

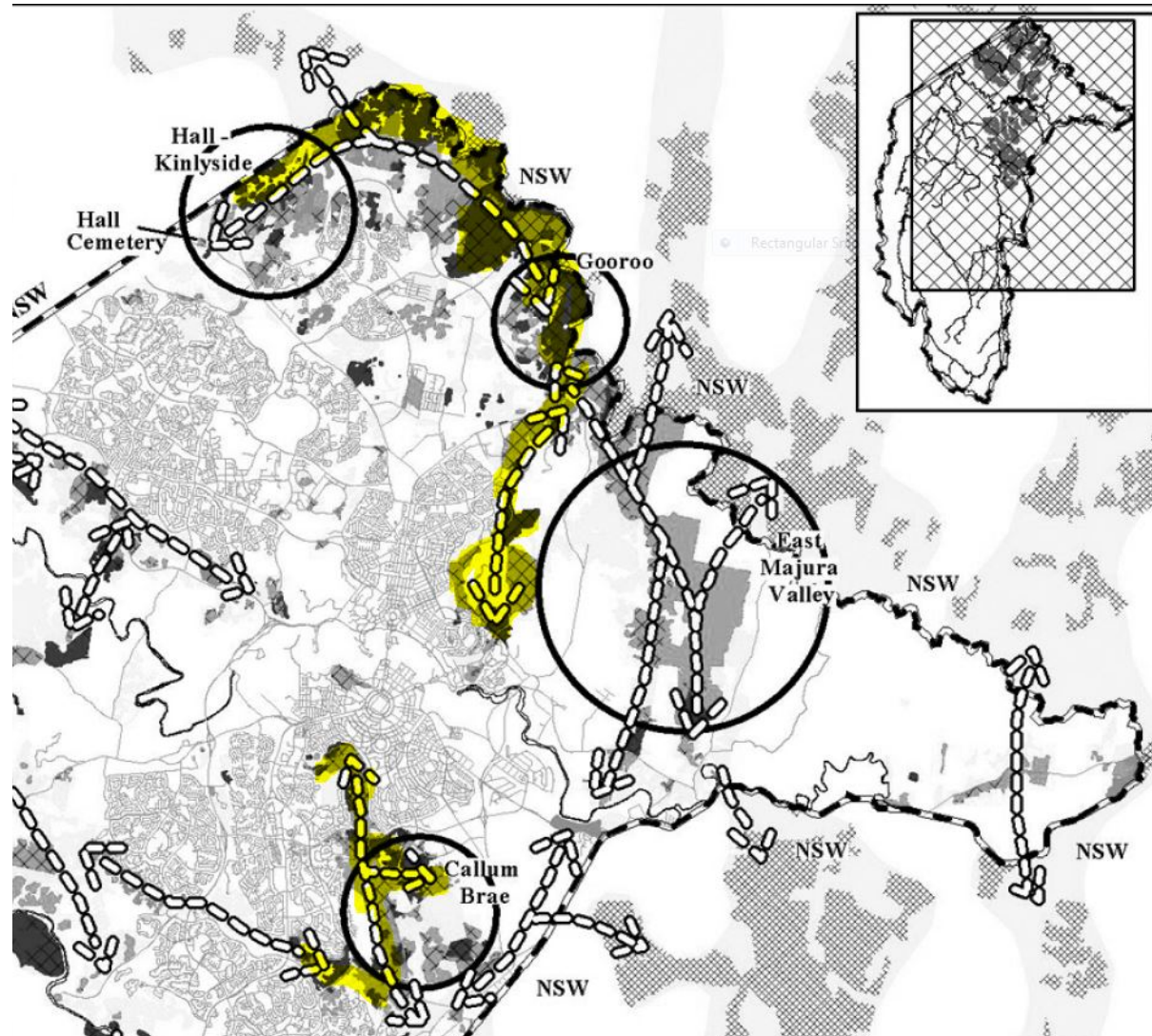
# ***A National Park***



***Misty Morning Goorooyaroo*** (R Griffiths)

# ***For A National Treasure***

# A New National Park Celebrating The ACT's Lowland Grassy Woodlands



Approximate area for a new national park and associated rural lease areas. Note potential to extend in the east Majura Valley (Map from the ACT Lowland Grassy Woodlands Strategy)

# ***A National Park For The ACT's National Treasure***

## ***A Proposal by the National Parks Association of the ACT***

### **Summary**

The National Parks Association of the ACT (NPA ACT) proposes the creation of a national park consolidating into a single management unit the nationally significant lowland grassy woodlands found in the north of the ACT.

