


The Great Eastern Ranges

2020 Impact Report





 University of Wollongong students celebrate the planting of 421 native trees in the grounds of the Berry Sport & Recreation Centre. The trees were planted by the students to contribute towards the Berry Bush Links project as a way of offsetting their carbon emissions.



Message from our CEO and Chair

The unprecedented challenges which 2020 have brought have been heart-breaking and difficult, but they have also created new opportunities. The impact of the devastating bushfire crisis on our wildlife served to amplify awareness and care for nature, while the COVID-19 pandemic has led to people starting to reconnect with their environment and to becoming more aware of their place in it.

This year has also seen the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative continue to build and consolidate our place as one of Australia's most ambitious yet essential endeavours.

The year kicked off with our immediate response to the bushfires which at that stage were still raging through our landscapes, from the iconic forests of East Gippsland to our precious World Heritage reserves in the Border Ranges. Significant swathes of the Great Eastern Ranges were impacted. Meeting this major challenge required a coordinated and complementary effort that responded at scale whilst meeting local needs. To ensure this, GER released a phased bushfire recovery plan in mid-January 2020. The three-stage approach to restoring and reconnecting nature post-fire took advantage of GER's unique ability to react quickly to the immediate threat, whilst ensuring the long-term restoration, resilience and connectivity of our land, wildlife and communities post-fire.

The onset of COVID-19 barely slowed the efforts of our regional partners. The GER network adapted new

forms of collaboration to overcome the closure of state borders and lockdowns in major centres – like much of the world, replacing meetings in the field with online discussions, symposiums and planning sessions. The challenging targets we set for our post-fire response all remained either on track or were completed.

With the support of a grant awarded by The Ian Potter Foundation, GER has formed new partnerships with other eNGOs and networks to expand our role in supporting wildlife movement and adaptation; incorporate human health outcomes into restoration projects; map and assess the ongoing regeneration of fire-affected forests; and integrate regenerative agriculture with landscape connectivity.

We have tackled tremendous adversity this year, but with the energy and enthusiasm of a steadily growing team working with our board and the support of our members, the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative continues to bring people together to achieve its bold vision.

Gary Howling
Executive Director & CEO



Bob Debus
Chair





What we do

The Great Eastern Ranges Initiative brings people and organisations together to protect, link and restore healthy habitats over 3,600km, from western Victoria to far north Queensland.



Support wildlife

By reconnecting and protecting vital habitat across the ranges, GER supports wildlife movements across seasons and landscapes, restoring natural migration routes and creating stepping stones between protected areas to enable wildlife to move, adapt and thrive.



Provide Natural Solutions

Through protecting, restoring and reconnecting the ranges' carbon-rich forests and wetlands, GER provides a natural solution to the climate and biodiversity crisis. By preserving important carbon stores and improving the health of vital ecosystems, more resilient landscapes are created, carbon emissions reduced and the loss of native animals and plants curbed.



Build Resilient Landscapes

By supporting improved land management practices and natural processes like pollination, whilst strategically managing threats to ecosystems and rural livelihoods, GER creates healthier, more productive landscapes for wildlife, farmers and industry.



Ensure Healthy Communities

Human health and wellbeing are inextricably linked with the health of our environment. By creating and supporting healthier habitat, soils, rivers and ecosystem services and reducing disease spread, GER's work creates healthier, happier, more connected communities.

Support wildlife

By reconnecting and protecting vital habitat across the ranges, GER supports wildlife movements across seasons and landscapes, restoring natural migration routes and creating stepping stones between protected areas to enable wildlife to move, adapt and thrive.

In response to the devastating 2019-2020 bushfires, GER released a phased bushfire recovery plan which reacted quickly to the immediate threat, whilst ensuring the long-term restoration, resilience and connectivity of our land, wildlife and communities' post-fire.



I2S Bush Connect project

Our Illawarra to Shoalhaven partnership continues to support the delivery of two NSW Government Bush Connect projects in the region – Berry Bush Links and Thickening the Thin Green Line. Berry Bush Links, led by I2S partner, Berry Landcare, is a consortium of private landholders, community and government organisations which is working to reconnect the region's isolated forests to create a vital corridor for wildlife moving between the coast and escarpment. At the same time, 'Thickening the thin green line' led by GER partner, the National Parks Association of NSW, is aimed at enhancing the 'pinch point' in connectivity that occurs between the Macquarie Pass and Budderoo National parks.

