



Australian Government
National Capital Authority



TREE MANAGEMENT POLICY (DRAFT)

FEBRUARY 2020

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This document has been prepared in partnership with Urban Forest Consulting and Ian Shears

Preamble

Trees in the Central National Area of Canberra are fundamental in strengthening the geometry and intent of the Griffins' formally adopted plan for Canberra. Trees provide visual strength to the Land Axis from Parliament House to Anzac Parade; they help form and define the main avenues of the National Triangle; as well as establishing other formal spaces.

Trees are also essential to the creation of the attractive parklands, streetscapes, and other spaces. They both complement and soften the built setting of Central Canberra. Canberra has been renowned as a Garden City and the 'bush capital', which demonstrates the important status trees have in the Canberra landscape.

The National Capital Authority (NCA) manages the land that forms the heart of our nation, with a mission to advance the National Capital as a valued and respected place for all Australians by ensuring it is well planned, managed and promoted, consistent with its enduring national significance.

The NCA is committed to the 'National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development' in managing development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends. The NCA recognises that the wellbeing of the community is critical to the liveability and economic prosperity of our city and has a role in leading better quality and design of the public domain.

One of the ways that NCA is seeking to deliver this outcome is through the development of a Tree Management Policy.

This Tree Management Policy (the Policy) is a key part of the planning and management documents that detail how the National Capital Authority (NCA) will manage its open spaces into the future.

The policy is subordinate to the National Capital Plan and provides guidance to heritage management plans and landscape maintenance plans. The Policy will also guide the content of other NCA planning documents.

Planning documents

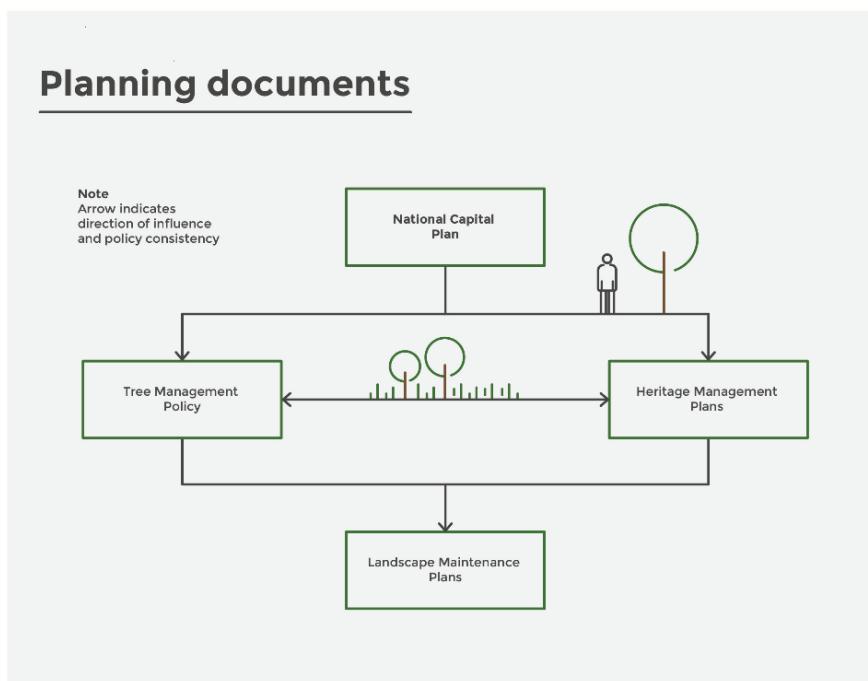


Figure 1: Key document hierarchy

The map below shows the custodians of National Land in central Canberra. Although the NCA has a planning role in relation to works on all National Land in Canberra, it does not directly manage a number of sites as can be seen from the map.

