

Draft Discussion Paper: Alternative Reserve Options -Ginninderra Creek Murrumbidgee River Peninsula Reserve

This discussion paper presents alternative conservation reserve options for the West Belconnen Development. In producing these options, Ginninderra Catchment Group took into account the many issues relating to the area at the northern end of the proposed West Belconnen development. The resulting options aim to protect the unique values of this area. The options incorporate well-established ecological reserve design principles and take into account many of the concerns raised by the community (including by local Aboriginal custodians, Ginninderra Catchment Group, Ginninderra Falls Association and the Conservation Council, ACT and Region) as well as concerns raised by many scientific experts in a variety of fields. The options also incorporate work done by Ginninderra Catchment Group in a biodiversity report co funded by GCG and the Riverview Group. The report, 'A Preliminary Biodiversity Survey of the Ginninderra Falls Area' provides greater detail on the key issues relating to biodiversity of the area.

1. Alternative reserve options

Conservation-weighted Protected Area Option

The conservation-weighted protected area option (yellow line in Figure 1) is based on a number of conservation considerations. It incorporates substantial additional areas within reserve, including land outside of the existing E3 land in order to:

- Maximise reserve size for large home range predators
- Maintain open ground for raptors including Little Eagle
- Maintain additional open areas for grazing herbivores and ecotone species
- Maximise distance from urbanisation for species sensitive to urbanisation
- Maintain all Pink Tailed Worm Lizard (PTWL) habitat and connectivity between habitat
- Set aside land for future rehabilitation to PTWL habitat and Box Gum Woodland (BGW).

It is acknowledged that this option does not fit well with the reserve trust funding model and would be an unlikely option to gain support from the developer and landowners. This option is included to allow for comparison between what could be considered as close to "best practice protected area management" as possible and other options. The intermediate protected area option is explored in more detail below as it reduces risk to biodiversity but still allows for development on lower conservation value land which would, in turn, provide funding for the trust to protect high conservation value areas.

Intermediate Protected Area Option

The proposed intermediate protected area option (blue line in Figure 2) incorporates well-established ecological principles of reserve design and protected area management but makes allowances for what is seen as the maximum amount of development that could take place in order to still have a good chance of minimising impact on significant values.

The intermediate protected area option aims to:

- Adequately protect biodiversity including top-order predators and large home range species such as Rosenberg's Goanna and the Spotted-tailed Quoll.
- Protect the high conservation value of the area including heritage, aesthetic and biodiversity values.
- Allow for connectivity between critical habitat zones and the movement of fauna.
- Maintain ecotone habitat (transitional zone between woodland and grassland)

- Maintain within reserve grassland areas which contribute to habitat heterogeneity.
- Allow for improvement and expansion of critical habitat and ecosystems including Pink-tailed Worm Lizard habitat and Box Gum Woodland (including secondary grassland)
- Decrease cost and impact of boundary infrastructure and ongoing management.
- Reduce the risk of uncontrolled access and detrimental activity.
- Create a sustainable long term, high biodiversity value and financially viable community asset.

It is recognised that there will be some trade-offs for biodiversity under this option and it is possible that some species including threatened species could still decline, but this is seen as a compromise option that still provides a reasonable degree of protection to the area and significant species.

2. Other issues in relating to infrastructure and visitor access

In addition to the reserve options, his discussion paper focuses on the three key aspects of infrastructure and reserve use:

1. High-use visitor access and entrance facilities
2. Cultural Heritage
3. Ecologically sensitive areas.

High-use visitor access and entrance facilities

In order to have a sustainably-managed high conservation value reserve, control of visitor access and a careful assessment of the types of activities permitted within the reserve will be critical. The Ginninderra Falls area provides a variety of access options that, if managed properly, would protect the area and provide substantial ongoing funding to ensure the reserve's sustainability.

