


The Great Eastern Ranges

2021 Impact Report





 Echidna foraging for ants in scorched dirt at Monga National Park six weeks after the 2019-2020 bushfires swept through the area. Photo © Andrew Wong. Taken as part of the Bushfire Recovery Research Project led by Griffith University and Australian National University in partnership with the Great Eastern Ranges.



Message from our CEO and Chair

Despite the difficulties created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the past year has seen the Great Eastern Ranges continue to expand its footprint and capacity to meet the challenges and opportunities of the next critical decade.

It is now two years since the devastating Black Summer bushfires raged across eastern Australia. The scars will take many decades to heal, but the targeted bushfire recovery activities that we have been undertaking with our partners across the GER corridor have provided a solid foundation from which we can build a more sustainable and resilient future Australia for people and nature.

As an essential adjunct to our bushfire recovery program, we have been actively expanding our regional partnership footprint, with a new alliance with the North East Bioregional Network expanding our activities into Tasmania and budding Port to Plateau (NSW Mid Coast) and Plains to Pacific (linking Western Sydney to the Central Coast) initiatives plugging important gaps in the GER corridor.

Through the continued support of The Ian Potter Foundation, our focus has also been on building a national connectivity effort alongside our sister initiatives, Gondwana Link in Western Australia and Reconnecting Northland in New Zealand. The Conservation Across Large Landscapes Australia New Zealand (CALLANZ) network has led to further opportunities to share ideas and experiences with other initiatives worldwide, including the Ecohealth Network, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the Global Rewilding Alliance.

At the international level, GER continues to contribute towards the achievement of critical global climate and biodiversity goals, by providing large-scale, integrated natural solutions to the intertwined crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and declining human and environmental health.

As part of this commitment, we have joined fourteen other major Australian environmental organisations to form the Restoration Decade Alliance to support the objectives of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration – to reverse the degradation of our landscapes and ecosystems and ensure the protection of the precious native forests that remain.

In 2021 and beyond, the Great Eastern Ranges will continue to serve as a rallying point for conservation action that creates new opportunities and mobilises communities to deliver our bold vision of protecting, connecting and restoring healthy landscapes across 3,600km of eastern Australia.

Gary Howling
Executive Director & CEO



Bob Debus
Chair



*We bring people together
to protect, link and restore
healthy landscapes across
3,600km of eastern Australia.*



What we do

The Great Eastern Ranges provides the bold vision that brings people together to deliver shared conservation goals across public and private land. By building long-term, inclusive partnerships, we provide a platform for delivering a coordinated effort at the regional level, while creating corridors of impact across multiple landscapes. To provide a focus for on-ground activities and funding, we centre our work around four core themes.



Supporting wildlife

Like us, animals need to be able to move to survive. By reconnecting and protecting vital habitat, GER supports the movement of our native wildlife across seasons and landscapes, restores natural migration routes, and links protected areas enabling species to move, adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing climate.



Providing natural solutions

Through protecting and restoring eastern Australia's carbon-rich forests and wetlands, GER provides integrated natural solutions to the interlinked crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and declining human and environmental health. By protecting significant carbon stores and improving habitat quality, we reduce carbon emissions, mitigate the impacts of climate change, encourage the natural regeneration of our forests and woodlands, and curb the loss of native species.



Creating resilient landscapes

By supporting better land management practices and maintaining the health of our ecosystems, whilst managing threats to our environment and rural livelihoods, GER creates more resilient, productive landscapes for wildlife, farmers and industry.



Ensuring healthy communities

Human health and wellbeing are inextricably linked with the health of our environment. By engaging local people directly in activities to restore and reconnect degraded landscapes and ecosystems, support biodiversity, and protect the natural and cultural assets that underpin our identity, sense of place and livelihoods, our work results in healthier, happier, more connected communities.

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Beginning the Birding Recovery

In NSW's Shoalhaven Region, the post-fire recovery of the area's native birdlife, which includes the critically endangered regent honeyeater, glossy black cockatoo and endangered eastern bristlebird, was supported through GER's partnership with WWF-Australia in 2021. As part of a broader program to restore habitat and manage widespread threats to wildlife during the critical post-fire recovery period, Shoalhaven Landcare has been coordinating priority restoration works with member groups, including the Shoalhaven Fox Control Project, Milton Landcare Nursery, Bengalee revegetation and Kangaroo Valley Wildlife Initiative, across more than 30 sites. On-ground activities have involved a mix of weed management, feral predator control, installation of nesting hollows and monitoring of wildlife recovery through remote sensing cameras. As a complement to the project, Birdlife Shoalhaven has been running Birds for Beginners – a series of workshops and training sessions for landholders in bird identification and habitat management. Over 200 locals participated in the program in 2021. Birds for Beginners forms part of Birdlife Australia's own Bushfire Research Project, which was initiated to better understand the long-term impacts of fire on birds in the Shoalhaven and monitor changes in their diversity and abundance.