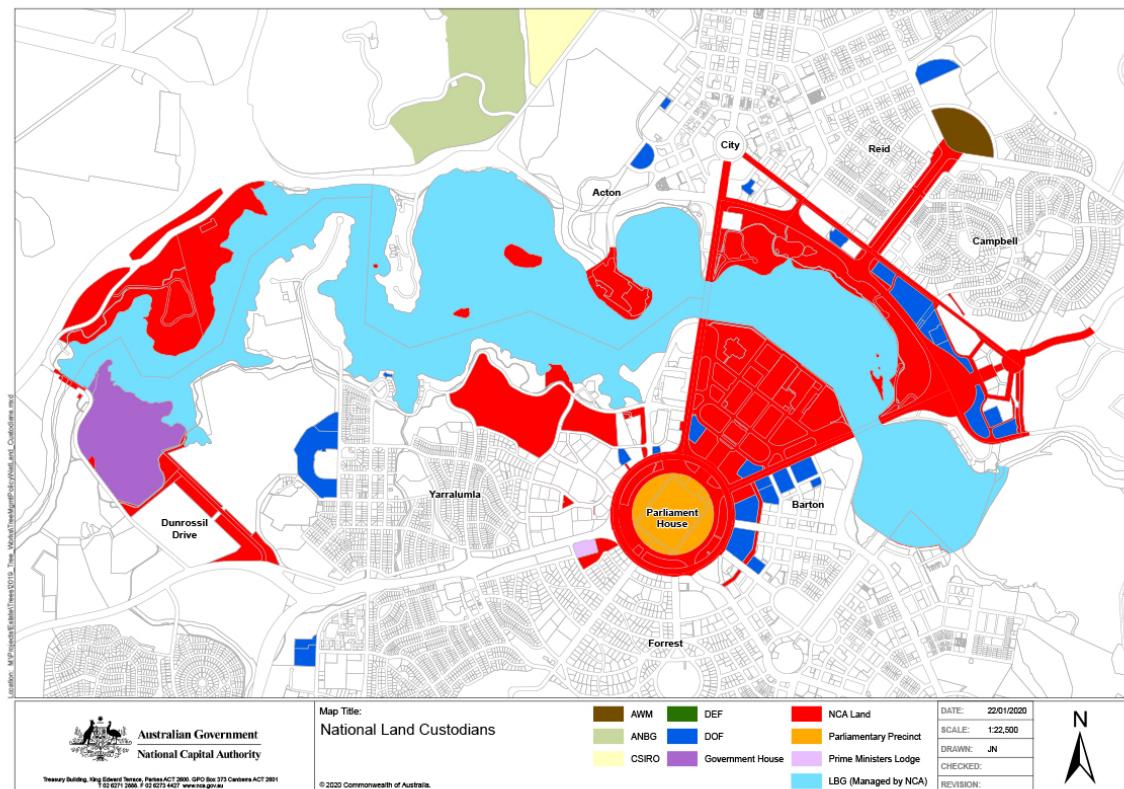


Figure 2: National Land Custodians

Purpose

This policy provides a consistent and carefully developed approach to the management of NCA urban trees and treescapes, and the Lindsay Pryor National Arboretum, to enable readiness for current and future challenges associated with the ageing tree population, climate change, tree removal and replacement, water management, heritage conservation, and the development and utilisation of open space.

Vision

The NCA treescapes are diverse and resilient, enhancing the richness of landscape character envisaged in Canberra's original design.

Policy Objectives

1. **To build resilient landscapes** so that the benefits of NCA's trees for the community and the environment are maximised into the future.
2. **To protect and manage the existing treescape** for the diversity of benefits they offer from shade, amenity, heritage or biodiversity.
3. **Growing the future treescape** through proactive planning, replacing all removed trees and planting additional trees where appropriate.
4. **Demonstrate leading urban tree management practice** and embed it into daily decision-making and providing leadership for other land managers.
5. **Continue to monitor and evaluate** the status of the treescapes and the tree management program to continually improve decision making.

Policy Targets

1. Tree canopy cover will increase from 33% to 40% by 2030.
2. Improve the age diversity of the treescapes by ensuring at least 10% of the population are juvenile.
3. Improve the existing diversity of species so that no one species represents more than 10% of the tree population.

Scope

This policy applies to trees on NCA managed land, excluding biodiversity conservation areas which have their own conservation management plans, see Figure 3 below.

This policy is applicable to the work of developers, builders, contractors, event organisers, service providers and NCA staff who arrange or undertake activities in proximity to NCA managed trees.

