

The Great Eastern Ranges

2022 Impact Report



The Great Eastern Ranges is a proud partner of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and a member of the Restoration Decade Alliance, a consortium of Australasian environmental restoration organisations supporting the objectives of the decade.



Message from our CEO and Chair

Reflecting on 2022, we are again reminded of the vital role that collaboration and partnerships play in achieving effective conservation at scale. People stand at the very heart of everything we do, and our report seeks to share and celebrate their vital contributions and achievements.

As we have continued to protect and regenerate crucial habitats and reconnect our fragmented ecosystems across eastern Australia, the Great Eastern Ranges' (GER) partners have grappled with the added complexities of this year's heavy rainfall and widespread flooding. In an effort to support them, we have focused on staying connected with community leaders in affected areas and explored new ways to incorporate health and wellbeing support into our existing projects and future ones.

The events of 2022 also highlight the scale and intensity of the climate change impacts we face and the even more critical need to implement nature-based solutions that span entire regions, ecosystems and jurisdictions. GER is not alone in this – it is a reality shared with similar initiatives elsewhere in Australia and around the world.

This year saw the initiative achieving several milestones, including the Connecting People, Connecting Nature conference in Brisbane in October – a two-day high-level event to explore the science and practice of connectivity conservation that engaged over 130 local and international attendees. The conference culminated in the development of a declaration calling upon governments to implement a supportive national connectivity policy framework that ensures good governance and involves and empowers people to protect, connect and regenerate nature.

The conference also marked the start of a month-long knowledge-sharing visit by the Global Landscape Stewards network - a delegation of practitioners from the United States which GER jointly hosted alongside the Australian Land Conservation Alliance jointly.

GER also continues to actively support the objectives of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration through the Restoration Decade Alliance and catalyse local action to fill vital gaps in connectivity and reduce the barriers and threats to wildlife.

There is much to celebrate as we look back on 2022. This report can merely scratch the surface of the combined efforts that continue to involve and inspire as we work to achieve the vision of restoring and reconnecting a 3,600 kilometre corridor of life spanning eastern Australia.

Gary Howling
Chief Executive Officer



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Chair



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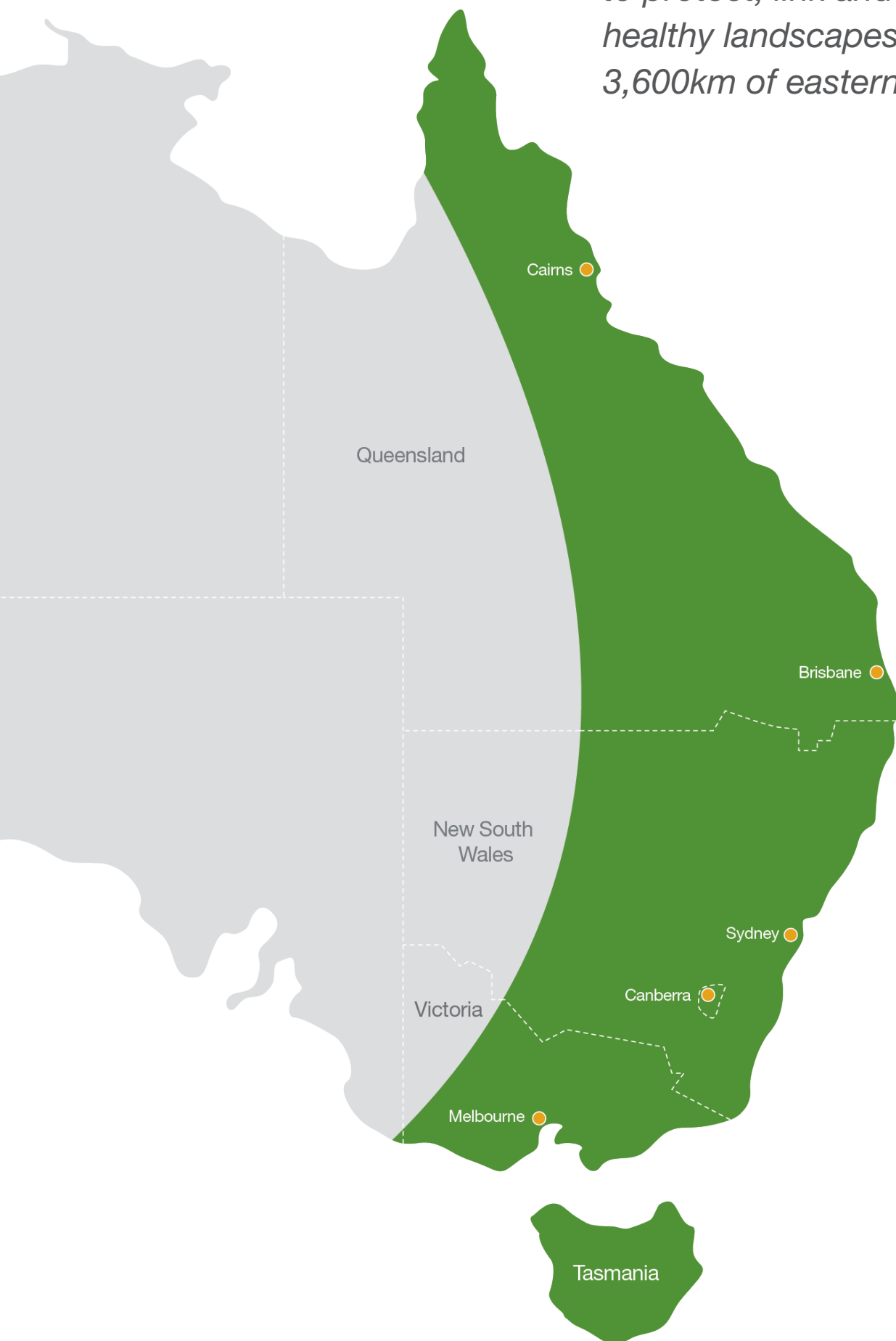
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Diane Latta

