Trust Saving Our Species and Research grant streams.

Future

Overall, the I2S Partnership has progressed relatively well and in a cohesive and collaborative way with goodwill expressed by those involved. I2S partners have contributed in-kind to planning for on-ground environmental projects, grant development (Trust Research, GER Partnership & Bush Connect grants) and a range of other activities between meetings. More recently, the I2S partners have focused on sustainability of the partnership via funding, philanthropic and sponsorship opportunities which will be important to continuing the group's activities into the future.



7. Kanangra Boyd to Wyangala Link

Formation and Focus

In 2012, OEH received \$2.7m funding from the Biodiversity Fund to establish a new landscape corridor project in the upper Lachlan Catchment as part of GER. Known as the Kanangra Boyd to Wyangala (K2W) Link, the project aims to deliver an integrated set of activities and conservation mechanisms to achieve improved habitat connectivity across the landscape. The eighth regional partnership formed by the GER in NSW, K2W has developed an agreed spatial plan targeting investment in priority locations and continually explores how the project can value-add to other programs, such as OEH invasive species management and threatened species recovery programs and LLS investment programs.

Achievements

To date, the Partnership has invested \$230 000 through Landcare and community groups to create a 'corridor of engagement' along the length of the K2W Link providing landholders with planning, native species identification events, invasive species information sessions and community coordination to assist landholders to work collaboratively. A 2012 grant for \$50 000 from the Trust

through the GER partnership grants program has delivered an Integrated Pest Management project along with a \$50 000 Tussock Tamers supported by the Biodiversity Fund. K2W has also delivered \$830 000 to individual landholders for on-ground works featuring 382ha of revegetation and 4250ha of collaborative weed control works. Three hundred and fifty hectares are now protected or conserved with a further 3550ha managed under Land for Wildlife property registration. Invasive animals have been controlled through collaborative cross-tenure management on more than 32 000 ha resulting in the trapping, shooting or removal of at least 850 feral animals. Property planning workshops and training events have improved the capacity of 140 landholders to manage their land for feral animals. Eleven primary and three secondary schools have also been engaged in educational activities around biodiversity, connectivity and cultural awareness. Other key outcomes during this period include the preparation of over 80 integrated pest and weed management property plans, 15 habitat management plans for both individuals and groups and two regional forums.

Other achievements include the establishment of a Cultural Connections program with \$120 000 made available to LALC's and other Aboriginal groups for the development of NRM management plans which expand on traditional ecological knowledge, cultural awareness and working on country opportunities. With a focus on encouraging collaboration between Aboriginal stakeholders and landholders in the K2W Link, the program targets events, activities and products presenting traditional knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal cultural, philosophy and obligations to Country. It has also created opportunities for direct involvement of Aboriginal people in training and employment associated with joint ventures and connectivity restoration projects.

Future

Investing in K2W capacity-building has supported several new and dormant Landcare groups into action. This has led to greater uptake of landholder incentives and participation in activities, events and meetings and overall broader engagement, enthusiasm and ownership of connectivity conservation by the community – a strategy the K2W partnership will continue to deliver.



8. Kosciuszko to Coast

Formation and Focus

Since 2007, Kosciuszko to Coast (K2C) has been bringing together motivated and experienced natural resource management organisations to work collaboratively to identify, restore and extend habitat for target species and vegetation communities between Mt Kosciuszko and the coast. An incorporated entity with thirteen Government and non-government natural resource management and biodiversity focussed partners, K2C operates under a formal MoU and delivers against an approved Conservation Action Plan (CAP). Partner forums have occurred each year, while K2C Working Groups and Executive Committee meet on a regular basis. The K2C partnership focus is on valley-floor vegetation communities known to be in decline and with potential to reconnect. Much of this landscape is under private

landholder management and providing landholders a suite of opportunities to support their conservation work is a critical part of K2C's activities.

