

Queensland's

Protected Area Strategy 2020–2030

2022 REPORT CARD

1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022

Introduction

Queensland's Protected Area Strategy 2020–2030 (the Strategy) provides the strategic framework for protected areas in Queensland.

Actions under the Strategy seek to expand, better manage and increase the community's connection with Queensland's valuable and unique protected areas.

This is the second annual report card, following the release of the Strategy in October 2020, covering the period 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022.

The achievements outlined in the 2022 report card demonstrate how the ten-year Strategy is already delivering positive outcomes for Queensland's protected areas in the initial years of implementation.

During the reporting period, the Department of Environment and Science (the department) successfully partnered with philanthropic and other organisations and groups to deliver public protected area outcomes, and offered support for private protected areas through grant and other programs.

The department continued to enable First Nations peoples' co-stewardship of protected areas, recognising and respecting traditional knowledge and management, which protects and sustains environmental and cultural values.

The department also continued to deliver world-class visitor experiences, despite the significant impact severe weather events such as floods had on many of our national parks this year.

Further embedding the department's adaptive management approach will drive continuous improvements in protected area management into the future years of the Strategy.



Funding

\$262.5 million

over four years for land acquisitions and capital works, announced as part of the 2022–23 Queensland Budget—providing the single largest allocation of funds to expand and manage Queensland's public protected area estate.

\$38.5 million

over four years and **\$1.2 million** per annum ongoing for the continued support of the Cape York Peninsula Tenure Resolution Program—including the transfer of land to First Nations peoples, enhancing joint management arrangements on Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal land (CYPAL) and management of Springvale Station Nature Refuge.

\$8.6 million

in 2021–22 to continue delivery of the Values Based Management Framework and support improved visitor experiences and infrastructure in Queensland's national parks—supporting the growth of regional small businesses and First Nations peoples' employment opportunities in Queensland's national parks.

\$1 million

per annum over four years to support the delivery of the Queensland Government's protected area grazing policy—funding management to protect and restore natural and cultural values of national parks impacted by grazing.

Yellow-spotted monitor,
Glenlifty Nature Refuge
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Achievements



Grow

- **Strategic partnerships, leveraging public and private funding, to increase the public protected area estate:**
 - The Lakes, a 35,300-hectare grazing property north of Hughenden, was acquired for addition to the protected area estate. The property includes largely undisturbed remnant vegetation supporting several threatened and highly restricted ecosystems. Unique features include a series of high-altitude lakes classified as Wetlands of High Significance. With the help of The Nature Conservancy Australia, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service was able to secure funding of \$1.962 million, through an annual grant round of the US-based Wyss Foundation's Campaign for Nature, to support the acquisition of The Lakes. The Gudjala First Nations peoples have been engaged to inform planning and future management.
 - A major land acquisition in the state's far north will protect more than 131,900 hectares of land for conservation. The purchase of two former cattle properties—Bramwell Station and Richardson Station—630 kilometres north-west of Cairns—is one of the most significant purchases in Queensland history, linking close to one million hectares of protected land. The property will return to First Nations ownership and management through negotiation as part of the Cape York Peninsula Tenure Resolution Program, creating jobs and opportunities for local workers in the future. The area includes significant, undisturbed ecosystems and habitat that will become part of the protected area estate. The purchase price for the Bramwell and Richardson properties was \$11.5 million (excluding GST), supported by a grant brokered by The Nature Conservancy Australia of \$3.148 million from the Wyss Foundation towards the purchase. The Australian Government is also contributing \$1.95 million to the lands' purchase.
 - Since the release of the Strategy, the department has attracted \$7.4 million in philanthropic and Commonwealth partner contributions to support protected area acquisitions.





Grow

- **Additions to the public protected area estate through conversions and acquisitions:**
 - 3,408 hectares of the former Glen Rock State Forest was converted and added to Main Range National Park, while a further 2,891 hectares was converted to become the new Main Range Conservation Park. This upgrade to protected area status has resulted in the linking of two key conservation areas south of Gatton, with the Main Range aggregation now hosting over 41,000 hectares of continuous protected area ranging from the New South Wales border, and north along the Great Dividing Range, protecting key habitat for the glossy black-cockatoo, brush-tailed rock-wallaby and powerful owl.
 - Yurol and Ringtail State Forests, north of Cooroy, continue to transition to protected area, with major revegetation works to be carried out by the Kabi Kabi People Aboriginal Corporation, Greenfleet Australia and Noosa Landcare. The Yurol Ringtail Conservation Project provides a great example of collaboration between government, councils, First Nations communities, industry and environment groups like the Noosa Parks Association. Following the final harvest of pine and hardwood plantation timber in the State forest, the plantation areas will be revegetated with native species and the restored habitat progressively added to Tewantin National Park.
 - Located about 77km south of Cairns, the former 1,877-hectare Tumoulin Forest Reserve was dedicated as the new Tumoulin National Park, home to towering rose gums, red stringybark, threatened species and the Millstream River. The new national park has significant conservation values, including endangered remnant ecosystems containing wet sclerophyll forest, and is home to a number of threatened species including the yellow-bellied glider, magnificent broodfrog and the southern species of rufous owl. The dedication was the result of a joint proposal with the Wabubadda Aboriginal Corporation, part of the Jirrbal Traditional Owners.
 - The former 2,160-hectare Pelion Forest Reserve was dedicated as part of Eungella National Park, about 54 kilometres west of Mackay. Threatened species of birds, frogs and plants are found within the new area of national park.
 - Additions to Lamington National Park, Main Range National Park, D’Aguilar National Park and Townsville Town Common were acquired during the reporting period, adding a total of 233 hectares to the protected area system.
- **New nature refuges to grow the private protected area network:**
 - 12 new nature refuges added 10,486 hectares to the protected area system. These new nature refuges will protect habitat for threatened species such as the endangered southern cassowary, vulnerable glossy black-cockatoo and vulnerable koala.
 - Conservation agreements were executed to establish the 34,206-hectare Mount Gibson Nature Refuge and the 8,286-hectare Ardgour Nature Refuge, which will be declared in the near future.