Wall to Wollondilly

Identified as a priority corridor by GER's Southern Highlands partner network, the Wingecarribee River forms a major link between the coastal escarpment and the Central Tablelands. To reverse the damage done to the river catchment through decades of grazing and clearing, Wall to Wollondilly is working with the local community, farmers and government, to restore critical habitat for animals, such as the Platypus; reduce the impact of weeds; improve water quality; and return the health of the Wingecarribee River. Greening Australia is leading this NSW Government funded project.

GER Crossings campaign

To reduce the impact of linear infrastructure on tree-dwelling mammals, GER is engaging Australia's top road ecologists, researchers and major environmental NGOs in the development of a new multi-faceted campaign. The GER Crossings Campaign aims to identify priority locations across the ranges for habitat restoration, augmented by the establishment of crossing structures as well as engage local communities and landholders


through a comprehensive awareness-raising and education campaign.

K2W Glideways

GER's Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala partner network was one of the first to roll out a series of Glideways projects when the flagship program launched in 2015. Through the NSW Government's Bush Connect grants, K2W is continuing to restore connectivity for the region's gliding possums which include populations of yellow-bellied glider, greater glider and squirrel glider. On-ground work in the region includes planting of preferred glider feed species, installation of nest boxes, strategic threat management, habitat protection and ecologist-led surveys. Additional funding provided through GER's partnership with WWF-Australia is building on these existing Glideways efforts with an emphasis on post-fire recovery.

National wildlife connectivity plans

To help drive action to secure the future of Australia's gliding possums, GER supported a Greater and Squirrel Glider symposium run by the Biolinks Alliance, on 27-28 October 2020. The virtual event brought together over 150 researchers, academics and on-ground practitioners from across the country to share their practical and scientific knowledge for glider conservation. The key takeaways from the symposium will help to inform the development of a national GER Glideways connectivity plan, which will highlight priority areas and actions to secure the future of gliding possums across eastern Australia. The new plan will be the first of a series of national conservation plans that GER will be working to develop alongside key experts for the organisation's flagship wildlife support programs.

 Volunteers planting native trees and shrubs on a property near Broughton Creek on the NSW South Coast as part of Berry Bushlinks. Photo copyright, Bill Pigot, Berry Landcare.

Natural Solutions

Through protecting and restoring the ranges' carbon-rich forests and wetlands, GER provides a natural solution to the climate and biodiversity crisis. By preserving important carbon stores and improving the health of our ecosystems, we reduce emissions, encourage natural regeneration, and curb the loss of native animals and plants.

The diverse forests of the Great Eastern Ranges are some of the most carbon rich on the planet, storing an estimated 2.5Gt of carbon.

Plains to Pacific: Connecting Western Sydney to the Central Coast

The Hawkesbury-Nepean River system from the Cox's catchment near Lithgow to the Central Coast has long been recognised as a critical gap in the Great Eastern Ranges partner network. Significant areas through which the iconic river system run are protected as national parks and reserves, however, other critical areas in Western Sydney and the Central Coast have been heavily cleared and fragmented due to agriculture, development, business and infrastructure.

Working closely with the Community Environment Network, GER is helping to lay the foundations for a Plains to Pacific alliance to restore and reconnect the Hawkesbury-Nepean system. This region is home to a diverse array of wildlife and plants including many threatened species such as the koala, spotted-tailed quoll, powerful owl and green and golden bell frog.

The initiative seeks to restore and enhance the connectivity of riparian areas, link protected areas and council reserves on the Central coast, link the endangered Cumberland Plains Woodland and improve the health of the river system for people and nature.

Consolidating climate corridors in the Border Ranges

GER partner, the Border Ranges Alliance, is working with landholders and Traditional Owners to recover landscape connectivity and health on private land between the Border Ranges and Toonumber National Parks. A key focus of the project is to relink and buffer a central pinch point in the Tweed–Border Ranges–Mount Clunie climate-change corridor as well as improve connections with the Iluka–Richmond Range climate-change corridor to the south. On-ground efforts are helping to ensure the long-term functioning of significant continental pathways for native migratory species whilst restoring and reconnecting a variety of habitats for the region's diverse and unique local wildlife.