Achievements

Guided by its CAP, K2C has been working on projects for threatened ecological communities and species in native grassland and wetland areas, along valley floor watercourses and for small bush birds and arboreal mammals. K2C successes during the reporting period include the Myer Grassland Project funded with a grant of \$150 000 from the Myer Foundation to restore the Monaro grasslands and a further \$216 000 from the Biodiversity Fund to restore grassland landscapes in the ACT and greater Gorooyarroo area. Landscape Links for Small Bush Birds, K2C-ALA Species and Site Atlas, Murrumbidgee Landscape Connectivity, Traditional Land Management Practices, Adopting Indigenous Values in the Community and

Glossy Black-Cockatoo projects were also delivered with an additional \$150 000 in funding from the Trust through the GER Grants program. During this period, K2C also successfully hosted annual Greening Australia Canberra Ornithologist Group bird surveys and OEH koala surveys in the Murrumbidgee Valley.

Future

K2C continues to build strong links in the community and is extending the partnership through a new Associate Membership program. However, ongoing funding for Partnership facilitation is uncertain and the K2C role in bridging the gap between landholders and community, Government and non-Government organisations to reconnect and rehabilitate the landscape may suffer in the absence of a dedicated role to oversee this process.



9. Slopes to Summit Summary

Formation and Focus

Slopes to Summit (S2S) was established in 2007. Hosted by the Nature Conservation Trust of NSW (NCT) and guided by a Working Group consisting of nine research, government and community organisations, the partnership is guided by a Strategic Plan, Principles of Collaboration and annual Operational Plan. In 2009, S2S undertook a Conservation Action Plan process to help prioritise regional biodiversity assets and threats and identified seven focus areas for connectivity conservation projects. The partnership was launched with a 'Biodiversity on Farms Field Day' event in Woomargama, NSW. Since then, its focus has been on delivering an innovative community engagement program, science workshop series and the Bush Links project.

Achievements

With \$3.1m funding secured, including \$2.3m over five years through the Biodiversity Fund, the Bushlinks Project,

managed by Holbrook Landcare Network (HLN), was able to employ a full-time Project Officer and part-time support staff through Murray LLS. On-ground achievements have been significant and include 800ha of revegetation and remnant enhancement works to enhance habitat connectivity in S2S priority areas. Over the past three years the S2S community engagement program has successfully delivered two 'BioBlitzes', an amateur short film competition (S2S BioFlix 2013), S2S Big Tree Competition in 2015, Squirrel Glider Urban Nest Box Project, 'heritage survey tree' community project, 'S2S pilot website' of the Atlas of Living Australia and production of a short film about the Eucalyptus species of S2S (Snow Gums to River Reds). These activities were made possible through grants from the Trust's GER Grants program (\$200 000), the Bjarne K Dahl Trust, Caring For Our Country (Community Action Grant), Atlas of Living Australia and local business support.

Acknowledging that the science of monitoring connectivity is in its infancy and an area of increasing interest from researchers globally, S2S has also

developed a ground-breaking project with Dr David M Watson (Charles Sturt University) and Veronica Doerr (CSIRO) convening two expert scientific workshops in 2013 and 2014 with the aim of producing a paper addressing the topic. The paper was finalised in mid-2015 and the authors are currently seeking publication.

Future

The future of the S2S partnership is promising yet funding continues to be an issue. Sourcing funds to undertake project work at the landscape-scale in addition to funding a Facilitator will be a major challenge for the group. However the transfer of the host organisation from NCT to HLN in July 2015, following the resignation of the Facilitator, occurred very smoothly. This shows the maturity of the partnership and bodes well for the future.