Protecting Croom reserve

A small remnant of Illawarra Lowland Woodland, an endangered ecological community once widespread on the Illawarra Coastal Plain, remains protected in a little-known reserve in Albion Park. With the large-scale clearing and fragmentation of habitat on the plain for housing and infrastructure over the past 20 years, Croom Reserve has become even more valuable, providing a vital refuge for a variety of local woodland species that were once common in the region. These include the threatened green hood orchid, rose robin and shining bronze-cuckoo. To help raise awareness of the importance of the reserve and engage local volunteers to help protect it, GER has launched a new local community connectivity project. GER will work closely with key partners, including Shell Harbour Council, Illawarra-to-Shoalhaven, Birdlife Australia,


University of Wollongong, Landcare, traditional owner groups and field naturalists on a range of activities. These include mitigating damage to the reserve, updating of on-site educational materials for local schools and community groups, regular citizen science monitoring activities, the upgrading of community infrastructure including walking paths and development of a reserve community plan.

Supporting the gliders of the Greater Blue Mountains

A survey commissioned by GER and the World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia found a concerning estimated 60% decline in Greater Gliders in the Blue Mountains due to the combined impacts of the 2019-2020 bushfires, prolonged drought and heatwaves. Local ecologists Dr Peter and Dr Judy Smith used spotlighting and wildlife cameras to survey six burnt sites in the Greater Blue Mountains region between November and December 2020. Pre-fire surveys of the area's tree-dwelling mammals were used for comparison. The survey has been used to inform the selection of priority sites for the next phase of GER's bushfire recovery activities in the region which will support on-ground work by the Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala partnership to assist Greater Gliders and other forest dependant animals on the Bindook Plateau and Wombeyan Caves.

Trails for Tails

Landholders across the Border Ranges region of New South Wales are being engaged to record information on the threatened Albert's lyrebird, protect them from threats, and restore and connect vital forest habitat. With a population estimated to number only 3,500 breeding pairs, Albert's lyrebirds are declining across their limited range due to land clearing and fragmentation, too frequent fires, timber harvesting, and predation by feral animals. To help capture sightings, motion detection cameras and song meters have been installed on 20 properties across the Border Ranges which landholders are assisting to monitor. Feral animal control will now be conducted on selected private properties in the region. The elusive Marbled Frogmouth, which shares similar conservation needs, is the project's second flagship species. GER will be helping to support the extension of the successful project, which is currently co-funded until February 2022 through the NSW Government's Saving Our Species program and the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife.

 Project Officer, Ashley Warby and local landholder Graham Watson setting up a song meter to capture the calls of Alberts Lyrebirds and Marbled Frogmouths.

Natural Solutions

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This picturesque landscape contains significant areas of forest that provide a critical altitudinal connection for wildlife moving between the plateau and the coast. Local groups have recognised that securing and consolidating these vital connections will require greater collaboration across private and public land.

Preparations for the creation of the Port to Plateau initiative began in May 2021, with GER lending its long-standing experience in supporting the formation of regional partnerships to drive and consolidate action. Northeast Local Land Services has since engaged GER's regional program manager to lead the process to create a new regional partnership to lead the initiative and to chart a pathway forward.

Securing the Springbrook to Lamington landbridge

The ridgelines and spurs that radiate from the extinct volcanic caldera of the Border Ranges have long been recognised as providing vital pathways and flyways for animals moving through the landscape. The importance of the region's north-south connections and the vital links they form between rainforest and dry eucalypt habitats have become even more essential for enabling wildlife to recover following the Black Summer bushfires. A landbridge that connects the Gold Coast Hinterland's World Heritage-listed Springbrook and Lamington National Parks, facilitating the movement of spotted-tailed quolls, rose-crowned fruit dove, cascade tree frogs and other wildlife, is one of these critical connections.

To bolster this essential link and enable wildlife populations to recover and adapt to a rapidly changing climate, Seqwater has been partnering with Healthy Land and Water to restore significant tracts of vegetation on the lands that they own and manage. GER has provided funding to support the planting of trees as a part of this broader program through our partnership with WWF-Australia.

Resilient landscapes

By supporting better land management practices and maintaining the health of our ecosystems, whilst managing threats to our environment and rural livelihoods, GER creates more resilient, productive landscapes for wildlife, farmers and industry.