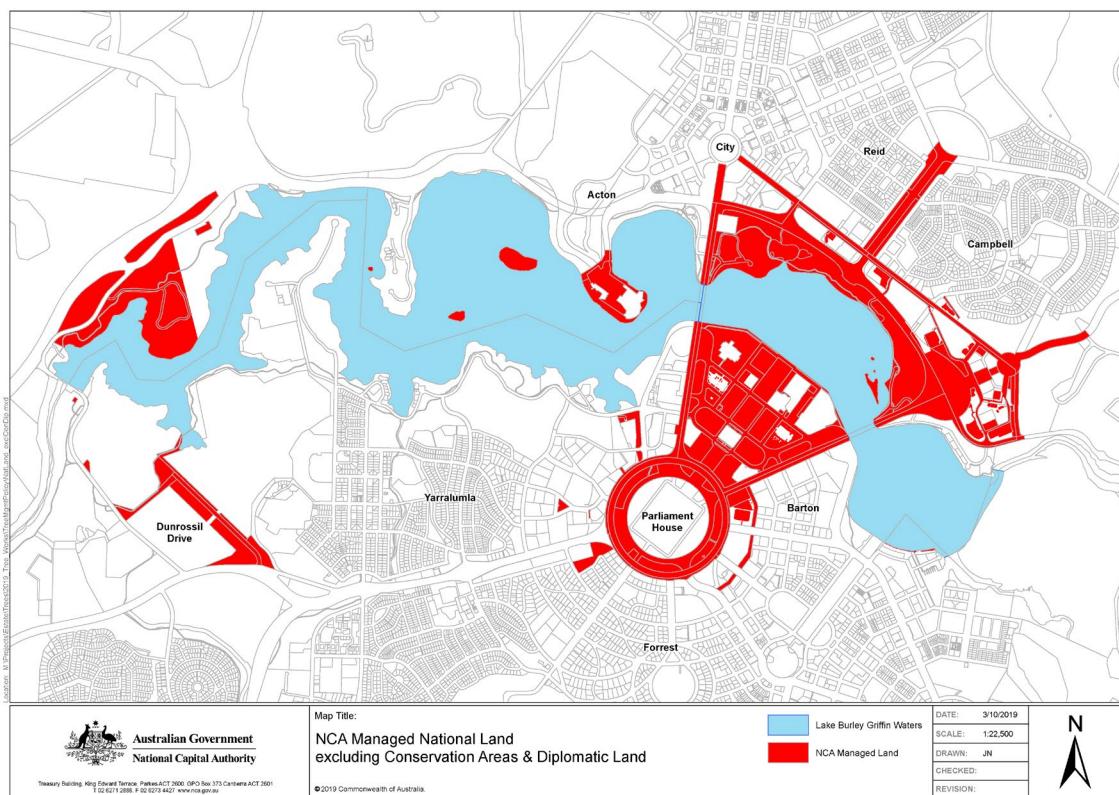


Figure 3: Central National Area - NCA managed National Land where the Tree management Policy applies

Trees excluded from the policy include:

- ACT Government owned and managed trees
- Trees in conservation reserves
- Trees managed by Parliament House and the Australian War Memorial
- Trees managed by other Federal Government agencies
- Trees on private land within the Central National Area

Context

The urban tree legacy of central Canberra has been guided by the vision of the Griffins' design and the pioneering work of Charles Weston, Lindsay Pryor and the development work undertaken by the National Capital Development Commission, the NCA and others.

Trees in the Central National Area of Canberra today are fundamental in strengthening the geometry and intent of the Griffins' formally adopted plan for Canberra. Trees provide visual strength to the Land Axis from Parliament House through to the Australian War Memorial; they help form and define the main avenues of the National Triangle; as well as establishing other formal spaces.

Trees are also essential to the creation of the attractive parklands, streetscapes, and other spaces and the important provision of shade. They both complement and soften the built setting of Central Canberra. Canberra has been renowned as a Garden City and the 'bush capital', which demonstrates the important status trees have in the Canberra landscape. The significance of this treed landscape is also recognised in a number of heritage listings.

Through their broad range of environmental, social and economic benefits, trees are one of the most efficient and cost-effective mechanisms for helping Canberra adapt to climate change through micro-climatic moderation and absorption of stormwater. They also provide habitat and food for wildlife, reduce energy consumption in buildings and encourage people to walk or ride rather than drive.

