

Increasing Landholder Collaboration for Landscape Scale Conservation

Stakeholder Engagement Outcomes

Project background:

While landholders generally focus on land management at the property scale, many environmental issues cut across property boundaries, including biodiversity conservation, management of riparian areas, weed and pest management and water quality. Cross-property collaboration could increase the viability of a range of enterprise options, including ecotourism, agroforestry, wind farms, biobanking, carbon farming and kangaroo management. Landcare has successfully promoted collaboration, but new models are needed that can integrate commercial and conservation opportunities and link actions strategically across the landscape. This project aims to develop models for collaboration amongst landholders to be tailored to the issues they wish to collaborate on and the appropriate level of collaboration. One such option is a Landscape Corporation that could undertake strategic planning, invest in profitable ventures and apply for grants for environmental projects. Beneath this would be other models forming a “ladder” of increasing collaboration, from Landcare groups (neighbour partnerships/networks) to alliances, associations and cooperatives.

Project overview and aims:

This project has been funded by the NSW Environmental Trust from February 2016 to January 2018. The project aims to develop models for incentivising on-ground collaboration on cross-property conservation and production activities. The focus of the study is the NSW Central Tablelands and Central West, particularly the areas around Lithgow, Mudgee, Orange and Wellington. The project involves:

1. Social analysis to identify types of activities and organisational structures that foster collaboration
2. Spatial analysis to determine how these activities could be linked strategically to deliver landscape-scale impacts outcomes
3. The development of an online GIS-based tool for use by landholders and other stakeholders in identifying opportunities for collaboration.

Collaborators:

- Great Eastern Ranges Initiative
- Little River Landcare
- Watershed Landcare
- Hovells Creek Landcare
- Landcare NSW Inc.
- Stipa Native Grasses Association
- LLS Central West
- LLS Central Tablelands
- LLS Greater Sydney

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Expected project outcomes:

- Increase the level of strategic planning and integration for biodiversity corridors, riparian zone protection, weed and pest management and water quality;
- Increase the cost-effectiveness of conservation activities by enabling landholders to collectively apply for grants and capitalise on potential synergies (e.g. combining two small revegetation projects on separate properties into a single connected site).
- Enhance climate change adaptation and manage risks from drought, fire, floods or pests by distributing and coordinating activities across a number of sites;
- Reduce the transaction costs of investing in emerging industries such as carbon farming, ecotourism, wind farms and new animal and plant industries (e.g. knowledge, legal costs, consultants' fees, monitoring costs);
- Allow the diversity of skills, resources and knowledge of a group of landholders to be combined in a mutually beneficial project; and
- Provide a coordinated local focus and critical mass for the delivery of natural resource management programs.

Expected benefits for landholders:

- Increased synergy of NRM activities on a landscape-scale
- Potentially additional sources of income for individuals and groups (help move groups towards being self-sustaining)
- Collective coordinated management of an issue (eg pest/weed control)
- Increased local social capital – interaction and knowledge sharing amongst neighbours
- If alliances developed into associations or corporations, landholders have a legal entity to fall back on
- Open up new opportunities for rural renewal via tourism/place-branding
- GIS tool will help landholders identify opportunities for collaboration within their landscape
- GIS tool will help landholders promote their conservation (and resulting production) achievements

Expected benefits for collaborators:

- Landscape corporations would result in local coordinated efforts which could be tapped into by agencies – could streamline grants and prioritise those that have cross-property impact
- GIS tool can help locate and coordinate targeted response by agencies with limited on-ground people power – especially good resource for new staff
- GIS tool can be used to contact groups/individuals – a repository of knowledge with links to discussion pages
- Involvement in the social research process enables close consultation with landholders, increased understanding of local knowledge and issues, better grip of what locals want to do and how corporations could be shaped and developed. Also increases skill-set of collaborators – could emulate research process after the life of the project.
- Potential for landscape-scale environmental, social, cultural and economic outcomes that embody local sustainability. Collaborators can help enhance, facilitate, knowledge broke or co-create by partnering up with local landscape corporations.