Regional Programs Manager
James O' Connor

Spatial Analyst
Dr Patrick Norman

Communications & Engagement Officer
Kate Stevens

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



What we do

Since 2007, we have been working with our partners to stem the loss of native wildlife and their habitats, provide natural climate solutions, protect precious resources, and ensure thriving, resilient landscapes and ecosystems for nature and people.

GER 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 concentrate our work around achieving a positive impact in four core areas:



Supporting wildlife



Creating resilient landscapes and natural systems



Providing natural climate solutions



Community health and wellbeing

The Great Eastern Ranges helps to advance the following UN Sustainable Development Goals



By working together and supporting efforts in the highest priority places, the Great Eastern Ranges achieves something far greater than the sum of its parts – securing the future of one of the world's great natural corridors and the wildlife and communities that live within.

Project showcase 2022



Some of the trees planted on a farm in Moruya on the South Coast. One of several anchor properties in the region in and around which habitat is being regenerated and restored for local wildlife through Cores, Corridors and Koalas. Photo © WWF-Australia / Sli Studio



30,000 new trees to boost habitat for Shellharbour's struggling grey-headed flying foxes

A new partnership between Shellharbour City Council and the Great Eastern Ranges has been working this year to provide additional food to support the region's endangered grey-headed flying-foxes. Over 30,000 flowering trees and shrubs are being established to regenerate and reconnect feeding habitat for the mega bats on Blackbutt Forest and Croom Reserve in Shellharbour.

The little-known reserves support the migration of many of our bird species up and down the coast and preserves one of the largest blocks of Illawarra Lowland Grassy Woodland in the region, a threatened ecological community.

Apart from the grey-headed flying-fox, the reserves are also frequented by many local birds such as the eastern yellow robin, fairy wrens, the spotted pardalote, boobooks and several types of thornbill, seasonal visitors such as grey and rufous fantails, golden whistlers and rose robins, and the occasional eastern grey kangaroo.

The project will also engage local communities and educate residents on the many benefits that flying-foxes provide and serve to reduce conflict with local residents by drawing the bats away from food trees in contentious areas.

Funding for the project is being provided through the Local Government NSW Flying-fox Habitat Restoration Grant Program.

Cores, Corridors and Koalas scales up

GER's partnership with the World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia (WWF-Australia), has entered a second, significantly expanded phase of work this year to reconnect and regenerate tens of thousands of hectares of fire damaged landscapes in NSW.