More information about the benefits of trees in urban environments can be found at the City Melbourne website <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/community/greening-the-city/tree-protection-management/Pages/tree-protection-and-management.aspx#benefits>

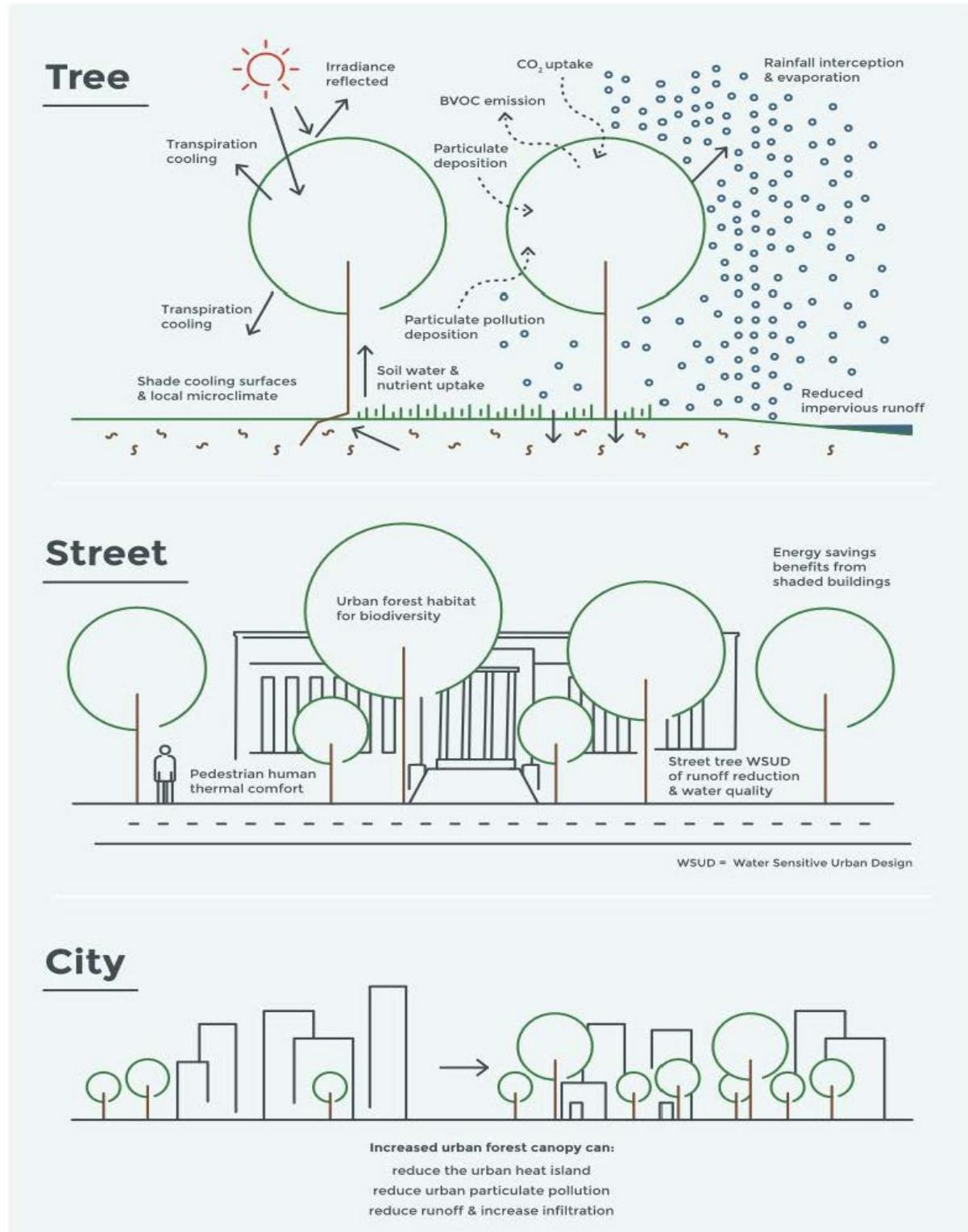


Figure 4: The broad benefits provided by urban trees at various scales (Adapted from Livesley et al, 2018)

The NCA is the custodian of Canberra's Central National Area. The 18,000 trees in this prominent location provide a stunning setting for the national institutions, memorials and ceremonial areas. They create excellent shade and cooling; providing tree canopy cover of approximately 33% over NCA land, which in comparison to many urban areas across Australia is considered high.