The establishment of a national park based on the ACT's lowland grassy woodlands:

- will facilitate a consolidated management approach for these ecosystems;
- would utilise an internationally recognised "brand" to help to increase local, national and international awareness of the importance of the ACT's lowland grassy woodlands;
- will enhance the existing eco-tourism market in the ACT;
- will help the ACT meet the objectives of its lowland grassy woodland strategy;
- will build on the important work occurring at the Mulligan's Flat Sanctuary;
- will add to the funding potential of the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust; and
- can be achieved at a very low cost.

Overall, the creation of a national park would rationalise the management of the ACT's lowland grassy woodlands, enhance the standing of the ACT as an ecotourism destination and provide benefits greater than can be achieved under the existing conservation framework.

It is an opportunity to celebrate the ACT's lowland grassy woodlands by creating **a national park for a national treasure**.

### **Background**

The ACT contains some of Australia's most important examples of lowland grassy woodlands. In particular, it holds some of the best remaining examples of the nationally threatened yellow box red gum grassy woodland ecosystem. These woodlands have been described by, what was then, Territory and Municipal Services as "treasures of national significance". The creation of the Sanctuary at Mulligan's Flat provides some recognition of this importance it is only small part of the ACT's lowland grassy woodlands. To truly recognise the importance of these woodlands requires the creation of a single reserve solely dedicated to celebrating these natural treasures.

While currently Canberra Nature Park (CNP) plays a significant role in protecting areas of lowland grassy woodlands there is a need to consider how best to further improve long term management (including enhanced connectivity) of these grassy woodlands. This is an important requirement of the ACT's Lowland Woodland Conservation Strategy.

### **The proposal**

The NPA ACT proposes that a national park be **initially** created from existing reserves of lowland grassy woodlands. Ultimately, it would expand to include the lowland grassy woodland areas earmarked for reservation under the Gungahlin strategic environmental assessment and other important lowland grassy woodland sites, such as those found in Majura.

The initial national park would be made up of two key blocs of reserves, being:

1.Mulligan’s Flat	2.Red Hill
Gooroyaroo	Mt Mugga Mugga
Mt Majura	Cullam Brae
Mt Ainslie	Isaacs Ridge
Mt Pleasant	Wanniassa Hills
Kinleyside	Farrer Ridge

Off reservation conservation management processes would be employed to enhance connectivity. To a large extent these processes are already established, particularly in the Gungahlin region.

The creation of the national park would incorporate the largest single reservation of yellow box red gum grassy woodland in Australia. This ecosystem is listed as critically endangered, nationally, and therefore is of national significance.

### **The Benefits**

The creation of a single national park based on lowland grassy woodlands would assist the adoption of consistent management practices in line with the requirements of the ACT’s lowland grassy woodland strategy. Current reserves are part of CNP whose management plan is required to cover a range of ecosystems. CNP’s management plan is now 15 years old, and while it is currently in the process of being updated, the administration of lowland grassy woodlands will still only be one part of a much broader management plan.

**Benefit** - The creation of a separate lowland grassy woodlands national park would ensure focussed management practices for the ACT’s lowland grassy woodlands and reduce the amount of effort in updating the CNP’s management plan.

The creation of a single national park would a recognition of the importance of the ACT’s lowland grassy woodlands. It would be a clear statement that these ecosystems are of national importance. This single reserve would be one of Australia’s most urban national parks and would help build on the extensive environmental community engagement that is already occurring in Canberra’s northern suburbs.

The term “national park’ has international recognition. Communities have been found associate the term national park as protecting areas of the highest conservation value. **Benefits** - The creation of a national park would allow the ACT to utilise this “brand” to inform and engage the local community on the importance of the ACT’s lowland grassy woodlands. Its creation would facilitate national and international recognition of the importance of the ACT’s lowland grassy woodlands.

With recognition, comes the potential for increased ecotourism. The location of the new national park means that it would be readily accessible to Canberra’s tourists and would be part of the northern gateway into the ACT. One of the first things tourists travelling along the Federal Highway would see upon entering the ACT would be signage for this national treasure. With the expansion of international flights into Canberra, the creation of a new national park would provide a key destination for ecotourists.