The single entry point and access road allows for a relatively simple method of controlling access. This configuration funnels visitors to a central point, resulting in better management of those visitors. As the current road access terminates at the old entrance to Ginninderra Falls and is close to the highly disturbed quarry area, there is an excellent opportunity to limit disturbance caused by infrastructure by confining the proposed visitor centre, car parking and other key buildings to the quarry site and the adjacent existing buildings.

The main attraction for most visitors will be the Ginninderra Falls themselves and the best place to view them is from the existing lookouts. This proposal recommends that infrastructure put in place to provide access to the falls be confined to the existing footprint. It is acknowledged that some upgrading of tracks would be required to cater for all access requirements; however, limiting this to key areas would ensure valuable sensitive areas are protected.

The high-use visitor area would incorporate a visitor information centre, café and easy access viewing of the Ginninderra Falls. It is anticipated that this section of the reserve would cater for the vast majority of visitors and that this part of reserve would provide the highest revenue.

Additional access would be more restricted and managed through a guided ranger program. An indigenous ranger program and biodiversity program would provide valuable education opportunities and would be potential revenue sources. Additional low impact activities such as rafting on the Murrumbidgee could also be linked to guided ranger program to further enhance funding opportunities.

Cultural Heritage

The Ginninderra Falls area has high cultural heritage values that needs to be acknowledged and managed effectively. If done well, there are also significant opportunities for this area to be utilised for cultural education. An indigenous ranger program based at the Ginninderra Falls area would

provide valuable training and job opportunities as well as providing a valuable community education resource that contributes to the broader regional pathways story.

3. Funding concepts

To fully recognise the value of the Ginninderra Falls area and sustainably manage these values, alternative models of funding need to be explored. The traditional development approach that has been followed to date in West Belconnen has involved maximising the developable area on each of the landowner's properties, with financial returns being linked to amount of land rezoned to urban on each of the landowner's properties. There is the potential for such an approach to result in perverse outcomes for high conservation areas as a result of impacts of urban development.

The critical area of concern for the West Belconnen development is the Ginninderra falls, Ginninderra Creek gorge and the surrounding forest, woodland and agricultural land that form a large peninsula in the northern end of the West Belconnen Project area. This area has been protected from the pressures associated with intensive agricultural activities and development activity as a result of the E3 zoning and includes large areas of high conservation value remnant habitat as well as cultural and scenic values.

The Ginninderra Falls area has been adequately protected under the E3 zoning to date (though strengthening of zoning to E1 or E2 for parts of the area is likely to be appropriate in future) Urban development represents a significant change to land management and a significant risk to the security of the area.

It is acknowledged that the current landowners require an additional incentive above the current market value of their properties in order to support changes to the proposed zoning and development in the area. It is also acknowledged that the current landowners have a strong connection to this area, having cared for it for many years.

In order to avoid degrading and undoing the conscientious work of landowners in maintaining and improving native biodiversity in parts of the E3 area, some new funding options need to be explored. In order to provide access to the area for the future community members, whilst ensuring that the ecological, cultural heritage and aesthetic values of the area are retained, an approach that truly represent best practice in reserve design and management is required.

With respect to planning and funding a development that is more sensitive to the values of the area, some of the ideas that have been suggested during the consultation process, or that have been tried in other projects, include:

- Increasing the trust levy to 2% (currently 1%) and using the additional revenue to compensate landowners and reserve large additional areas of the existing E3 land within a reserve to protect the values and species within the area
- Assessing the whole developable area as a combined unit and profit-sharing to compensate for protected land that is important for conservation
- Developing a unified vision to garner the support of all groups who can advocate for government co-contribution (e.g. Developer \$X, Community \$X and Government Matching funding \$X)
- Exploring crowd funding, philanthropic or corporate contribution models and;
- Upfront purchase of property with nominal lease structure to continue living on site within the reserve.