Approximately half of these 18,000 trees are street trees and half are park trees. A detailed inventory of the trees in 2019 in the Central National Area reveals the following:

- 93% of trees have a useful life expectancy over 20 years.
- 23% of trees have a useful life expectancy over 40 years.
- The most common species is *Eucalyptus mannifera* 12%.
- The second most common tree species is *Eucalyptus bicostata* 11.5 %.
- Together these two species represent almost a quarter of NCA's tree population.
- Most of NCA's trees are mature and 8% are juvenile.
- 91% of trees are in fair to good health with 9% assessed as being in less than fair health.

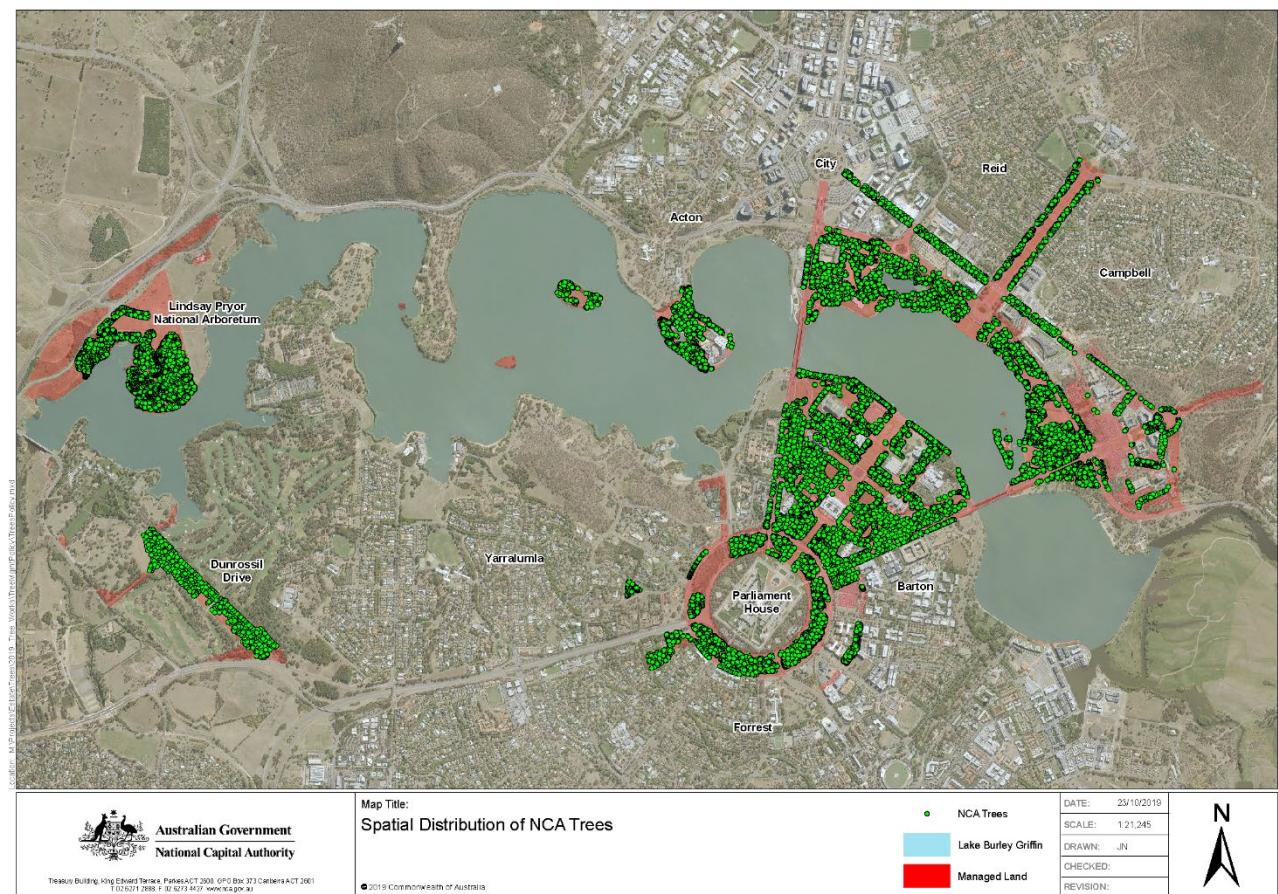


Figure 5: Spatial distribution of NCA's trees in 2019.

The statistics show that NCA trees are healthy, well managed and cared for. There is a wide range of species across NCA land with more than 70 species represented; though age diversity could be improved by increasing the number of juvenile trees through a tree planting program.