GER has supported post-fire recovery activities by the Jaliigir Biodiversity Alliance on five sites on Gumbaynggir country (NSW mid-north coast) through the first phase of Cores, Corridors and Koalas; a partnership with WWF-Australia.



Restoring Gumbaynggir country

GER has supported post-fire recovery activities by the Jaliigir Biodiversity Alliance on five sites on Gumbaynggir country (NSW mid-north coast) through the first phase of Cores, Corridors and Koalas - a partnership with WWF-Australia. Working closely with traditional custodians, aboriginal rangers and Landcare, Jaliigir has been assisting with the planting of vital feed trees for koalas and other wildlife on public and private land, reconnecting forest habitat and engaging local communities. The work builds on and complements many years of bush regeneration, cultural burns, and plant and animal survey work conducted by the local ranger teams and Jaliigir and its partners at the same sites.

Bushfire recovery research project

The first phase of the Bushfire Recovery Research Project, which aims to provide a science-informed response to the Black Summer bushfires that optimises wildlife and landscape recovery, wrapped up in mid-2021. Led by Griffith University and the Australian National University in partnership with GER, the project assessed the impact of the devastating bushfires and tracked the recovery of south-eastern Australia's forests. As part of a pilot study, local volunteers in several locations were trained to help track forest regrowth using a smartphone app. The citizen scientists collected hundreds of records from sites in Murrumbidgee and Monga National Parks and Mount Kosciuszko. The researchers then compared these records against satellite data on fire intensity to determine how the recovery of our forests was progressing. The project's first phase also involved compiling information and fact sheets, which summarise the researchers' key findings from their expert review of scientific literature on five key issues related to climate, forests, bushfires, and land management. These can be viewed at

www.bushfirefacts.org. Funding to extend the citizen science component of the effort and use it to help inform improved future management of our forests is currently being sought.

Wrapping up the Bush Connects program

In 2015, the NSW Environmental Trust established its \$8 million Bush Connects program to expand community-driven connectivity conservation efforts. Through the program, 16 long-term local connectivity projects were launched across the NSW section of the GER corridor. These included:

- Consolidation of a future climate corridor at Roseberry and Loadstone (led by the Northeast Fire & Biodiversity Consortium).
- Wall to Wollondilly, to protect, maintain and restore habitat along the Wingecarribee River, in NSW's Southern Highlands (led Greening Australia).
- Restoring and protecting ten biodiversity conservation sites within the Coffs, Bellinger and Dorrigo region to extend and improve connectivity (led by the Jaliigir Biodiversity Alliance Inc.).
- Restoring the Glideways of the Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala Link (led by the Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala Link Partnership).
- Berry Bush Links, a project led by Berry Landcare to reconnect the region's isolated forests to create a corridor for wildlife moving between the coast and escarpment.
- Thickening the Thin Green Line which is working with landholders to expand an important forest connection along the Illawarra Escarpment between Newcastle and the Victorian Border (led by the National Parks Association of NSW).
- A suite of connectivity and restoration activities in three high-priority fragmented landscapes in the Holbrook region (led by Holbrook Landcare).

Bush Connects provided funding for the first six years of the ten year projects, with this year marking the end of the funding period. Building on the unique cross-property commitments made by landholders to restore connections across properties through Bush Connects, GER will continue to support the maintenance and enhancement of restored areas and the monitoring of the wildlife within them.

Healthy communities

Human health and wellbeing are inextricably linked with the health of our environment. By engaging local people directly in activities to restore and reconnect degraded landscapes and ecosystems, support biodiversity, and protect the natural and cultural assets that underpin our identity, sense of place and livelihoods, our work results in healthier, happier, more connected communities.

In mid-2021, GER and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) joined forces to roll-out bushfire recovery activities to restore native forests, assist animals in need and boost community healing and resilience in the Lockyer Valley, Southern Border Ranges and Greater Blue Mountains.



Healing bushfire affected wildlife and communities with IFAW

In mid-2021, GER and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) joined forces to roll-out bushfire recovery activities to restore native forests, assist animals in need and boost community healing and resilience in the Lockyer Valley, Southern Border Ranges and Greater Blue Mountains; areas heavily impacted by the 2019-2020 bushfires. To ensure that efforts are targeted at the highest priority places, the initial phase has involved the identification of 'anchor' properties around which on-ground activities can be focused and expanded from.