Resilient landscapes

By supporting improved land management practices and natural processes like pollination, whilst strategically managing threats to ecosystems and rural livelihoods, GER creates healthier, more resilient and more productive landscapes for wildlife, farmers and industry.

Through Cores, Corridors and Koalas, WWF-Australia is providing support for projects to restore the health and resilience of habitat for forest-dependant wildlife in ten priority areas across the Great Eastern Ranges.



Cores, Corridors and Koalas

In response to the devastating Black Summer bushfires, GER partnered with WWF-Australia to restore the health and resilience of habitat for koalas, greater gliders and other forest-dependent native animals. Through 'Cores, Corridors and Koalas', GER's partners are rolling out a series of coordinated, complementary projects in ten priority locations across the ranges. On-ground work being supported through the partnership includes the planting of koala feed trees; arboreal mammal surveys employing remote cameras, audio monitoring and the use of wildlife scent detection dogs; installation of nest boxes and water stations; community engagement; and strategic management of feral animals and weeds. The partnership is also supporting fieldwork and mapping in the Eurobodalla Shire, Greater Blue Mountains, and Illawarra to Shoalhaven as part of a wider post-fire mapping research effort co-led by Griffith University and Australian National University (see below). This is the first phase of what we hope will become a long-term, strategic collaboration with WWF-Australia.

Providing a science informed bushfire response

To provide a science-informed response to the 2019-2020 bushfires that optimises wildlife and landscape recovery and builds capacity for citizen science, GER is supporting a large-scale, cross-tenure research effort. Led by Griffith University and The Australian National University, this project is working to map and assess


the fire foot print and post-fire condition of eastern and south-western Australia's native forests using satellite data in combination with citizen science surveys. To aid collection of data on forest regeneration, habitat variables and wildlife, a custom built app is being developed. This information will provide the basis for informing forest habitat recovery plans and actions to improve conservation management, encourage natural regeneration and restoration, inform forest management, and support the natural adaptive capacity of our forest ecosystems in the face of a rapidly changing climate. Another major aim of the project is to produce a series of reports synthesising the current scientific understanding on forests, fire, climate and management. The outputs from the research effort will help inform the development of specific wildlife recovery plans with separate funding already being sought by GER to assist koalas and grey-headed flying foxes.

Reconnecting fragmented landscapes in Holbrook

Through the NSW Government's Bush Connect grants, GER's Slopes to Summit partnership, which is managed by the Holbrook Landcare Network, is leading a project to restore and reconnect three high-priority fragmented landscapes in the Holbrook region. The project is working to strengthen existing roadways, creeklines and glideways for the threatened squirrel glider; plant trees; install fencing to protect delicate areas and increase community awareness. This includes a pilot program to engage locals in managing isolated travelling stock reserves for their biodiversity values.

Jaliigirr landscape connections in the Great Eastern Ranges

GER partner network, the Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance, continues to work to restore and protect ten high-value conservation sites within identified priority areas of the Coffs-Bellinger-Dorrigo region. The focus of Jaliigirr's on-ground work is on bush regeneration to restore essential and viable habitats for forest-dependent animals complemented with capacity-building activities. These efforts include working with the Coffs Harbour Local Aboriginal Land Council's Repair to Country team to restore priority sites on Gumbaynggirr land. All sites are connected to the iconic Dorrigo World Heritage Area.

 Wildlife scent detection dog Max with handler Jack from Canines for Wildlife demonstrating their skills at a Jaliigirr Biodiversity Alliance field day on Gumbaynggirr land on 2 November 2020.

Healthy communities

Human health and wellbeing are inextricably linked with the health of our environment. By creating and supporting healthier habitat, soils, rivers and ecosystem services and reducing disease spread, GER's work creates healthier, happier, more connected communities.

