

21.07 ENVIRONMENT

20/06/2013
C30

Overview

The West Wimmera Shire contains many areas which have significant natural landscapes and features of environmental value and include the numerous natural wetlands and waterways in the south and the Little Desert in the north. There are also small areas such as narrow reserves along streams, roadsides and railways and nature reserves which retain native vegetation, contribute to nature conservation and are valuable for migratory and nomadic birds and are valuable for flora and fauna habitat and as wildlife corridors for fauna. Approximately 30% of the Shire is Crown land hosting native vegetation and wildlife habitat.

Catchment management is a growing issue within West Wimmera Shire. The municipality lies within the Wimmera, Mallee, and Glenelg catchments.

Although the majority of public land holdings comprise national and state parks, there are smaller parcels of forested and cleared land, lakes, wetlands and reservoirs, and linear roadside reserves. Public land is used for recreation and some grazing and also supports important localised, remnant ecosystems.

The private land in the Shire has been substantially altered during the past 150 years but still contains small pockets of remnant habitat, wetlands and other original features. These areas have become increasingly important with the realisation that only 3% of the original vegetation remains intact. Floodplain management and stormwater management are critical factors affecting the development potential of private land.

Key environmental management issues in the Shire include controlling the loss of native vegetation and habitat, pollution of the water catchment and changes to drainage patterns. Private land holdings can make a substantial contribution to managing these problems.

The Shire contains a range of physiographic features which need to be carefully managed to facilitate the sustainable development of the Shire.

The condition of land, water and biological resources in the region is declining. Human activity exerts pressure on natural resources and changes the state or condition of the resources. Continuous reduction of the region's biodiversity in turn affects our ability to use the natural resources in a sustainable way.

The Catchment Management Authorities are an important source of information regarding natural resource management. The Wimmera Regional Catchment Strategy, the Mallee Regional Catchment Strategy, and the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Strategy seek to create sustainable land management through the better co-ordination and linkages with government, land and water managers and the community.

21.07-1 Biodiversity Conservation and Habitat Protection

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Overview

The decline and fragmentation of indigenous vegetation and loss of biodiversity is a major environmental issue in the Shire, and a contributing factor towards all other land and water degradation issues.

Large areas of the Shire have been cleared for agriculture and the Shire contains limited areas of its natural vegetation cover. There is a risk that scattered trees on farms will die out and the roadside vegetation will be all that remains. The protection and management of the bushland reserves is important to provide a diversity of flora and wildlife refuge areas and habitat. There is particular need to protect habitat for the endangered species, the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo and Jumping Jack Wattle. There is a need for greater revegetation and management of pest plants and animals to address areas of degraded land.

Flora and fauna communities vary throughout the Shire ranging from woodlands and wetlands in the south and desert scrublands in the north. However, with less than 3% of the original Buloke woodlands intact and threats from pest species and development, there is the need to protect existing communities in order to maintain biodiversity.

Objectives and Strategies

Objective 1 To effectively manage and conserve the Shire's biologically diverse natural environment as an ecologically sustainable resource for present and future generations.

- Strategy 1.1 Protect and enhance significant habitat on public and private land in order to maintain biodiversity.
- Strategy 1.2 Support the development of wildlife corridor projects across the municipality, in accordance with a Wildlife Corridor Network.
- Strategy 1.3 Encourage the revegetation of degraded rural land, including in creeks and waterways.
- Strategy 1.4 Encourage the establishment, protection and enhancement of lineal vegetation corridors along drainage lines, waterways and roadsides.
- Strategy 1.4 Investigate appropriate locations within the municipality to set aside land to facilitate the planting of vegetation offsets and provide the opportunity to establish carbon offsets for the Shire.
- Strategy 1.5 Protect Red Tailed Black Cockatoo and Jumping Jack Wattle habitat within the Shire.
- Strategy 1.6 Protect and enhance the region's indigenous genetic biodiversity by maintaining the extent and diversity of the various ecosystems.

Objective 2 To discourage development in locations, which impacts or conflicts with the quality and sensitivity of the natural environment.

- Strategy 2.1 Reduce fragmentation and isolation of vegetation communities.
- Strategy 2.2 Minimise land clearing (including native grasslands) and where land clearing is proposed, require a site analysis, management and remediation plan demonstrating the consideration of any rare or threatened species on or adjacent to the site and the continued integrity of the remnant vegetation and habitat.

Objective 3 To minimise impacts on areas with high habitat value.