10. Central Victoria Biolinks Alliance

Formation and Focus

Central Victorian Biolinks Alliance (CVB) was established in 2010 by community conservation groups in Central Victoria extending from the Grampians across to the Australian Alps and from the Dividing Ranges to the Murray River. CVB comprises 12 Landcare networks, conservation management networks and environment groups and is currently in the process of incorporation. It has been primarily funded by philanthropic and private donations, providing the means to employ a part time facilitator for the past 3 years. CVB's activities are directed by a management team with representatives from member groups and an Advisory Committee with representation from all member groups. CVB's activities recognise that large-scale landscape restoration needed to halt environmental and species decline requires coordination of effort and knowledge, as well as new and innovative approaches.

Achievements

CVB has built a strong foundation based on its understanding of member groups' current capacity and need. It has developed a five year Framework for Action with the partnership identifying a unique role for itself as a capacity and partnership building organisation that will ensure the significant momentum there is for community-driven conservation in Central Victoria is supported, coordinated and amplified. The Plan outlines seven key priority areas and four clearly defined programs for delivery. Funding to implement the plan is being sought. Some funding has been forthcoming from member groups to implement program activities and a Connectivity Plan for the Grampian to Pyrenees Biolink has been developed with the numerous stakeholders working in that area.

CVB's partnership with the GER has been very important providing CVB with a larger connectivity conservation framework and access to the skills and experience within the GER network. GER provides a strong ecological rationale for CVB's broader ecological goals. It also provides a real example of the value of connectivity conservation in providing

a unifying and motivating vision that encourages coordination of effort.

Future

The Alliance's future challenges are many. Securing funding has been a major task for the group with no state government policy or funding for connectivity conservation in Victoria. CVB requires state policy frameworks that prioritises landscape-scale ecological connectivity and supports multi-regional scale planning and adaptive management; capacity building of the community conservation sector; partnership delivery models; community driven initiatives; and on-ground delivery. With Facilitator funding coming to an end in October 2015, it will be a challenge to continue to seek funding for the partnership. CVB also faces challenges with maintaining the interest and confidence of its membership-base who are time and resource poor and will only continue to invest in CVB if it achieves demonstrable outcomes. The move to a new governance arrangement and expanded board as a result of the partnerships recent incorporation looks to mitigate this risk.



ACRONYMS

ABC - Australian Broadcasting Commission	FNPW - Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife
ACF - Australian Conservation Foundation	GBC - Glossy Black Cockatoo
ACT - Australian Capital Territory	GER - Great Eastern Ranges Initiative
ALA - Atlas of Living Australia	GPS - Global Positioning System
BMP - Biodiversity Management Plan	LALC - Local Aboriginal Land Council
BRA - Border Ranges Alliance	LLS - Local Land Services
CAP - Conservation Action Plan	MER - Monitoring Reporting and Evaluation
CEO - Chief Executive Officer	MCG - Molonglo Catchment Group
CSIRO - Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation	MoU - Memorandum of Understanding
CVB - Central Victorian Biolinks	NCT - Nature Conservation Trust of New South Wales
DPI - Department of Primary Industries	NPA - National Parks Association of New South Wales
EEC - Endangered Ecological Community	NPWS - NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service
EPBC - Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999	NSW - New South Wales
HBL - Hinterland Bushlinks	NGO - Non Government organisation
HLN - Holbrook Landcare Network	NRM - Natural Resource Management
HSI - Humane Society International	OEH - NSW Office of Environment & Heritage
HVP - Hunter Valley Partnership	QL - Queanbeyan Landcare
I2S - Illawarra to Shoalhaven	QLD - Queensland
IPA - Indigenous Protected Area	S2S - Slopes to Summit
IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature	SELLS - South East Local Land Services
JBA - Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance	SEQC - South East Queensland Catchments
K2C - Kosciuszko to Coast	TSC - NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995
K2W - Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala	WWF - World Wildlife Fund
	YLTGER - Youth Leading the Great Eastern Ranges
	YLTW - Youth Leading the World

PHOTO CREDITS

Front Cover Willowglen Planting (Keith Hyde)

P.13 S2S BioBlitz (Esther Beaton)

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