



Native Vegetation Conservation in the City of Ballarat



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Information Kit

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What is Native Vegetation?

Plants that are indigenous (locally native) to the State, including trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses. Native vegetation includes both remnant naturally occurring vegetation and revegetation.

Who should read this Information Kit?

Anyone who is interested in preserving and enhancing the Regions unique natural assets will find this Information Kit useful.

More specifically, it is aimed at rural residential and residential land owners, those looking to purchase rural residential and residential land, builders, surveyors, architects, real estate agents and other development professionals.

If you own land or are looking to purchase land within a native vegetation setting – think carefully about how you will retain the neighbourhood character. View the native vegetation as an asset to the property and plan with this in mind.

Why should I read this Information Kit?

If you are planning to develop land or make alterations to land, which involves the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation – then there are specific requirements to be met. PENALTIES APPLY FOR NON-COMPLIANCE. This Information Kit will make clear your responsibilities when dealing with native vegetation.

The Information Kit shall also provide you with valuable tips and resources for native vegetation conservation when planning your development.



State Government policy.

The Victorian Government is committed to retaining and enhancing the quantity and quality of native vegetation across all landscapes. Historically, land fragmentation and clearing were primarily focused on the more fertile and accessible areas. As a result, private land contains only 12% of Victoria's remaining native vegetation but supports 30% of the important locations for threatened species¹. 60% of native vegetation remaining on private land is of a type threatened with extinction².

This policy shall be guided by *Victoria's Native Vegetation Management – A Framework for Action*. The primary goal of this Framework is to achieve: **“a reversal across the entire landscape, of the long-term decline in the extent and quality of native vegetation, leading to a Net Gain”**. The Framework requires a three-step approach to determine the achievement of Net Gain in decision making.

The three-step approach to Net Gain is:

1. **Avoid** – has every attempt been made to avoid damage to vegetation?
2. **Minimise** – has every attempt been made to minimise damage/impact to vegetation?
3. **Offset** – have any offset areas or actions been proposed to mitigate the losses?

¹ Operational Guidelines for Applying Net Gain in Planning Decisions – Draft 24 August 2004.

² Operational Guidelines for Applying Net Gain in Planning Decisions – Draft 24 August 2004.

What is Councils position?

The City of Ballarat sees the importance of native vegetation in creating and maintaining healthy and sustainable habitats as a key focus in its strategy for the municipality over the next 25 years. Retention of existing native vegetation is vital if an ecological balance is to be maintained. It provides homes for fauna, preserves flora, and gives visual pleasure.

This Information Kit shall foster a proactive approach for land owners and related development professionals, which encourages the conservation and enhancement of native vegetation within the City now and into the future.

Why is Ballarat's native vegetation so important?

The Ballarat region contains a variety of plant species that have evolved and adapted to this particular area. Flora has developed to fit the ecology based on climate, geography, soils and other variables. These plants are "endemic" or indigenous to the area, and while they may be similar to species in other areas, they are unique to the set of characteristics that determine their own region.

The Ballarat region has about 700 native species of plant³. Common bushland of the region was open Eucalyptus forest combinations of Messmate and Peppermint, with an understorey of wattles and a great diversity of smaller shrubs, grasses and herbs. The introduction of pastoral grazing and gold mining in the 1850s and associated settlements, drastically altered the natural environment.

Today, 70-90% of Ballarat's subregion ecosystem is classified as being at risk⁴. The region is included in the highest stressed landscape in Victoria. This loss and fragmentation of habitat also means loss and threat of extinction of a number of native animal species and types of native vegetation in the region.

Figure 1 shows the extent of native vegetation classes present in the City of Ballarat pre-European settlement. At that time the region was covered in open forest and woodland combinations supporting a diverse range of flora and fauna. *Figure 2* shows the current extent of native vegetation as a whole. The vast majority has been removed, primarily for agriculture, and what remains is fragmented and confined to isolated areas.

Very little native vegetation still exists in the City of Ballarat region. It is the responsibility of all to retain and conserve what remains.

³ Ballarat Conservation Strategy 1999.