**Benefit** – In this time of budgetary constraints the creation of a new national park has the ability to contribute to the ACT’s ecotourism industry.

The Lowland Grassy Woodlands Strategy (the Strategy) has been around, in several guises, for many years. It was introduced due to the threatened status of these ecosystems contain a rich biodiversity. A number of grassy woodland initiatives are

currently being progressed under the Strategy. The creation of a new national park would provide a focus for continued acquisition of lowland grassy woodlands in the ACT and for the provision of interconnecting corridors between woodland sites. It would also provide further justification for the continuation and expansion of the activities arising under the Strategy.

**Benefit** – the creation of a national park would facilitate continued implementation of the objectives of the Strategy.

The Mulligan's Flat Sanctuary (the Sanctuary) project is a leading edge ecological study and a key research project for the preservation and rehabilitation of grassy woodlands which further highlights the importance of the potential national park. The Sanctuary attracts national and international attention and there are plans for its extension and the establishment of a visitors centre. The inclusion of the Sanctuary within the lowland grassy woodlands national park would provide a broader context for the work being done there. It would show that the Sanctuary is part of a larger national treasure of which it would be the key focal point.

The role of a future visitors centre would highlight the importance of the ACT's lowland grassy woodlands and emphasise the Sanctuary's jewel in the crown status within this broader context.

**Benefit** – The establishment of a new national park would provide context for the important work being performed at Mulligans Flat.

The one of the objectives of the Capital Woodland and Wetlands Conservation Trust is to seek funding for the Sanctuary.

**Benefit** - The declaration of a national park has the potential to increase avenues for funding by identifying the Sanctuary as being part of the ACT's management of a nationally important ecological community and by highlighting the role of the Trust in the management of an important component of the national park.

The utilisation of existing reserves to create the initial foundations for a national park would ensure that the costs associated with this action are minimal for the benefits that accrue. In addition, once created, a national park offers administrative efficiencies in the management of the ACT's lowland grassy woodlands with a dedicated management plan providing focussed management practices.

**Benefit** – The creation of a new national park can be achieved with minimal impact on the ACT's budget.

**Why a national park?** – The NPA ACT believes that the term "national park" is highly recognisable and describes for many members of the public the epitome of a conservation reserve. The creation of a new national park will therefore raise the ecological standing of the land incorporated in it in the eyes of the community. Considerable work has been done in the Gungahlin and northern Canberra regions, by organisations such as the Conservation Council ACT Region, to engage the communities there with the natural wonders on their doorstep. The creation of a national park would build on this community engagement and emphasise the importance of the protected ecosystem.

**Requirements for a national park** – The IUCN is seen as a world expert on conservation reserves. In its 2008 publication *Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories*, the IUCN sets out the following six management categories

- I Strict protection [Ia) Strict nature reserve and Ib) Wilderness area]
- II Ecosystem conservation and protection (i.e. National park)
- III Conservation of natural features (i.e. Natural monument)
- IV Conservation through active management (i.e. Habitat/species management area)

- V Landscape/seascape conservation and recreation (i.e. Protected landscape/seascape)
- VI Sustainable use of natural resources (i.e. Managed resource protected area)

The IUCN states that the names (strict nature reserve, etc) are meant to align, more or less, with the main management objective of each category. The exception to this is the name "national park". The IUCN recognises that national park is a term that has been in use for well over a century and has been applied to areas in all management categories. It therefore notes that "the fact that a government has called, or wants to call, an area a national park does not mean that it has to be managed according to the guidelines under category II. Instead the most suitable management system should be identified and applied; the name is a matter for governments and other stakeholders to decide."

The ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment commissioned a report on potential for the creation of a national park based solely on Mulligan's Flat and Gorooyaroo. This report identified that there would be nothing in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's guidelines that would prohibit the creation of such a national park. As the NPA ACT's proposal is much broader than these two reserves, this makes the Commissioner's findings even more relevant.

It should also be recognised that a national park could incorporate areas under the management of rural leaseholders without changing the rights of those leaseholders, other than an obligation to maintain the biodiversity values of their land. This approach would be similar to what has been implemented in respect to Kinleyside.



Gorooyaroo (R Griffiths)