

Conservation of Native Grasslands in New South Wales

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Up to the 1990s little research had taken place in NSW on the biodiversity values of native grasslands in contrast to the literature on them as a resource for stock grazing. The World Wide Fund for Nature's study of the lowland grasslands in south-eastern Australia (McDougall and Kirkpatrick 1993) raised the knowledge of the plight of native grasslands. In NSW the native grasslands of the Monaro have been documented by Benson (1994) and on the Riverine Plain in south-western NSW by Benson *et al.* (1996) and in Victoria by Foreman (1995). These reports list sites of botanical significance considered worthy of follow up conservation action. They also recognise that more survey work is required to ensure the other important sites are discovered. The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service has undertaken further surveys in the Bungendore region and have commenced conservation planning for some of the important sites on the Monaro. Sarah Sharp (1994) and others have studied the native grasslands of the ACT and the protection and management of these has gained momentum.

About 15 nationally listed rare or threatened plants occur in the native grasslands of the Monaro and Riverina along with a number of rare or threatened animal species. Most of these species are specific to grassland habitat.

One of the problems of enforcing SEPP 46 in NSW has been in the lack of definitions of vegetation types. Benson (1996) provided definitions of native and exotic grassland in order to assist with resolving this issue. Grassland management plans are being prepared by catchment management committees for the Monaro, Liverpool Plains, Walgett area, Moree Plains and the Western Riverina. It will be interesting to see if any breaches of these plans are enforceable. SEPP 46 is likely to be replaced by legislation in the near future which will bring together under one Act provisions of various separate laws in NSW pertaining to managing native vegetation. This legislation should also provide for incentives to encourage landholder participation in protecting natural habitat and native species.

The future of native grassland conservation will depend on:

- acquiring sufficient scientific information on distribution, variation and dynamics of native grassland habitats and species;
- the acquisition of some key sites for nature reserves and the application of conservation agreements over other sites;
- an increase in landholder appreciation of native grassland species for sustainable grazing;
- sympathetic management on public and private land to maintain species richness;
- community based protection management plans preferably underpinned by vegetation retention laws.

References

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