⁴ National Land and Water Resources Audit, <http://www.nlwra.gov.au>

Figure 1. Pre-European settlement native vegetation

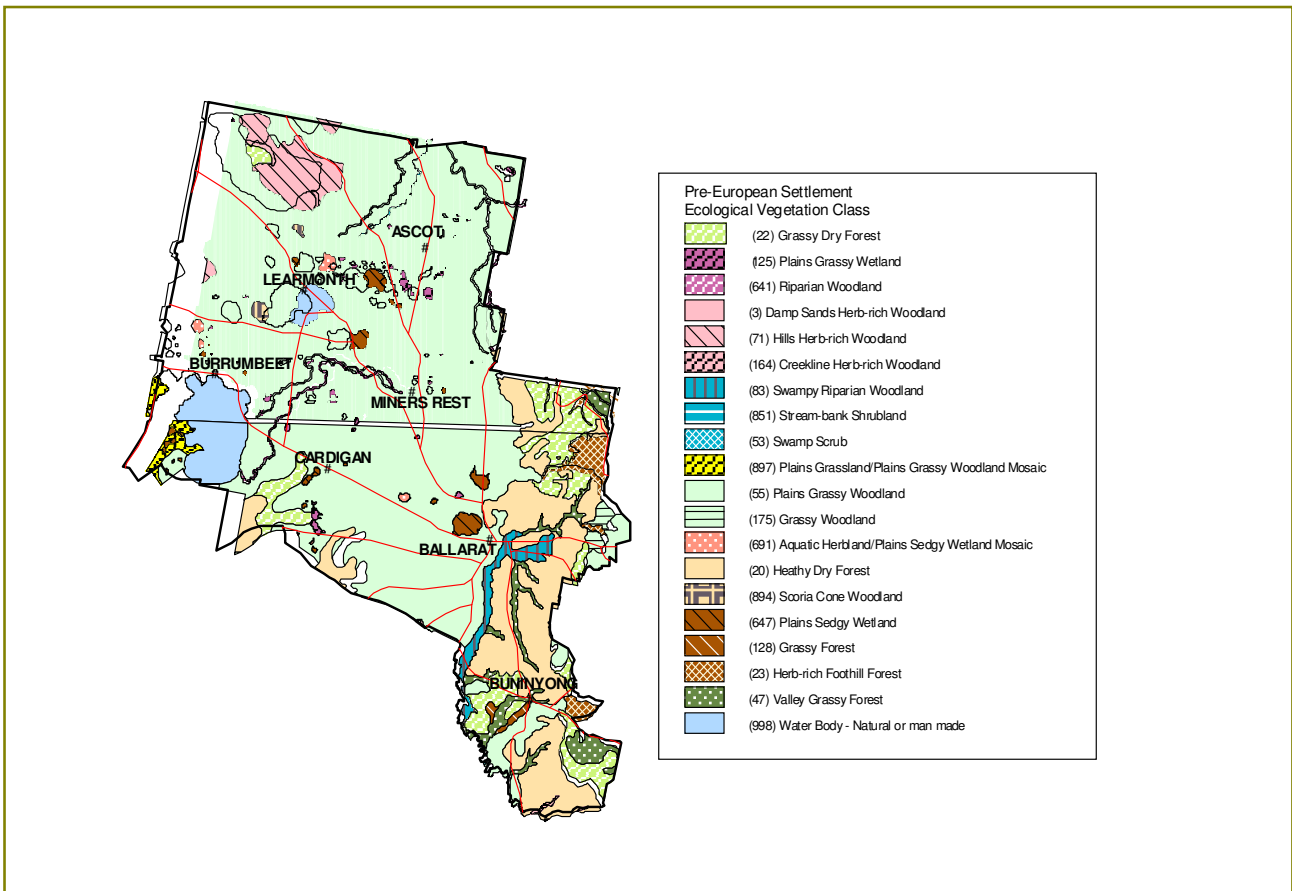
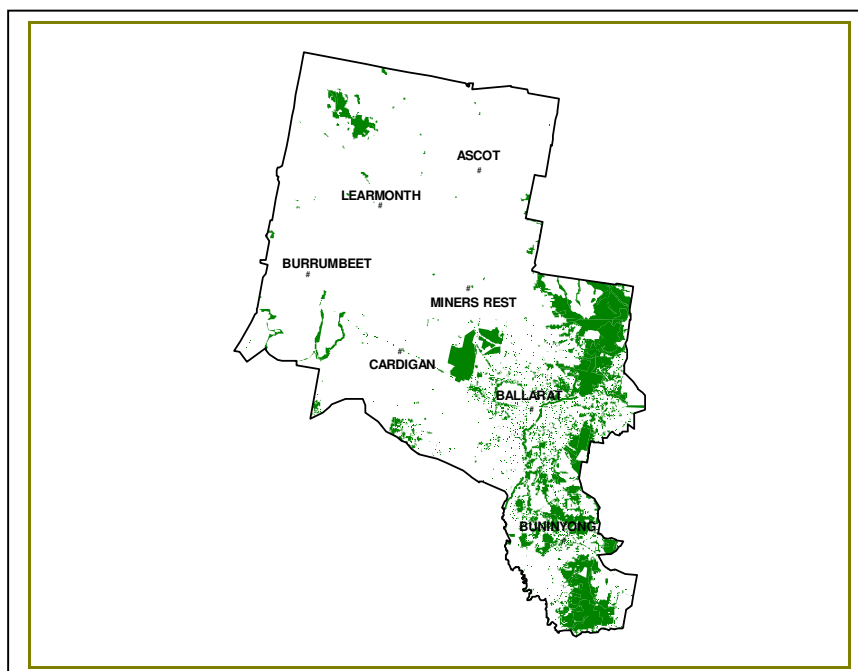