Conclusion

Due to the community concerns and the multitude of values that are present in the area of land subject to rezoning from E3 to urban, a frank assessment of the current model of conservation planning in that area should occur as a matter of priority. The resulting planning decisions should ensure that key biodiversity and cultural heritage values are protected in perpetuity. It is likely that innovative solutions will need to be explored in order to achieve a sustainable outcome in the area

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Figure 1

1) Conservation weighted protected area option

- Larger reserve incorporating significant additional areas within reserve that ensure high conservation areas are well away from the urban edge
- Improved fire protection eliminating the need for fuel reduction in fire sensitive communities.
- Improved connectivity for key species including PTWL
- Excellent protection for species that use the ecotone (those that use open grassland and woodland areas)
- Opportunity to increase the area of Box Gum Woodland (secondary grassland and open woodland and to enhance PTWL habitat
- Very high level of control over access
- Excellent separation of reserve and urban areas (minimises edge effects e.g. weed invasion, predation, noise and light pollution on biodiversity; better visitor experience)
- Incorporates all PTWL records and identified potential habitat.

2) Infrastructure confined to the quarry site and key high flow areas

- Visitor/Education centre promoting sustainable low impact reserve management and development
- Removes the need for a road that threatens to impact on significant species and Aboriginal cultural heritage
- Reuse and upgrade existing lookouts and paths
- Better visitor control resulting in low impact tourism
- High visitor numbers restricted to approved visitor zones
- Specialised tours including Aboriginal Heritage and Biodiversity (diversifying funding)
- Indigenous ranger program

3) Indigenous values protected

- Protecting areas of high significance and controlling access to sensitive areas
- Recognising the significance of indigenous heritage in the broader landscape including pathways and connectivity between sites in the region
- Providing educational opportunities and training facilities.