- Strategy 3.1 Encourage developments adjacent to reserves with habitat values to enhance the environmental values of the reserves.
- Strategy 3.2 Ensure that the boundary between reserves and abutting properties are clearly delineated and that reserves are protected from incursions by adjoining private properties.
- Strategy 3.3 Control noxious weeds and vermin throughout the Shire.

Objective 4 To identify and protect good quality vegetation stands throughout the municipality.

- Strategy 4.1 Encourage the protection and enhancement of remnant indigenous vegetation, including roadside vegetation where possible.
- Strategy 4.2 Encourage the planting of locally indigenous and native vegetation species, while encouraging the removal of exotic and environmental weed species.
- Strategy 4.3 Encourage wildlife survival through the establishment of wildlife corridors and biolinks between native vegetation on private and public land.

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Catchment Management

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Overview

The widespread clearing of land for agriculture has led to increased pollution of waterways and increased salinity. The natural watercourses have changed, with extensive harvesting and redistribution from the surface water system to sustain agriculture and the rural and township communities. The ground water resources in the Shire are limited both in terms of quality and yield. There is the potential for the further extraction of the ground water resource, although the extent of extraction requires monitoring to ensure that it is not

depleted or contaminated from pollution by saline groundwater and nutrients, pesticides and herbicides or any other source.

The natural drainage patterns in the flat parts of the Shire are dramatically affected by activities such as clearing, roads and railway lines and the creation of levee banks and channels. The drainage of agricultural land without regard to adjoining, downstream and upstream land holders also significantly affects natural drainage patterns. Drainage is being undertaken continuously as farmers try to make more land suitable for cropping. The interference with natural drainage patterns also has major implications for the conservation of wetlands.

The lakes system is an important environmental, cultural and economic feature of the Shire. Care is needed to ensure that the qualities of the significant waterways of the municipality are not degraded by upstream activities.

Objectives and Strategies

Objective 1 To improve water quality and availability.

Strategy 1.1 Encourage the incorporation of water sensitive urban design principles into future, and, where practicable, existing urban subdivisions.

Strategy 1.2 Encourage landowners to revegetate gullies, stream banks and degraded areas to minimise erosion and salinity, and improve water quality.

Strategy 1.3 Maintain and improve indigenous vegetation and land management practices within Proclaimed Water Catchment Areas.

Strategy 1.4 Develop and promote greater understanding of the significance of water in maintaining sustainable communities.

Strategy 1.5 Protect the quality of both ground and surface waters throughout the Shire.

Objective 2 To ensure new use or development does not cause water pollution, land degradation or pose a threat to the sustainable productive capacity of the Shire's major economic base.

Strategy 2.1 Ensure development and associated road infrastructure works minimise impacts on stormwater quality, and sediment and nutrient loads to local waterways.

Strategy 2.2 Improve water quality by better management of urban stormwater inflows.

Strategy 2.3 Ensure that drainage of agricultural land has due regard for adjoining, downstream and upstream landholders and is ecologically sustainable.

Strategy 2.4 Control land fill, excavation and land forming works, such as the construction and maintenance of drains, channels and waterways, likely to affect the flow of surface water having regard to the nature and likelihood of satisfactory resolution of potential drainage problems, conservation values of drained land and possible disposal sites, impacts on wetlands and wetland habitat values, topography, the level of fill and excavation and the effects of such on the subject and adjoining land, and any other matters pertinent to the proposed works such as the impact on any remnant vegetation or habitat and changes to the hydrology on a local and catchment basis.

Objective 4 To recognise the significance of water courses and bodies such as lakes, wetlands, rivers and streams as areas of environmental significance and sensitivity.

Strategy 4.1 Identify and protect the environmental values of significant water courses, lakes and wetlands.

Strategy 4.2 Reduce erosion and sediment inputs in catchments by encouraging the retention and replacement of riparian vegetation.

Strategy 4.3 Work to stabilise stream banks and improve the overall condition of waterways.

21.07-3 Environmental Hazards

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Overview

Natural disasters (including fire, flood, storms and drought) have the potential to substantially affect the community economically and socially, in addition to the environmental issues created by these disasters.

There are large areas of grass/cropping land and bushland in the Shire which regularly burn as a result of natural causes, accidents or deliberate action. One of the major issues is that of uncontrolled bushfires. Planning is required to decrease the level of risk to life and property and facilitate the efforts of the emergency services to handling crises.

Some areas within the municipality are subjected to flooding and inundation from storms and flood events. Planning should ensure that the community is protected from risks associated with these events.

