

## Ngadju fire and conservation land management

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In 2014 Ngadju were granted Native Title over some 10 million hectares of southern Western Australia, including exclusive possession over 5 million hectares of unallocated crown land in the Great Western Woodlands.

The Federal Court determination recognised Ngadju's uninterrupted connection to country and the desire of many Ngadju to maintain their strong cultural links into the future. Ngadju Conservation was established in 2012 to coordinate and manage conservation land management programs on behalf of the broader Ngadju native title claim group. The core objective was to link the many components of land management into future employment and economic opportunities that created jobs on country. This is being achieved through the establishment of a ranger program focusing on fire training for wildfire suppression and mitigation, the development of a conservation action plan across the 5 million hectares in the Woodlands and training in surveying and mapping of invasive weeds and malleefowl.

In 2010 Ngadju representative Les Schultz approached Gondwana Link, a private environmental organisation active in establishing management and protection over the Great Western Woodlands, for ideas on how to have the regions traditional owners Ngadju included in future management decisions and participation in 'on country' management that could lead to employment opportunities.

Critical to these discussions was Ngadju Conservation's desire to operate in their own right, which Gondwana Link agreed to support as the 'end-game' of any program.

A working arrangement between the Great Western Woodlands Collaboration partners that included Gondwana Link, and CSIRO was established and this contributed to funds being secured to document the Ngadju Seasonal Calendar and Ngadju 'kala' Fire Knowledge. Both documents were prepared by Dr Suzanne Prober from CSIRO and formed a foundation for the land management programs now being established.

In 2012 Gondwana Link's program manager Peter Price took four members of Ngadju conservation to the Kimberley Ranger forum at One Arm Point north of Broome and then onto the World Indigenous Convention in Darwin to interact and network with people from established ranger programs.

In 2013 Rangeland NRM provided funding for a five year program through the Commonwealth Government's Caring for Our Country program to focus on developing a Conservation Action Plan, to identify priority conservation targets areas and long term management strategies.

With the initial base funding in place the program further developed to employ three Ngadju people in positions of general coordinator, 'on country' and bush knowledge coordinators. These positions were made available through funding from Gondwana Link, Pew Charitable Trusts and Rangeland NRM.

Ngadju Conservation is leading development of the Conservation Action Plan, supported by facilitator Paula Deegan, who has also facilitated training in the similar Healthy Country Planning process of a number of groups across northern Australia. Ngadju knowledge is being supplemented by input from key western scientists, including Dr Prober from CSIRO. The plan is being developed in parallel with a work program that includes a small number of early specific actions, in order to accelerate development of Ngadju capacity, deal with priorities already identified by Ngadju, and provide 'hands-on' workshop' opportunities that stimulates input to the overall plan. The work program now has many components including bushfire suppression and mitigation training and participation in the development of a 10 year regional fire strategy, cultural exchange and networking with other ranger groups and a comprehensive training program featuring Indigenous land management. The various components are detailed below.

### **Malleefowl and Invasive Weeds Project**

This project furthers the protection of key sites and species in parts of the Great Western Woodlands, while also strengthening the capacity of the Ngadju Conservation Committee and the broader Ngadju community. Key issues identified by the community are being tackled by a small work force, supported by training and mentoring to increase their skill base. These issues include:

- Malleefowl through monitoring and mapping with this information fed into a management regime for the area and the species. Malleefowl are a useful flagship species which will help Ngadju develop initial skills before doing similar work with more cryptic threatened species. Additional discussions currently underway may lead to this project having a role in a national program to define critical management requirements for malleefowl.
- Invasive weeds, their impact and risk of accelerated spread in coming years. Weed mapping and control will add to survey skills, chemical handling and OHS training and tackle a number of early infestations before they spread further.
- Ngadju skill base and need to increase 'job ready' skills in Ngadju community members. Additional programs developed through this project will have a focus on building links with the local Shires, the mining industry and helping develop small machinery handling skills.

### **Ngadju Fighting Fires Fast**

Twelve Norseman-based Ngadju people have attended a series of a bush fire training workshops to develop Ngadju Conservation's ability to manage and prevent fires on their country.

Ngadju Conservation in conjunction with Gondwana Link and Rangelands NRM arranged the bush fire training workshops in Norseman, hosted by Mr Macca Johnston, Area Officer, Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) and the Shire of Dundas.

To date the program has included an introduction to fire behaviour, use of equipment and structural training, mapping and GIS. On country mosaic burning has been conducted on the outskirts of the Norseman town site demonstrating mitigation practices required to protect key assets. The training has resulted in the formal establishment of the Dundas Rural Fire Brigade under the Shire of Dundas.

The training workshop included the election of David Graham as Captain and James Schultz as Lieutenant. David is employed through the Gondwana Link Fighting Fires Fast project as 'On Country' Coordinator. Other Brigade members are involved as volunteers.

Ngadju Conservation has always seen fire mitigation and prevention as the key element in managing country, with traditional knowledge and modern fire management working together. Mitigating bushfire impacts is one of their highest priorities.

As a consequence of the native title settlement Ngadju Conservation are working with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES), Dundas Shire and other stakeholders in the development of a 10 year regional fire strategy.

### **Ngadju visit Martu Birriliburu IPA**

Six Ngadju members of the Malleefowl and Invasive Weed project recently met with the Martu ranger team to experience Martu management practices at the Carnarvon Range.

The Carnarvon Range is located four and a half hours north east of Wiluna, straddles the Canning Stock Route and is within the Birriliburu Indigenous Protected Area (IPA).

The visit, which took place in July 2014, was led by Malleefowl and Invasive Weed Program 'On Country' Coordinator David Graham.

It was a very important experience and helped Ngadju better understand the logistics involved with remote conservation land management and provided a practical demonstration of what Ngadju could do on their country.

The group were impressed by the level of connection Martu have to their country, as was demonstrated through the leadership and management of their ranger program. Senior Martu Ranger Brad Wongawol led by example and the whole ranger team worked together as a team in everything they did. This was a real lesson for younger Ngadju participants.

The cultural and conservation land management exchange between the groups was very successful, and valuable experience was gained in identifying scats and tracks, cultural burning practices and cultural site management.

Martu Ranger Coordinator Mo Powero outlined the Martu journey with the group and pointed out that they have spent five years with limited funding to get to where they are today. He encouraged Ngadju to persevere and the results will come.

### **Remote Jobs Community Program**

To further assist in preparing Ngadju to manage their land and be fee for service ready a new partnership was formed with Remote Jobs Community Program and Max Employment Services to deliver a Norseman based training program focusing on conservation land management integrating Ngadju traditional knowledge and western science and management practices.

This presents a great opportunity for future comprehensive management on a very significant and biologically rich section of southern Western Australia, where Ngadju country transects the Great Western Woodlands end of Gondwana Link.

The training program includes Indigenous Land Management Cert III, conservation action planning, administration of conservation projects, bushfire training (with DFES), field survey for plants, animals and pests, weed control including chemical accreditation, repair and improvement of some Ngadju special places, first aid certificate and 4WD recovery, and cultural exchange and networking with other ranger groups.

A key component of the program is an opportunity for a Ngadju woman to have time experiencing and learning from womens ranger programs with an experienced female ranger coordinator in the north of the state.

The training program is integrated into the existing fire, malleefowl and invasive weeds program where trainees can participate proactively over an eighteen month period and meet the requirements of the Commonwealth government's work training policy.