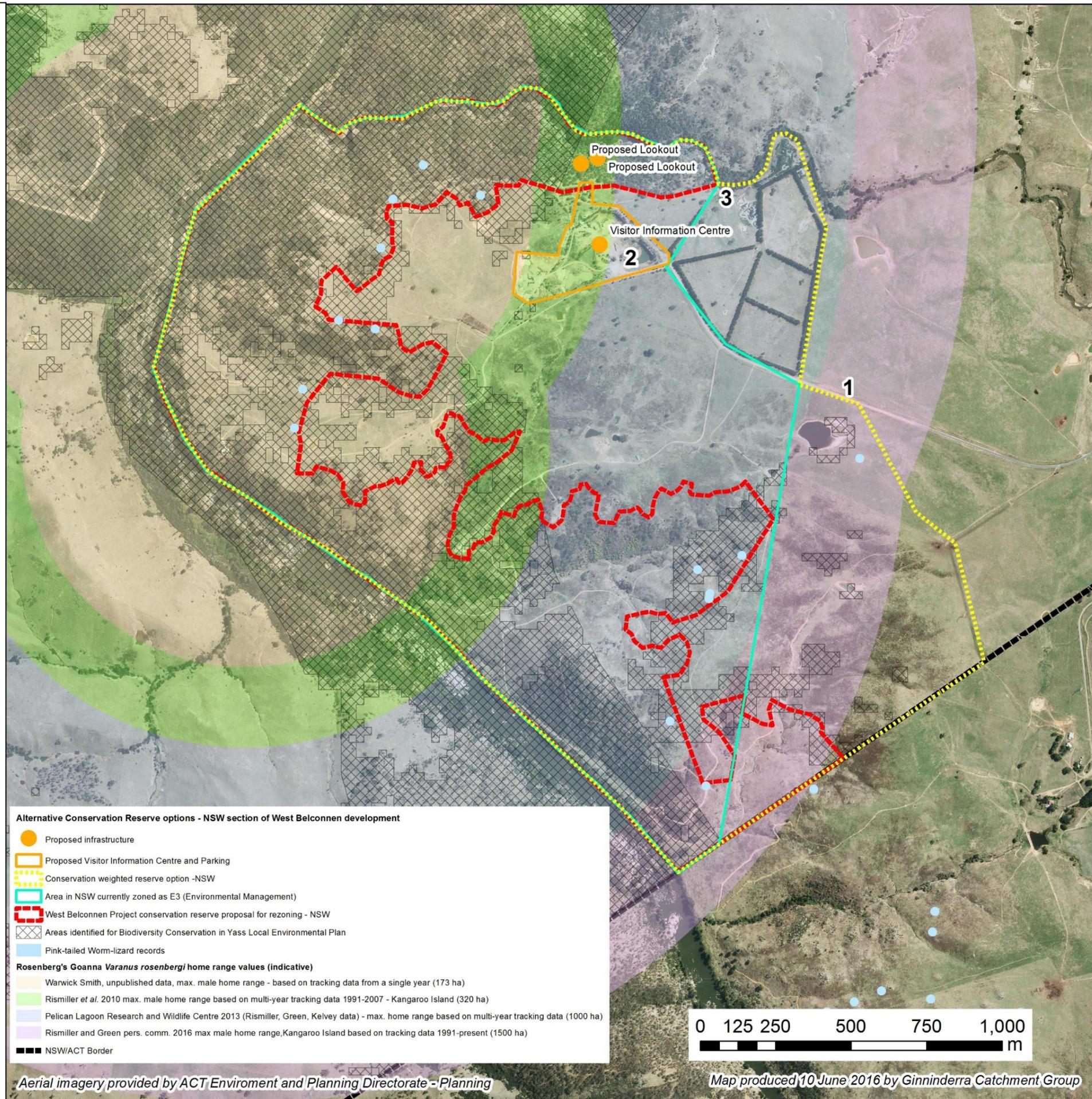
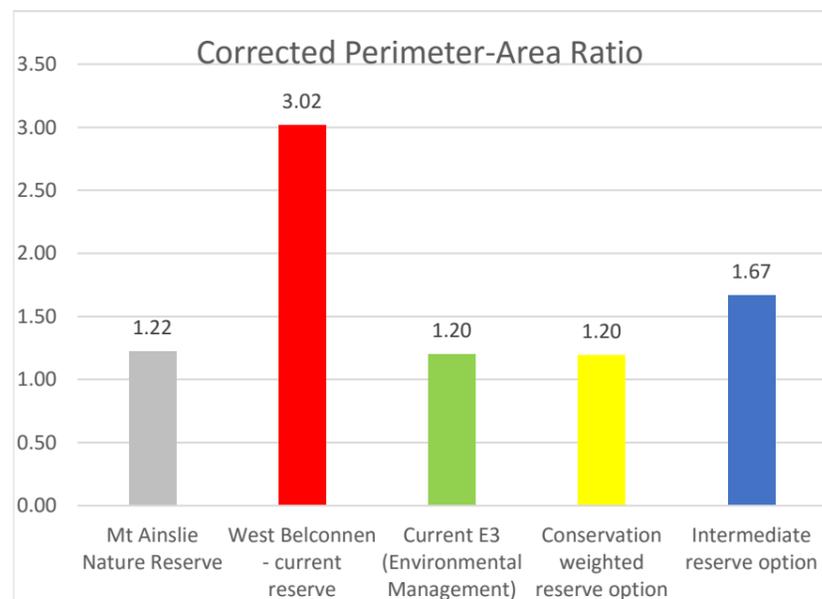


Figure 2

1) Intermediate protected area option

- Ongoing protection of threatened species and areas important for their conservation within reserve
- Improved connectivity for key species including PTWL
- Improved fire protection including restricting the need for fuel reduction in fire sensitive communities.
- Better protection for species that use the ecotone (those that use open grassland and woodland areas)
- Opportunity to increase the area of Box Gum Woodland (secondary grassland) and open woodland and to enhance PTWL habitat.
- Reduced risk of uncontrolled visitation
- Good separation of reserve and urban (reduced edge effects e.g. weed invasion, predation, noise and light pollution on biodiversity; better visitor experience).

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