Detailed information on the previous use of land may not be available for all areas. It is important to protect the community from health risks that may emerge from being exposed to contamination. Planning should ensure that the history of potentially contaminating uses is considered when making land use decisions.

Objectives and Strategies

Objective 1 To ensure new development is designed to respond to the risk of fire.

Strategy 1.1 Encourage development to be sited, designed and constructed to minimise the impact of emergency conditions arising from fire.

Strategy 1.2 Encourage the location of access ways, fencing and dams to maximise fire fighting potential and minimise the interface with fire fighting measures.

Objective 2 To restrict and control development on land prone to bushfire.

Strategy 2.1 Ensure the Bushfire Management Overlay is used to guide development on land prone to wildfire and ensure that development does not increase the risk of an environmental hazard.

Objective 3 To protect life, health, safety and community well being from flood hazard and to minimise the impact of flooding on the community.

Strategy 3.1 Ensure that the capacity of floodplains to store and convey floodwaters is not compromised.

Strategy 3.2 Encourage the use of "constructed wetlands" or other similar systems, as a means of storing floodwater, improving water quality and adding to natural habitats.

Strategy 3.3 Identify areas affected by flooding and inundation and ensure that land use and development in those areas protect the community from risks.

Strategy 3.4 Improve the management of the floodplains by addressing land use and development within the floodplain and areas of inundation, improving data/knowledge currency and availability, updating and improving ageing and poorly managed structures, and increasing the quality of private asset management.

Objective 4 To ensure potentially contaminated sites are suitable for intended future use or development.

Strategy 4.1 Require detailed information on the condition of land that may have previously contained a potentially contaminating use, including agricultural activities, for new development.

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Climate Change

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Overview

Climate change is one of the most serious challenges facing the world community. With the West Wimmera Shire's economy heavily reliant on agriculture, the potential risks to the municipality from changes in climate are significant. The West Wimmera Shire Council

has a critical role to play in providing leadership and working with local communities to improve the environmental performance of the municipality, and ensure the long term sustainability of the community, economy and environment of the municipality.

Objectives and Strategies

Objective 1 Improve the environmental performance of the municipality.

Strategy 1.1 Reduce greenhouse gas emissions of the Shire.

Strategy 1.2 Increase energy efficiency throughout the municipality.

Strategy 1.3 Encourage the uptake of renewable energy options.

Strategy 1.4 Halt the process of vegetation clearance.

Strategy 1.5 Expand the indigenous vegetation cover of the Shire.

Strategy 1.6 Implement an energy reduction program across all sectors of the community.

Strategy 1.7 Improve recycling and waste reduction services to reduce methane emissions.

Strategy 1.8 Encourage the establishment, protection and enhancement of vegetation links between native vegetation communities on public and private land.

Strategy 1.9 Increase the Council and the community's knowledge and understanding of the effects of climate change in the municipality.

Objective 2 To protect and conserve existing water reserves and prevent degradation of water catchment areas.

Strategy 2.1 Maintain and improve indigenous vegetation and land management practices within Proclaimed Water Catchment Areas.

Objective 3 To conserve water resources within townships.

Strategy 3.1 Encourage developments to minimise stormwater run-off by reusing rainwater and recycling waste water. This should include, but not be limited to, incorporating facilities for the re-use of water, through the use of rainwater tanks, grey water tanks and grey water pipelines.

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Public Land

Overview

The Shire contains significant areas of public land. Accordingly, there is the need to recognise this resource and ensure that it and adjacent private land are properly managed. The mismanagement of public land can affect a broad range of qualities from tourism to the health of the natural ecosystem. Roadside vegetation is very important in maintaining and restoring connectivity to the fragmented parcels of public land, which are important for the survival of many species.

With public land accounting for over 30% of the land in the Shire, there is the need to recognise the significant size of this resource and to ensure that it and adjacent private lands are properly managed.

Objectives and Strategies

Objective 1 To recognise the public land resource in the Shire and ensure that it and adjacent private land are managed in a manner that reflects their environmental qualities.

Strategy 1.1 Ensure that public land and adjacent private land are managed in a compatible and environmentally sustainable manner.

Strategy 1.2 Encourage the phasing out of grazing on all roadsides and public bushland reserves which have a potential for regeneration.

Objective 2 To ensure publicly owned land is identified correctly throughout the West Wimmera Planning Scheme to facilitate its orderly development.

Strategy 2.1 Engage with public land managers to identify public land holdings throughout the municipality.

Strategy 2.2 Ensure all publicly owned land is correctly zoned.