Figure 2. Total native vegetation remaining today (all ecological classes)



Is a permit required to remove native vegetation?

YES. If you wish to remove, lop or destroy native vegetation (including trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses) a planning permit will need to be obtained under the Ballarat Planning Scheme. There are certain exemptions for removal depending on the level of planning control. Specific exemptions should be confirmed with a Council Planning Officer. **Be aware that there are substantial fines and other penalties which apply for the illegal removal of native vegetation.**

When should I contact Council?

Whether you are a current land owner, looking to purchase land or a development professional, understanding the native vegetation retention controls is essential. **Look to contact Officers from the Statutory Planning Services Unit in the initial planning stages of the development.** Depending on the nature of the application they can put you in touch with Council's Environment Policy Officer, Landscape Architect or Arboriculturist to provide advice on alternative approaches, significance of the vegetation, site management techniques or replanting options.

Planning for native vegetation conservation in the initial stages will generally lead to reduced permit application costs and time delays. Early consultation with Council Officers is therefore an important part of the application process.

What are the benefits?

Retaining and enhancing native vegetation on your property can provide many benefits. These include financial, aesthetic and environmental benefits.



Financial Benefits

- Suitably positioned and maintained native vegetation can increase a property's market value by 5%, and even 10% in some instances⁵.
- Native vegetation provides insulation to your dwelling against sun and wind. This can help reduce expenses for heating and cooling.
- Native Vegetation, due to its adaptation to the regions climate and soils, retains water on site. Watering native vegetation is not necessary and will reduce your water bill by up to 35%⁶. Remember, native vegetation is not just trees but the understorey of shrubs, herbs, grasses and lichens. This understorey will help retain moisture in the soil. It will also eliminate the need for mowing!
- Native vegetation provides instant landscape amenity, eliminating the need to recreate landscape on your property – which can be expensive, and take years to become established.

⁵ Survey undertaken in September 2004 – “Native Vegetation Conservation in the City of Ballarat”, where responses were sought from real estate professionals in the region.

⁶ www.watersmart.vic.gov.au

Aesthetic Benefits

- Native vegetation helps maintain the neighbourhood character of the area.
- Native vegetation provides a natural setting in which you can take “time out” to relax and enjoy the feel of living in a bush setting.
- Native vegetation attracts birds, animals and insects to your property, providing a lasting source of interest and pleasure.

Environmental Benefits

- Native vegetation provides valuable habitat for Australian native birds and animals. This in turn helps maintain biological diversity.
- Native vegetation retention prevents loss of valuable topsoil and erosion, protects water quality, and controls noxious weeds. This in turn helps maintain ecological processes.
- Native grasses retain moisture during hot, dry weather periods, making them fire resistant – providing a natural defence for your property.
- Native vegetation retention minimises the impacts of the greenhouse effect.

The benefits of native vegetation conservation will be greatly enhanced if you work closely with your neighbours. Creating habitat corridors within the neighbourhood can offset isolation and fragmentation, a major threat to native plants and animals. Encourage others – and help protect the unique natural qualities of your area.

What can I do to conserve the native vegetation on my property?