Through GER's regional partnerships, 'Cores, Corridors and Koalas' is restoring the health and resilience of habitat for koalas, greater gliders, quolls and other forest-dependent wildlife on the NSW South Coast, Border Ranges, Greater Blue Mountains and Coffs Coast Hinterland.

This includes reconnecting 30,000 hectares of habitat, the establishment of 150,000 trees and shrubs, the engagement of close to 400 landholders in capacity building and conservation efforts, and the installation of nest boxes and other supplementary habitat.

The project focuses around identified 'anchor' properties in the four landscapes - a property that forms a central focus for on-ground works from which we radiate our efforts out – that are valuable in terms of their connectivity, habitat and/or serve as vital refugia for wildlife.

“There's a lot of iconic wildlife that could use these corridors once they're set up. We focus a lot on these flagship species, but for every koala, there are thousands of other lesser-known species that are just as important. What we're doing here is part of the solution to turning around Australia's ecological decline,” Tim Cronin, Acting Head, Healthy Land and Seascapes, WWF-Australia





Virtual fencing pilot on NSW South Coast

Every year, vehicle strikes take an extremely high toll on our native wildlife, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 10 million animals, including koalas, Tasmanian devils and powerful owls.

In a bid to reduce the roadkill toll on the NSW South Coast, GER regional partner, Coastwatchers, is spearheading a project to trial a 'virtual fence' on a section of road notorious for its high number of wildlife fatalities. One kilometer of virtual fencing was installed along Cullendulla Drive in Long Beach in October; a road that was selected after being identified through roadkill records as one of the area's most significant hotspots.

The electronic protection system comprises a series of poles set at 25-metre intervals along the road in a zigzag pattern. When a vehicle approaches, it activates each pole in turn, causing it to emit a combination of sound and flashing lights creating a 'virtual fence' that alerts animals.

Similar virtual fencing has been trialled with great success in Australia and internationally. This is the first time that the fencing will be trialled in New South Wales with plans already underway to establish it in other road-kill hotspots across eastern Australia.

Funding for the project is being provided through GER's partnership with the World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia (WWF-Australia).



New state of the art homes for wildlife in the Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala Link

Injection moulded nest boxes designed to mimic the stable micro-climate of a real tree have been installed across the Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala (K2W) Link this year to replace much-needed hollows lost in the 2019-2020 bushfires. Designed by a team of researchers at Charles Sturt University, the modular boxes comprise a double-walled plastic outer with a timber internal chamber, with customisable entrances to suit a wide range of animals. The boxes attach to trees with a simple bracket system.

The artificial hollows are proving to be highly successful, with some animals spotted through remote sensing cameras to be taking up residence in the boxes within just a few days of being installed, including gliders, antechinus and possums.

The installation of the nest boxes and cameras was funded through the Great Eastern Ranges partnership with the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) Australia as part of a broader effort to heal bushfire affected wildlife and communities in three priority landscapes in NSW and QLD.

Plans are already underway to install Habitech nest boxes as part of other GER projects across eastern



GER's Bushfire Local Economic Recovery Fund project kicks-off

At the end of 2021, GER received \$1 million of funding from the Australian and NSW government's Bushfire Local Economic Recovery (BLER) Fund to work with its regional partners, IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare) and the Community Environment Network to roll out recovery activities in the NSW North Coast, Blue Mountains, South Coast and Far South Coast.

GER's BLER Fund project was developed in response to appeals for assistance from local landholders and communities post the fires who lacked sufficient funding, knowledge or resources to respond to a crisis of that scale by themselves.

This year, a wide range of GER-BLER Fund projects and activities have commenced that will boost

local capacity and employment opportunities, build community and landscape resilience, support native wildlife and restore and reconnect the region's 'natural infrastructure'.

This includes the creation of four new Indigenous ranger positions in the Northern Rivers region to carry out bush regeneration works, and funds to support the employment of rangers in the Greater Blue Mountains and NSW South Coast.

The project is also providing equipment and manpower to support the planting of new habitat, install nest boxes, control weeds, carry out wildlife surveys and run capacity-building workshops and field days for local communities and landholders.


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



Left: One of the virtual fencing poles installed along Cullendulla Drive on the NSW South Coast to curb the high wildlife roadkill toll. Right: Mick Callan, Founding Director of Habitat Innovation & Management, installing one of the company's Habitech nest boxes.