Grow

- **Support for landholders to add to the private protected area network:**
 - Under the latest round of NatureAssist grants, eligible landholders were able to apply for a share of \$2.2 million to help expand or transform part or all of their property into a nature refuge. The funding could be used for habitat restoration, refuge expansions greater than 1,000 hectares, weed and feral animal control programs, development of cultural heritage plans, or the installation of fences or other control measures to restrict stock access to environmentally sensitive areas. Applications have been assessed and new additions to the private protected area network will be announced in late 2022.



Care

- **Support for nature refuge landholders through programs and grants:**
 - The department continues to deliver the Landholder Services Pilot program, in partnership with Ecosure. The department also continues to roll out Nature Refuge Landholder Grants to support management activities on nature refuges. Both of these programs support the conservation economy in regional Queensland where local contractors and suppliers are engaged to provide relevant goods and services.
 - A web-based portal was developed as part of the Landholder Services Pilot program to link private protected area landholders with a range of citizen science apps to support monitoring of the condition of their private protected area.
 - 79 nature refuges across Queensland shared in close to \$1 million in funding under the latest round of Nature Refuge Landholder Grants program funding. The grants will fund conservation projects including weed and feral animal management, land restoration, flora and fauna surveys, restoring important koala habitat, protecting woodland and rainforest ecosystems, and fire management on properties that had been declared as nature refuges for native animals and plants.
 - The department contracted Australian National University and Frontier Economics to undertake research into options for a stewardship payment program for private protected areas in Queensland. The findings of the research are currently being considered by the department.
- **Continuing focus on enabling First Nations peoples' co-stewardship:**
 - More than 362,000 hectares of land on Cape York Peninsula was handed back to the Gudang/Yadhaykenu, Atambaya and Angkamuthi (Seven Rivers) peoples in a special ceremony on 7 September 2022 between Traditional Owners and the Queensland Government. Made up of 319,300 hectares of national park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal land) (CYPAL) and 42,799 hectares of Aboriginal freehold land – equivalent to 676,000 football fields – it included land formerly known as Jardine River National Park, Denham Group National Park, part of Heathlands Reserve and Jardine River Reserve, and two offshore islands. The land will be granted to the Ipima Ikaya Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC and the Atambaya Aboriginal Corporation on behalf of the Traditional Owners. The Native Title parties and Government entered into an Indigenous Land Use Agreement for the grant of Aboriginal lands and dedication of the Apudthama National Park (CYPAL) and Yamarrinh Wachangan Islands (Denham Group) National Park (CYPAL). The Government and the Gudang/Yadhaykenu, Atambaya and Angkamuthi (Seven Rivers) peoples, represented by Ipima Ikaya Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, have also agreed to joint management arrangements over the two national parks (CYPAL).



Care

- Close to \$1 million is being provided to 14 First Nations communities in Queensland to deliver outcomes for Country under the Looking after Country grant program. The funding goes directly to First Nations-led projects on Country that look after the environment, create jobs and lay new pathways to gain meaningful skills and training. Projects will deliver outcomes such as revegetation of native species, critical erosion mitigation on shorelines, and the preservation of thousands of years of cultural heritage.
- The Queensland Government partnered with the Bunya Peoples Aboriginal Corporation (BPAC) to care for close to 1,000 hectares of vital native habitat and support First Nations jobs in the Toowoomba and South Burnett regions. \$100,000 in funding was announced to care for Country on eight nature refuges in the area, building on funding provided through the Queensland Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger Program. Through the funding, BPAC is working with nature refuge landholders on activities including weed control, property management planning and cultural burning.
- The Queensland Government secured funding from the Australian Heritage Grants and is supporting the Gondwana Traditional Owners in the Queensland section (Yugambah, Githabul and Yuggera Ugarapul) to undertake cultural heritage assessments for their Country. This work will inform management planning of the world heritage area. Procurement processes are currently underway with the three groups.