There is a variety of practices you can do that are simple, easy to implement and inexpensive. Council can put you in touch with organisations that can help. Remember, retention and restoration of existing vegetation, including trees, shrubs and understorey, is a far more cost-effective means of land conservation and maintaining environmental values. Follow this three-step approach:



STEP 1 – Know what you have

- The first step in the management of native vegetation is to have a good knowledge of the flora and fauna present and the physical characteristics of the site. Consider the following:
 - ecological vegetation classes⁷
 - slope of the land
 - soil type
 - hydrology

⁷ A type of native vegetation classification that is described through a combination of its floristic, life form and ecological characteristics (*Victoria's Native Vegetation Management: A Framework For Action, 2002*).

- A map of the site can be a valuable management tool. It can be used to assist in planning and recording your management activities, and when talking to servicing authorities. A map will assist Council Planning Officers assess your permit application.
- Look to build/redevelop on areas already cleared. Retain native vegetation and design your property around existing environmental values. Consider the following:
 - building design which minimises building footprint – for example, stumps or pylons rather than slab on ground.
 - by locating your garage as close as possible to the road, less vegetation will need to be removed for the driveway.
 - install infrastructure, including power, water and drains along driveway.
- Areas for native vegetation retention include along property boundaries, in areas of poor drainage, where the ground is rough or steep, or where the soil is poor.
- Trees can be dangerous. Don't just assume a tree is in good or bad condition – seek professional advice (contacts are in the information section). Careful lopping may improve tree health and eliminate need for removal.

STEP 2 – Protection

The protection of native vegetation from detrimental impacts is extremely important. Below are some points to ensure protection during the development process:

- Fencing – prior to the commencement of any works (including site preparation) the native vegetation boundaries as defined in the planning permit are to be temporarily fenced. Maintain the fencing for the duration of the development.
- Temporary fences as a minimum standard comprise of star picket at an interval of 1.5 meters, two strands of wire top and bottom with Para webbing securely fixed to the wire.
- No vegetation growing in the fenced area should be destroyed, removed, pruned or cleared, nor any soils or rocks removed. Ensure that the fenced area adequately protects the ground surrounding trees, as roots may otherwise be damaged.
- The storage or mixing of materials and chemicals, vehicle passage or parking, disposal of liquids, soils or building refuse, machinery repair and construction of site buildings should not occur within the fenced native vegetation.
- No signs, stays or other objects should be attached to trees or placed within the fenced native vegetation.
- Stormwater or sediment should not be diverted to the fenced native vegetation.
- No soil disturbance, including cut and fill operations, should occur within the fenced native vegetation.
- Control of weeds within the fenced native vegetation should occur using approved herbicides and hand tools.
- Road reserves, including nature strips, adjoining parks and reserves, should also be protected during the development period.



It is Council's Policy that any native vegetation identified for protection in a planning permit will be included in a Vegetation Protection Area (VPA). Should any vegetation within the VPA be damaged or removed during development, restoration works will be conducted at the cost of the developer to the satisfaction of Council. Penalties associated with a breach of permit conditions may also be applicable.

STEP 3 – Enhancement

After the development is completed, consider the following practices to conserve and enhance the native vegetation on your property:

- Consider more permanent fencing in the longer term to encourage regrowth of grasses and other ground flora. All fencing should allow passage for native animals, such as koalas. Speak to Councils' Australian Koala Foundation Officer for information on Koala friendly fence designs.
- Encourage natural regeneration by disturbing the soil in patches or small areas as required. Ensure there is no significant ground cover species prior to removing to encourage regeneration.
- Replant – reintroducing the plant species that would have previously occurred on your land is an effective way of restoring its former composition. Collect seed from naturally occurring species on your land. Speak with Council, your local environment group or indigenous plant nursery about seed collection and availability.
- Control weeds. While a good cover of native vegetation is the best defence against weeds, hand removal and spot spraying can be effective. Again, speak with Council, your local environment group or indigenous plant nursery.
- Try to retain some dead trees or logs as they provide valuable habitat to a variety of native animals.
- Wildlife and pets, especially cats and dogs, are not always compatible. Keep your cat and/or dog secured at night as this is when most native animals are active. As a transition, new residents may plan not to replace their pets when they die.
- Join a local environment group and learn more about the flora and fauna on your property, and how best to conserve it.



Useful contacts and further information.