New rangers Jaydon and Peter Cavanagh with their father Peter Snr. The four new Indigenous Ranger positions were funded through the Great Eastern Ranges Australian and NSW government's Bushfire Local Economic Recovery (BLER) Fund project. Photo © Jane Baldwin

A greater glider is shown clinging to a tree trunk at night. The glider has large, prominent orange-brown ears and a greyish-brown body. It is looking directly at the camera with large, dark eyes. The tree bark is dark and textured, with some lighter patches where the glider is gripping. The background is dark, suggesting a nighttime setting.

“The Great Eastern Ranges had the foresight to begin working on connectivity conservation 15 years ago, to protect natural resources across eastern Australia and stem the loss of native species. WIRES is looking forward to working closely with the GER and their regional partners to address the major threat of habitat loss impacting wildlife which has been exacerbated by the recent floods, fires, long-term drought, and climate change.”

WIRES Chief Operating Officer, Kyla Shelley

Partnering with WIRES to create Glideways, Flyways and Stepping Stones

In mid-2022, the Great Eastern Ranges formed a partnership with the NSW Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service (WIRES) to assist spotted-tailed quolls, greater gliders, masked owls and other animals in southeast Australia which are still recovering from the devastating bushfires of 2019-2020.

‘Glideways, Flyways and Stepping Stones’ comprises a suite of community-led projects to support native wildlife, and protect, restore and reconnect their habitat in the Northern Rivers, Blue Mountains and NSW South Coast.

More than 22 species of wildlife impacted by the bushfires will be supported through the project over the next two years, including endangered and vulnerable native animals as well as common species.

The first few months of the project has involved consultation with key stakeholders and the identification of suitable ‘anchor’ properties on and around which restoration and conservation activities will be rolled out from in the new year. These include:

- In the Northern Rivers, Clarence Landcare has been engaged to work with GER and landholders along the Nymboida River which was severely impacted by the bushfires. A major focus in this landscape will be on managing threats and regenerating important riverine habitat to support impacted aquatic wildlife including the platypus and endangered eastern cod as well as land-based animals.
- In the Bilpin region of the Blue Mountains, GER will work with Hawkesbury-Nepean Landcare Network and local landholders – many of whom are WIRES carers – to secure and create suitable, safe release sites for wildlife and combat wombat mange.
- In the South Coast’s Bega Valley, GER will be working with the South Coast Local Land Services, Bega Cheese and their farmers collective to deliver a range of conservation initiatives on dairy farms, with a focus on supporting the region’s koalas and threatened woodland birds.

Building community capacity and resilience

To help local communities and landholders to recover from the recent succession of climate disasters and extreme weather events, GER is supporting its regional partnerships to deliver community resilience and capacity building workshops in impacted landscapes across the ranges.



Building community resilience in the Border Ranges

To support the recovery of landholders in the Busby's Flat region - one of the area's hit hardest by the Black Summer bushfires and then floods - the Border Ranges Alliance held two fire and flood community workshops in Rapville. More than 80 community members attended to learn about cultural burning, stream restoration, assisting natural regeneration and private land conservation. As well as building local capacity, the workshops served to draw out landholders who were interested in getting involved in restoration projects. The workshops were hosted by the Northern Rivers Fire and Biodiversity Consortium inc. with the support of GER, IFAW and WWF-Australia.



Educating the next generation of nature carers in the K2W Link

In celebration of Threatened Species Day, Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala supported an action-packed environmental education day for students from around the Upper Lachlan Shire with funding from GER's partnership with WWF-Australia. As part of a partnership between local and state environmental organisations the children participated in drawing, tree planting and theatre to learn about wildlife and the environment and how they could assist in supporting nature to heal after the Black Summer Bushfires.



Engaging local communities in the Lockyer Valley

In April, Lockyer Valley residents were invited to a greater and yellow-bellied glider workshop at Gatton, held to encourage landholders to help conserve the threatened marsupials. The free event included presentations by wildlife experts, a nest-box building demo, and the chance to meet some of the locals from stick insects to barking owls and bandicoots. The workshop was run by Healthy Land & Water, Wildlife Queensland, Great Eastern Ranges and the International Fund for Animal Welfare as part of a broader effort to secure the future of south-east Queensland's gliders.