Local Land for Wildlife assessors and Aboriginal Rangers will then assist landholders with property assessments and the planning of targeted recovery actions that help restore the natural and cultural values of importance to them. These include: planting of feed species for local wildlife such as koalas, yellow-bellied gliders and grey-headed flying foxes; feral animal and weed control; fencing to protect fragile habitat; and installation of nest boxes. Landholders are also being engaged to assist with the long-term monitoring of the post-fire recovery of their land and local wildlife.

Restoring country, culture and community in hard-hit New South Wales

In mid-2021, GER was awarded a significant grant through the Australian and NSW Government's Bushfire Local Economic Recovery (BLER) Fund for a large-scale effort to help restore country, culture and community in four heavily bushfire affected landscapes in New South Wales. Through the BLER Fund, GER will work with its regional partner networks, the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and the Community Environment Network, to roll-out recovery activities in the NSW North

Coast, Blue Mountains, South Coast and Far South Coast from November 2021.

The grassroots-driven activities aim to boost local capacity, improve the health and resilience of regional communities and landscapes, support native wildlife, and restore and reconnect the region's 'natural infrastructure'.

The BLER Fund project was initiated in response to appeals for assistance from local landholders and communities who lacked sufficient funding, knowledge or resources to respond to a bushfire crisis of that scale by themselves. The project will meet this need by bringing locals together with the diverse skills and expertise required to deliver a coordinated effort, including restoration experts, environmental educators, traditional owners, protected area managers, local government and Local Land Services organisations. This includes the creation of four new Aboriginal Ranger positions to support on-ground activities and facilitate two-way learning and knowledge sharing.

As well as helping to speed up the recovery of the regions' environment and striking scenery, which draw thousands of tourists every year, the project will provide a further boost to regional economies by sourcing materials for on-ground works (e.g. seed and plants, fencing materials and nest boxes) from local suppliers.

The project will build on other targeted post-fire recovery efforts that the GER and its partners have been carrying out in these landscapes since early 2019.

 A yellow-bellied glider, one of the species that will benefit from post-fire recovery activities by GER in partnership with IFAW Australia.

Impact at a glance



3,600 kilometres

Of land encapsulated in the Great Eastern Ranges vision



250 organisations

Working to achieve the GER vision



200+

Volunteers involved in projects and activities



12 priority landscapes

In which we focus our efforts



28 threatened species

Directly targeted through projects

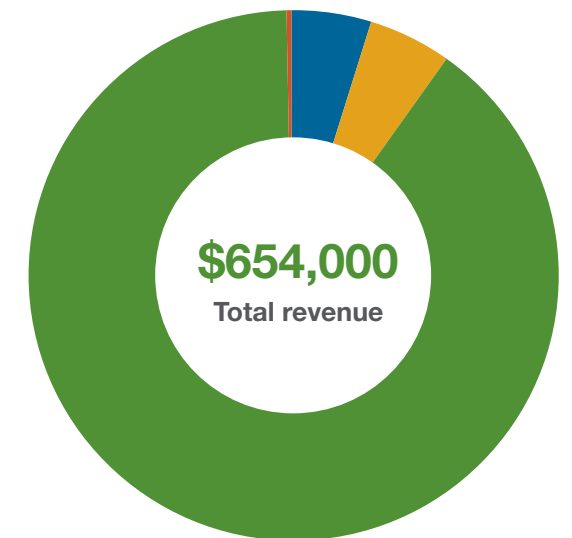


7 Sustainable Development Goals

Being advanced through the Great Eastern Ranges initiative

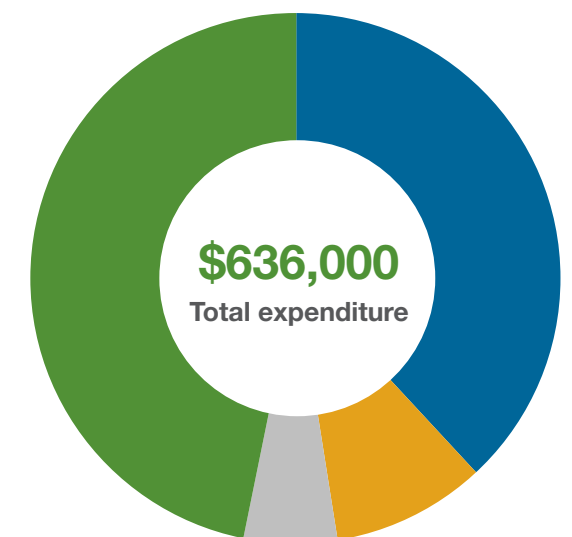
2020-2021 Financials

Where our funds came from



- Grants 89.84%
- Project support 4.83%
- Donations 5.03%
- Bank interest 0.3%

How we spent the funds



- GER conservation activities 46.8%
- Regional partner conservation projects 38.1%
- Communications & engagement 9.4%
- Organisational support 5.7%

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 the GER vision. By working together and supporting efforts in the highest priority places, we achieve something far greater than the sum of our parts.