Climate change, urban development and the need for open space to be multi-functional all place various stresses on our trees and in some cases could cause an increase in the decline and death of trees. The data shows that 70 percent of the trees will need to be replaced within the next 40 years.

Further detail about these issues can be found in the NCA Tree Policy Issues Paper, July 2019
<https://stage.ourtrees.com.au/plan>.

The Tree Management Policy outlines the NCA's approach to maintain a diverse and resilient treescape that supports the richness of landscape character and provides a balanced response to the issues raised during the public consultation on the NCA Tree Policy Issues Paper.

The Policy also reflects the NCA's desire to align itself with the Tree Cities of the World standards¹.

¹ Tree Cities of the World standards - <https://treecitiesoftheworld.org/>.

Policy Statement

The NCA recognises the immense contribution that the treescape makes to the character and resilience of our urban landscape.

Urban trees are some of the NCA's most valuable assets and must therefore be protected, maintained and replaced to enhance their collective heritage, environmental and economic values.

Key Policy Areas

Responses to the NCA Tree Policy Issues Paper informed the key policy areas for this document:

1. Managing resilience and vulnerability of the NCA treescape
2. Design, development and land use planning
3. Community Participation and knowledge
4. Maintenance, data, monitoring and evaluation
5. Heritage
6. Governance and Management Arrangements.

1. Managing Resilience and Vulnerability of NCA's Treescapes

NCA's urban trees do and will face a range of challenges, which if not well managed, could lead to vulnerability amongst the tree population. There is a need to build resilience by improving the age profile of the trees, developing strategies to address climate change, urban development and increased use of public spaces.

The NCA commits to the following:

- Policy 1.1 A climate adapted suite of species suitable for NCA landscapes will be developed and updated every five years.
- Policy 1.2 New tree species will be trialled within the Lindsay Pryor National Arboretum and other areas for suitability to plant in Canberra's conditions.
- Policy 1.3 An annual tree planting program will be delivered to achieve the NCA canopy cover target of 40% by 2030 and to ensure a balanced and diverse age profile.
- Policy 1.4 Where appropriate and feasible, water sensitive urban design will be implemented.
- Policy 1.5 Integrated pest and disease management plans will be developed where required.

2. Design, Development and Land Use Planning

There are opportunities to improve and extend the treescape and increase canopy cover. Any loss of canopy from tree removals or decline in tree health will jeopardise the much-needed contribution that trees make to the designed landscape character, including vital environmental services and public amenity. Balancing the value of the treed landscape with development and public use of areas must be considered from a range of perspectives, including the need to protect the treescape.

The NCA commits to the following:

- Policy 2.1** Growing the future treescape through a proactive tree planting program in accordance with applicable plans.
- Policy 2.2** Preparation of Landscape Guidelines to apply to all works in Designated Areas, including NCA managed land.
- Policy 2.3** All relevant NCA strategic planning and management documents will reflect the Tree Management Policy.
- Policy 2.4** Locations for events, activities and other uses on National Land will be selected to ensure they are of an appropriate scale and nature so as to protect all trees within the landscape.
- Policy 2.5** For every tree that is removed on NCA managed land, at least one will be planted.
- Policy 2.6** Managing and enhancing the landscape for native wildlife where possible.

3. Community Participation and Knowledge

The broad range of community expectations, values and needs of the NCA treescape defines the need for transparency of information, clear and agreed pathways of decision making and the opportunity to involve the community in helping the NCA to monitor the performance of the treescape.

The NCA commits to the following:

- Policy 3.1 Continued engagement with the community, including local traditional owners, regarding key tree management issues and identification of opportunities to enable input.
- Policy 3.2 Citizen science opportunities will be developed to help monitor and evaluate the performance of the NCA treescape.
- Policy 3.3 The NCA website will enable an open data approach to share information about trees on NCA land.

4. Maintenance, Data, Monitoring and Evaluation

In order to effect evidence-based decisions about the maintenance of its trees, the NCA will require robust data and information that is regularly monitored and evaluated. This process will inform the development of best practice methods needed to achieve the future landscape vision, canopy cover targets and standard of landscape excellence.