Supporting the recovery of wildlife on the NSW South Coast

In October, GER partner Coastwatchers Inc, held a workshop on the NSW South Coast to provide advice to local landholders on how they could support the post-fire recovery of wildlife on their land. The workshop was funded through the Australian and NSW government's Bushfire Economic Recovery (BLER) Fund as part of GER's project to help restore country, culture and community in some of NSW's most heavily bushfire-affected landscapes.



Seeding the future for conservation in the Greater Blue Mountains

To provide the critical stock needed to restore habitat for tree-dwelling mammals and birds in the Kanangra-Boyd to Wyangala (K2W) Link, Upper Lachlan Landcare partnered with the Southern Tablelands group of the Australian Plants Society (APS) to launch a native seed collection project.

Supported through GER's partnership with the International Fund for Animal Welfare Australia (IFAW), the project is working to provide 3,000 plants to help restore, recover and build the resilience of bushfire affected areas and other vulnerable landscapes in the region.

The project kicked off in February with a series of community workshops on seed collection and plant propagation.

Throughout the year, Southern Tablelands APS has been working with private landholders, local councils, NSW National Parks and Wildlife, and Local

Land Services to collect the seeds and cuttings of a variety of native species from various sites across the K2W Link.

The seed collection project will continue into 2023, with more community workshops being held early next year and the new propagated seedlings maturing in time for the Spring and Autumn planting season.

“The native seeds and plants needed to restore and reconnect vital habitat for wildlife post the Black Summer bushfires is in short supply. This native seed collection project is helping to fill the supply gap in this important corridor, collaborating with our partners on community driven recovery projects like this is essential for ensuring a healthier, more resilient future Australia for people and nature.” Gary Howling, CEO of Great Eastern Ranges.

Top left: Members of the local community attend a fire and flood workshop in Rapville, Busby's Flat. Top right: Wendy Simpson from IFAW and Paul Revie from Wildlife Queensland demonstrate how to construct a nest box at the greater and yellow-bellied glider workshop at Gatton. Bottom left: Students preparing for tree planting activities. Photo © Mary Bonet. Bottom right: Landholders on the South Coast attend the Supporting Wildlife in Your Land workshop.

Impact at a glance



618,095ha

Of improved landscape connectivity



250+ organisations

Working contributing to the GER vision



1,000

People engaged in conservation projects and activities



217

Private properties involved



54

Threatened and regionally significant animal species supported through projects



7 Sustainable Development Goals

Being advanced through the Great Eastern Ranges initiative



Members of NSW Bellingen Valley community help plant nectar producing trees and shrubs to provide sources of food for the regions endangered grey-headed flying foxes. Photo © Annette Ruzicka

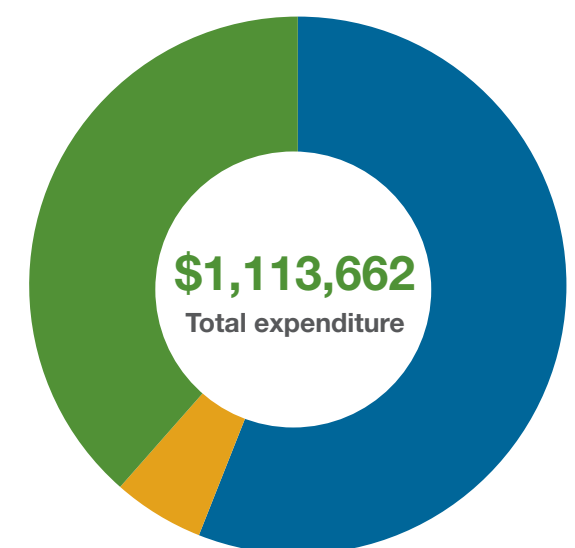
FY22 Financials

Where our funds came from



- Grants 95%
- Project support 1.4%
- Donations 1.3%
- Project administration 2.3%

How we spent the funds



- GER conservation activities 38.5%
- Regional partner conservation projects 56%
- Organisational support, communications and engagement 5.5%

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 are achieving 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



Thank you to Taronga Conservation Society Australia for providing GER with office space.



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

“We’ve cleared tens of millions of hectares across Australia. We have got to the point where we not only need to stop clearing, but also undo the damage we’ve done. It may be impractical to put that many trees back in the ground, but by restoring relatively small but strategic areas, we can reconnect thousands of hectares of habitat and make a much larger impact for the benefit of local communities and nature.”