Regional partnerships



- Biolinks Alliance
- Border Ranges Alliance
- Hinterland Bush Links
- Hunter GER
- Illawarra to Shoalhaven
- Jalligirr Biodiversity Alliance
- Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala
- Kosciusko to Coast
- Lockyer Uplands Catchments Inc.
- North East Bioregional Network
- Slopes to Summit
- Southern Highlands Link

Partner organisations



Global partners



We would also like to thank our members and donors for supporting our conservation efforts and the many landholders, traditional custodians and communities who help to protect, connect and restore healthy landscapes across 3,600km of eastern Australia.



Rebecca Keeble, IFAW Oceania Regional Director.
Photo © International Fund for Animal Welfare.

“Entire ecosystems which were decimated by the Black Summer bushfires will take years, if not decades to recover, everything we can do to help with the recovery effort is vital. This important work can’t be done by just one group so we’re partnering with GER and their network of regional and local conservation, Indigenous and community groups, scientific experts and private landholders to give our wildlife and communities the best chances of surviving and thriving together into the future.”

International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) Oceania Regional Director, Rebecca Keeble

Looking ahead

Planning for the future

To help plan, prepare and scale up our efforts to meet the challenges and opportunities of the next critical decade, we are in the process of developing a new, ten year strategic plan. The new strategy will provide a framework for action that reflects our partners' practical needs and priorities whilst providing integrated, large-scale natural solutions to the intertwined crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and declining human and environmental health.

As part of this collaborative process, we will assist our regional partnerships in developing and renewing their own Conservation Action Plans and monitoring and promoting their contribution towards the GER vision.

Providing and applying best practice science

GER has a long-standing track record of applying the best available science and data to informed, evidence-based action. In 2022 and beyond, we will be working to further improve our understanding of the species, ecosystems and ecosystem processes of the GER

corridor and the requirements for securing their long-term health and resilience.

To help ensure that our projects continue to occur in the right place at the right time, we are partnering with universities such as Griffith University and our regional partnerships to develop a new, advanced generation of spatial science methodologies and tools. These analyses will help us highlight the best solutions to the complex challenges we face, identify important areas of connectivity and refugia, make informed predictions, and find the highest priority sites to focus our efforts in.

Monitoring our impact

Our spatial analysis work will also open new opportunities to track changes in the GER corridor and present information about the combined contribution that our and partners' projects make towards improving the connectivity and integrity of habitats and ecosystems across eastern Australia.

In partnership with Gondwana Link, we are developing a new connectivity conservation science program, including a 'State of the Links' reporting framework to

enable ongoing assessment of these changes and our progress towards achieving our joint national priorities and goals.

Future-proofing our work

A business-as-usual approach to conservation is no longer sufficient to meet the scale and speed of the challenges we now face. To ensure that our efforts create impact not only today but into the future too, we recognise the need to make bold decisions, become active experimentalists, test new technologies, land management and restoration techniques, and factor climate resilience into all our efforts.


Merging traditional and modern science

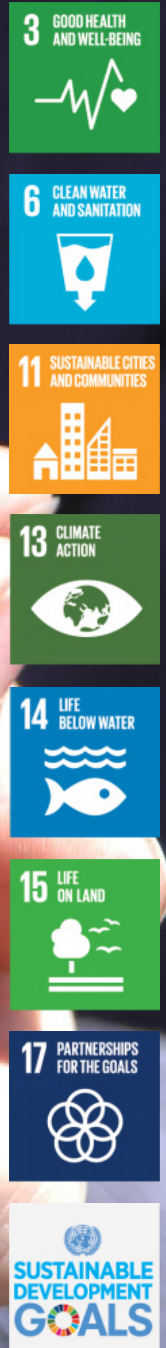
First Australians hold a vast wealth of knowledge of, and experience in, managing country. Building truly healthy, resilient landscapes, ecosystems and communities, requires the active merging of traditional and modern science.

To help facilitate two-way knowledge sharing and learning, GER has embarked on developing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

The development of our RAP will be led by a dedicated working group closely guided by Aboriginal representatives. We will also be striving to expand our engagement with traditional owners and Aboriginal organisations across the GER corridor and provide employment and capacity-building opportunities to empower local communities.



 Some of the 750 trees and shrubs planted by volunteers on a property near Berry on the NSW South Coast Corridor in September 2019 as part of Berry Bush Links. Photo © Bill Pigot, Berry Landcare



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