The Great Eastern Ranges forms the watershed and headwaters for the major river catchments of eastern Australia, providing clean water for over two-thirds of the continent's population, whilst their dense forests soak up vast amounts of carbon from the atmosphere and filter the air we breathe.




Improving animal and human health by Planting for Pollinators

Like pollinating insects, native animal pollinators are intimately connected with the health of Australia's forests. Ongoing loss and fragmentation of bird and bat habitat across eastern Australia, however, are leading to significant food shortages occurring for these nectar-dependent animals, particularly during winter and spring. This is resulting in the alarming decline of animal pollinators and is forcing bats like flying foxes to concentrate in new places with more reliable food sources, bringing them into conflict with people and increasing the risk of disease spillover. To help secure the future of the ranges' unique animal pollinators and reduce the risk of disease spread, GER is working with Dr Peggy Eby and Planting for Pollinators to restore and relink pollen- and nectar-rich trees to boost sources of food for native bats and birds.

Four Islands Ecohealth Network

To raise awareness of the fundamental links between human and ecosystem health, and to increase the effectiveness of ecological restoration globally, GER joined the Four Islands EcoHealth network established in 2019. The EcoHealth Network (EHN) is a global action initiative that works at the nexus of soil health, human health and ecological restoration. EHN connects practitioners of long-term restoration projects with public health professionals and scientists so that they can learn from each other, share efforts, identify knowledge gaps, and accelerate understanding and awareness of the benefits of restoration for human health. As part of GER's involvement with the global network, the organisation will be establishing long-term Ecohealth network sites across the ranges to help advance the science, education and practice of restoration.

 A Grey-headed Flying Fox. One of the threatened animal pollinators which is benefiting from Pollinating for Pollinators. Photo copyright Vivienne Jones.

Impact at a glance



3600 kilometres

Of land covered by the Great Eastern Ranges



2.5 gigatonnes

Of carbon stock stored in the Great Eastern Ranges



250 organisations

Are working to achieve the GER vision



11 priority landscapes

Covered by GER's regional partner networks



28 threatened species

Directly targeted through projects

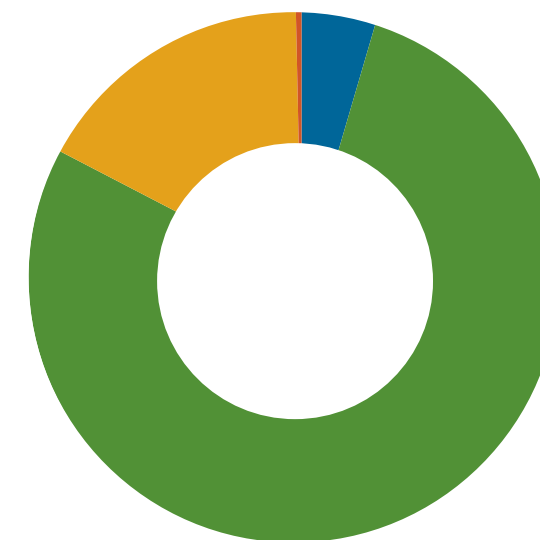


7 Sustainable Development Goals

Are being advanced through GER

2019-2020 Financials

Where our funds came from



Grants 78%
Project support 17%
Donations 4.5%
Bank interest 0.3%

How we spent the funds



Conservation activities 51%
Communications and engagement 22%
Building future resilience 11%
Organisational support 16%

Our valued partners

Our work would not be possible without the support of our valued network of regional, national and international partners who all contribute towards achieving the GER vision. Together we are bigger than the sum of our parts.

New partners



GER is partnering with Birdlife Australia to restore vital habitat for common and declining species of forest and woodland birds and engage communities and locals landholders in their care.



To raise awareness of the fundamental links between human and ecosystem health, and increase the effectiveness of ecological restoration globally, GER has joined the global EcoHealth Network.



GER is working with the International Fund for Animal Welfare to restore vital forest habitat, activate new partner alliances in priority gap areas, share knowledge and resources, and engage local communities.

Lockyer Uplands Catchments Inc.

GER was proud to welcome Lockyer Uplands Catchments Inc (LUCI), as its eleventh regional partner network in 2020. LUCI is a not-for-profit community organisation dedicated to the conservation of the native habitats and wildlife in Queensland's Lockyer Valley.