The NCA commits to the following:

- Policy 4.1 A clear and effective monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed and implemented to inform tree management decisions into the future.
- Policy 4.2 A central tree database will be maintained to include records of maintenance history, annual condition assessments, required works and heritage and ecological values.
- Policy 4.3 Canopy cover will be measured and modelled at regular intervals to evaluate progress towards the policy target.
- Policy 4.4 Species performance will be reviewed every five years to inform the preferred list of climate adapted species.
- Policy 4.5 Staff and contractors who are responsible for the management of trees will be appropriately experienced and or qualified.
- Policy 4.6 Trees will be protected in accordance with accepted best practice standards².
- Policy 4.7 A soil improvement program will be developed and implemented.
- Policy 4.8 Leading practice urban tree management techniques will be adopted.
- Policy 4.9 Maintenance plans, including irrigation regimes that are appropriate to the landscape will be developed.
- Policy 4.10 Veteran trees³ will be identified and managed to extend their landscape value for as long as possible while maintaining safety.

² Australian Standard 4970-2009 Protection of Trees on Development Sites
Australian Standard 4373-2007 Pruning of Amenity Trees

³ A veteran tree is a tree that is of interest biologically, culturally or aesthetically because of its age, size or condition (*Veteran Trees: A Guide to Good Management, Natural England, 2000*).

5. Heritage

The trees under the care of the NCA are part of an evolving landscape that has slowly developed since 1911. This landscape carries many stories and shared values, many of which are recognised as heritage values that the NCA is obliged to protect and manage.

As custodians of this living place there is a need to ensure a dynamic and healthy urban forest while acknowledging and respecting the heritage values of the landscape. It will be most important in managing the treescape in changing environmental conditions to consider different tree species that will thrive in order to safeguard the urban forest for future generations.

The NCA commits to the following:

Policy 5.1 Heritage management plans will relate to the Tree Management Policy.

Policy 5.2 Landscape maintenance plans will be prepared to provide more detailed guidance for areas within a HMP.

Policy 5.3 Maintaining a mix of trees in keeping with a place's identified heritage values.

Policy 5.4 Replacing trees that are removed with the same species. Where a species fails to thrive or has otherwise become unviable, trees may be replaced with a different species that provides the same heritage values as the original tree.

6. Governance and Management Arrangements

The NCA commits resources through its Corporate Plan and budget processes to protect and manage the treescape. Strategic planning and management documents provide a framework for operational and maintenance procedures.

Most trees on NCA managed land are located within places subject to heritage listings under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999)*. Heritage management plans describe the heritage values that trees contribute to the 20 heritage listed places and the NCA manages these places to protect their values.

Developing partnerships and articulating roles and responsibilities for both NCA's trees and the broader Canberra urban forest will ensure that Canberra continues to exhibit garden city characteristics. Where there are shared boundaries with other land management agencies it is desirable to have complementary management practices.

The NCA commits to the following:

Policy 6.1 This policy will be reviewed and updated every 10 years.

Policy 6.2 A report to the NCA Board and the community will be provided annually on progress towards tree canopy and diversity targets.

Policy 6.3 Appropriate resources and budgets will be provided to ensure tree management meets the Policy objectives.

Policy 6.4 The NCA Corporate Plan and annual business plans will reflect the objectives of the Policy.

Policy 6.5 Individual trees will be valued and included within the organisational financial statements.

Policy 6.6 Training will be provided to all staff and contractors to protect and care for trees in accordance with best practice.

Policy 6.7 Engagement with other ACT land managers to share and reflect on learnings in urban tree management.

Policy 6.8 Implement measures to align governance and management arrangements with the Tree Cities of the World standards.

Next Steps

Within the term of the NCA Corporate Plan 2019 – 2023, the NCA will implement the following initiatives.

1. Develop and implement a Tree Management Policy Implementation Plan.

Specific initiatives to progress include:

- A program for community involvement
- Continued development of strategies for monitoring and evaluation of tree management information to improve management and practices
- A tree planting program that will achieve 40 percent canopy cover by 2030
- A climate adapted suite of species for application where appropriate
- A training program for staff and contractors
- Explore opportunities with other land management agencies where there are shared boundaries to develop complementary management practices.

2. Review the National Capital Plan to reflect the objectives of the Policy.

3. The objectives of this Policy will guide heritage management plans as they are reviewed and updated.

4. Landscape maintenance plans will be developed for prioritised locations.



Building the National Capital in the hearts of all Australians

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