City of Ballarat		
Statutory Planning Services	5320 5571	25 Armstrong Street South, Ballarat 3350 (Pheonix Building)
Parks & Environment	5320 7401	Cnr Gregory & Gillies Streets, Ballarat 3350
Environment Policy Officer	5320 5708	
Arboricultural Officer	5320 7411	
Landscape Architect	5320 5665	
Australian Koala Foundation Officer	5320 7406	
Plant Nursery	5320 7431	
Municipal Fire Prevention Officer	5320 5568	

Victorian Government Departments and Agencies		
Department of Sustainability & Environment	5336 6856	Cnr Mair & Doveton Streets, Ballarat 3350
Land for Wildlife Extension Officer	5336 6722	Cnr Mair & Doveton Streets, Ballarat 3350
Corangamite Catchment Management Authority	5232 9100	64 Dennis Street, Colac 3250
Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority	5571 2526	79 French Street, Hamilton 3300
North Central Catchment Management Authority	5448 7124	628-634 Midland Highway, Huntly 3551
Country Fire Authority – Region 15	5331 7966	1120 Sturt Street, Ballarat 3350

Indigenous Plant Nurseries		
Avalon Nursery	5342 4519	41 Kopke Road, Haddon 3352
Bacchus Marsh Seedling Farm	5367 2324	31 Holts Lane, Bacchus Marsh 3340
Ballarat Wild Plants	5333 5548	433 Joseph Street, Ballarat 3350
Ballarat Indigenous Plant Nursery	5346 1495	116 Tantans Road, Dereel 3352
Creswick Nursery	5345 2502	PO Box 3, Creswick 3363
Meredith Wholesale Nursery	5286 1397	6 Read Street, Meredith 3333
Welfare's Nursery	5340 3555	RMB 2190, Skipton 3361
Western Plains Flora	9740 3178	628 Wildwood Rd, Wildwood 3428

Local Environment Groups		
Ballarat Environment Network	5346 1495	http://www.ben.org.au
Bald Hills – Creswick Landcare Group	5345 2120	http://www.bhclandcare.goldlinksweb.com

Ballarat Regional Landcare Groups		
Leigh Catchment South Ballarat Urban Landcare Napoleons-Enfield Landcare Ross Creek Landcare Grenville Landcare Bamganie-Meredith Landcare Leigh Districts Landcare Wattle Flat-Pootilla Landcare Hasties Creek Landcare	Burrumbeet Catchment Invermay Landcare Cardigan-Windermere Landcare Miners Rest Landcare Beckworth-Bolton Landcare Burrumbeet Landcare Upper Mt Emu Creek Landcare Windermere Landcare Loddon Catchment Bald Hills-Creswick Landcare Ullina Landcare	Moorabool Catchment Lal Lal Catchment Landcare East Moorabool Landcare Bamganie-Meredith Landcare Woody Yaloak Catchment Hoyles Creek-Pittong Landcare Haddon Landcare Smythesdale-Scardale Landcare Grenville Landcare Misery-Moonlight Landcare Rokewood Landcare

General Web Sites

City of Ballarat www.ballarat.vic.gov.au

Department of Sustainability and Environment www.dse.vic.gov.au

Environment Australia www.ea.gov.au

Greening Australia www.greeningaustralia.org.au

Country Fire Authority www.cfa.vic.gov.au

Corangamite Catchment Management Authority www.ccma.vic.gov.au

Landcare Victoria www.landcare.net.au

Natural Heritage Trust www.nht.gov.au

Practical “hands on” Web sites

Home Technical Manual – Design for Lifestyle and the Future. This National Government site shows what is possible and provides you with information to get you started. The Technical Fact Sheets contain specific information and practical solutions to suit your budget and lifestyle.

www.greenhouse.gov.au/yourhome/technical/fs51.htm

City of Ballarat – Guide to Preparing a Site Analysis. This site outlines what is required under the Ballarat Planning Scheme for all housing developments.

www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/Page/Page.asp?Page_Id=99&h=1

RMIT Centre For Design – Sustainable Buildings. This site aims to reduce the environmental impacts of the built environment. Includes a Directory of Green Building and Construction Professionals.

www.cfd.rmit.edu.au/programs/sustainable_buildings

Managing Vegetation Around Your home. This CFA publication provides practical information on protecting your property against the threat of bushfire.

www.cfa.vic.gov.au/documents/vegetation-mgmt-web.pdf

Viridians Biological Databases. This site contains comprehensive information on Victoria’s native flora and fauna. Includes a range of maps and pictures.

www.viridians.com.au

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