GER is working with Planting for Pollinators to plan and coordinate large-scale restoration of feed trees to support native animal pollinators and reduce the risk of disease spill-over.



In response to the devastating 2019-2020 bushfires, we joined forces with WWF-Australia to restore the health and resilience of habitat for forest-dependent native animals in ten locations across the ranges.

Existing partners

Regional partner networks

- Biolinks Alliance
- Border Ranges Alliance
- Hinterland Bush Links
- Hunter GER
- Illawarra to Shoalhaven
- Jalligirr Biodiversity Alliance
- Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala
- Kosciusko to Coast
- Slopes to Summit
- Southern Highlands Link

Partner Organisations

- Community Environment Network
- Gondwana Link Ltd.
- National Parks Association of NSW
- The Ian Potter Foundation

Global Partners

- Centre for Large Landscape Conservation
- Network for Landscape Conservation
- Reconnecting Northland
- University of Montana



“WWF-Australia is committed to large landscape-scale reforestation and seeks to partner with organisations and communities in Australia that share that vision. That is why we love working with the Great Eastern Ranges and their partners to regenerate our landscapes for the benefit of local communities, nature and climate.”

Stuart Blanch, WWF-Australia's Senior Manager, Land Clearing and Restoration

Looking to the future

Scaling up GER's bushfire recovery efforts

With many sections of the Great Eastern Ranges significantly impacted by the Black Summer bushfires, GER will be working closely with our partners to scale up our post-fire habitat restoration and wildlife support efforts in 2021. Our next tranche of targeted bushfire recovery projects is already under development, whilst the first phase of our post-fire response effort, which is supported by WWF-Australia, continues to mature. A central component of the work will be GER's flagship Glideways, Flyways, Swimways and Stepping Stones programs. Each program comprises a suite of collaborative projects in priority areas to improve and maintain the health and connectivity of the ranges for the host of wildlife that live there, including tree-dwelling mammals, migratory birds and bats, and platypus.

Forging new partnerships

From our earliest days, partnerships have sat at the core of the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative and are

critical for achieving the GER vision. By building long-term, inclusive partnerships across a broad spectrum of sectors and interest groups, GER enables greater coordination at the local and regional level, whilst creating corridors of effort across multiple landscapes. In 2021 and beyond, we will continue to nurture and support our valued partners whilst seeking to explore and consolidate new partnership opportunities in key gap areas such as the NSW South Coast and East Gippsland, Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment and far north Queensland. We are also working to expand GER's footprint into north-east Tasmania, which serves as a vital step in the migratory pathway for a profusion of bird and bat species travelling between the island and the mainland.

Redoubling our efforts to build resilience

A vital consideration of all of our efforts is the need to work with nature to minimise the risk of future catastrophic events and rebuild natural resilience, so

that our landscapes, wildlife and communities can better withstand and rapidly recover from future events. Climate Change driven events, such as prolonged drought and more frequent, intense fires, requires that we actively address the challenges ahead by employing innovative natural solutions to tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis. Maintaining diverse, healthy and intact native forests remain one of the most valuable nature based solutions to the challenges that lie ahead. GER will therefore be redoubling its efforts in the future to restore, buffer and reconnect what remains of Australia's irreplaceable old-growth forest, whilst working with landholders to integrate regenerative agriculture with connectivity.

Developing a national approach to connectivity conservation

Through the support of the Ian Potter Foundation, GER will continue to work in close collaboration with Gondwana Link to progress a national approach to connectivity conservation. This includes forging

connections with existing and emerging connectivity conservation initiatives in the Asia Pacific region and globally for the purpose of sharing knowledge and lessons learnt to maximise impact on the ground.

Towards Reconciliation

GER recognises and acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the Great Eastern Ranges and their continued connection to, and care for, country. To ensure that we continue to operate in a manner that is consistent with our understanding, respect and value for the histories, cultures and contributions of First Australians, GER is working to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). The RAP will be developed in close consultation with our staff, board and partners.



Great Eastern Ranges Initiative

PO Box 528 Pymont NSW 2009

info@ger.org.au

www.ger.org.au



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