Tim Cronin, WWF-Australia's Acting Head, Healthy Land and Seascapes



Tim Cronin, WWF-Australia's Acting Head, Healthy Land and Seascapes, helps to plant trees on a property in Coila NSW as part of Cores, Corridors and Koalas. Photo © WWF-Australia / Sli Studio

Looking ahead



 Georgina Baker on her property Levensale Farm in the Bellingen Valley, where her and her family have planted over 2,000 trees to contribute to the creation of a vital corridor that will help koalas to move between the coast and the plateau. Photo © Annette Ruzicka

Planning for the future

In 2023, GER will be entering its 16th year as a major connectivity conservation initiative. As we embark upon the next period of growth, we have been working to develop a new ten-year strategic plan. The strategy, due for release in early 2023, will set the direction and priorities for the future, establish clear goals and enable us to be proactive and adaptable in response to new opportunities and challenges. Over the next ten years, we will be significantly ramping up efforts to regenerate and reconnect nature at the scale needed to help tackle the significant challenges we face and meet our national and global environmental and climate goals. Alongside the strategic plan, we are developing a robust Monitoring and Evaluation framework that will enable us to track progress and monitor the initiative's environmental, social and cultural impacts.

Integrated natural solutions

Evidence-based and strategically planned connectivity conservation efforts provide some of the most comprehensive, integrated nature-based solutions available. In the future, GER's work to protect and regenerate intact landscapes and ecosystems will play a significant role in helping to curb the impacts

of climate change, halt extinctions and reduce the risk of new pandemics. Focusing solely on delivering natural climate solutions however will only get us part of the way to where we need to be; simultaneously protecting and restoring biodiversity is also crucial. This means not only the protection and restoration of our carbon-rich woodlands, forests and wetlands, but ensuring that animals, which play a significant but often overlooked role in the carbon cycle, are actively considered in project design. Over the next critical decade, GER will work with the Global Rewilding Alliance and other key partners to ensure that our projects integrate climate, biodiversity and health outcomes and deliver holistic nature-based solutions.

Incorporating wellbeing into on-ground action

The COVID-19 pandemic and succession of climate disasters that our communities and partners on the ground have faced over the last couple of years have taken a heavy toll. To support them now and into the future, GER is committed to exploring new ways to incorporate health and wellbeing support into our existing projects and future ones. Over the next few years, we will also be working to roll-out a series of Ecohealth projects that combine restoration with public

health research, interventions, and outreach, as well as advancing initiatives that give people the chance to meaningfully reconnect with nature.

Putting connectivity conservation on the national agenda

Protecting isolated pockets of habitat and a focus on single species conservation is not sufficient to ensure the persistence of our wildlife and natural systems, particularly in a time of climate change. GER and its partners will therefore be continuing to raise the profile of connectivity conservation and increase awareness of the importance of connectivity amongst key decision makers and the broader general public. This includes calling on government to implement a national corridors framework to revitalise connectivity conservation in Australia and promote strong integration of wildlife corridors across the National Reserve System and threatened species recovery plans.

Science-led action

Effective conservation requires cutting-edge science. To support connectivity planning, guide on-ground actions and generate evidence in support of natural climate-biodiversity solutions, GER will continue to

fill the gaps in vital research, data, information and knowledge through a variety of initiatives. This includes the release of the first 'State of the Links' report, in partnership with Griffith University with funding from The Ian Potter Foundation, the creation of a carbon-biodiversity calculator and the launch of a new data portal for recording restoration activities alongside the Atlas of Living Australia. GER will also be exploring new opportunities to ensure that the investment made in science reflects the scale of the challenges we face and trialing bold, innovative new approaches to restoration and monitoring.

Turning intention into positive action

In recognition of the significant value of traditional knowledge and to strengthen and develop respectful relationships with First Australians, GER will be developing its first Reconciliation Action Plan. Alongside this, sits a commitment to involve First Australians in project design and roll-out, weave traditional knowledge and practice into on-ground efforts, and engage Aboriginal rangers to support bush regeneration and research activities.



The Great Eastern Ranges shrouded in mist on the Coffs Coast Hinterland. Photo © Annette Ruzicka.

GER acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and their continued connection to, and care for, country. We pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

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**THE GREAT
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connecting people...connecting nature



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