Walkabout Creek
Photographer Lyle Radford
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Care

- The department is working in partnership with the Butchulla people and the Climate Systems National Environmental Science Program (NESP) Hub to consider potential impacts of a changing climate on the K’gari World Heritage Area and cultural values of K’gari and identity adaptation management options. This project will inform similar processes for other world heritage areas.
- The department delivered the Cape York Heritage Grant Program to enable First Nations people on Cape York Peninsula to assess cultural values on their Country with a view to achieving heritage recognition and protection for their Country.
- The new Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park management plan, gazetted on 27 May 2022 and launched on 7 June 2022 at Parliament House, takes a cooperative approach to national park management that incorporates the important cultural knowledge of the Waanyi People. The national park will be jointly managed by the Waanyi People and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to ensure the traditional knowledge of the area’s First Nations peoples will be protected and shared for future generations, while also creating new economic, job and training opportunities. Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park is the heart of Waanyi Country, in the north-west highlands of western Queensland, and features spectacular gorges, sandstone ranges and World Heritage fossils. The national park is home to the World Heritage Riversleigh fossil deposit and consists of three significant ecosystems that provide habitat for rare and threatened species. A Cooperative Management Committee is now in place, with regional staff and Waanyi People meeting regularly.
- An additional 54 Indigenous ranger positions have been supported through grants to First Nations organisations in thirteen Queensland communities. This brings the total number of positions supported through the Queensland Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger Program to over 150, located in 37 Queensland communities. Through the Queensland Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger Program, the Queensland Government is working in true partnership with First Nations organisations, respecting and harnessing the knowledge of Queensland’s First Nations peoples in protecting the environmental and cultural values of Country.
- Further support for the formal role of First Nations peoples in managing protected areas is provided through training and qualifying Traditional Owners as authorised officers under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. Refresher training was provided for some authorised officers during the year.



Care

- **Improved fire management capabilities:**
 - Scientists from the department and the Joint Remote Sensing Research Program developed an improved way of using satellite imagery to map where fires have occurred across Queensland, which will greatly improve Queensland's fire management capabilities. The new fire scar maps detail the extent and changes in burnt areas in a way that can easily be used by land managers and emergency management agencies, such as Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, to improve future fire planning and management activities. It will help improve predictive fire modelling capabilities, assist in the development of planned burn or hazard reduction programs, and allow monitoring of the ecological impacts of fire on biodiversity, land condition, water and air quality, and better quantify greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Protection and recovery of threatened species:**
 - The Queensland Government announced species funding of almost \$40 million to help protect Queensland's native species.
 - This included \$24.6 million to support further implementation of the South East Queensland Koala Conservation Strategy 2020-2025, to help protect and restore key koala habitats, reduce threats to koalas in identified hotspots, invest in ongoing scientific research to protect koalas, and support on-ground koala conservation projects and actions.
 - It also included \$14.7 million to support Queensland's Threatened Species Program, which centres on delivering coordinated actions to protect, mitigate and recover threatened species. Outcomes to date include developing a Threatened Species Prioritisation Framework with CSIRO, improved threatened species monitoring and conservation planning, and delivery of key on-ground recovery actions for key species in partnership with the community, non-government organisations, research institutions and First Nations peoples.
 - \$125,000 was allocated over two years to protect endangered ghost bats in Mount Etna Caves National Park, north of Rockhampton. The Mount Etna Caves site provides maternity and roosting caves for the southern population of the ghost bat, which is considered significant for the ongoing conservation of the species. Funding in the first year was directed towards developing a recovery action plan for the species and improving on-park land management, and developing public and landholder awareness to promote complementary off-park land management practices in ghost bat foraging habitat.



Care

- This year saw the continuation of the successful Raine Island Recovery Project. Raine Island, within Wuthathi Sea Country and Meriam Nations Sea Country, and located on the northern tip of the Great Barrier Reef approximately 620 km north-west of Cairns, is potentially the most important green turtle rookery on earth. The recovery project is a partnership involving Traditional Owners, science, business, government and reef managers, focusing on restoring and protecting the island and helping prevent the deaths of nesting turtles.
- **Upgrades and repairs to deliver enhanced visitor experiences and improve visitor safety:**
 - A \$3.3 million upgrade to Girraween National Park, with upgrades to the premier camping and nature-based tourism destination, including the creation of two new camping areas, was welcomed by visitors. Girraween is a popular national park, internationally renowned for its magnificent granite landscape, spring wildflower displays and changing seasons, with more than 120,000 people visiting each year.
 - Completion of the Mount Archer National Park Zamia Track, costing \$615,556 over three years. Visitors to Mount Archer, in the Capricorn Region, may see a range of wildlife, including a variety of woodland birds such as powerful owls, as well as glossy black-cockatoos.
 - A total of 43 projects were successful in applying for more than \$779,000 in total grant funding under the Community Sustainability Action Grants Round 6: Conservation—Community Engagement on Queensland's National Parks and State Forests. After the floods in early 2022 devastated many parks, projects including habitat protection, flora and fauna surveys, monitoring and mapping, visitor education programs, track monitoring and maintenance, will lay the foundations for national parks and forests to flourish into the future.
 - The government, rangers, First Nations corporations, volunteers and community organisations mobilised to repair damaged tracks and clean up debris in national parks following the floods across south-east Queensland in early 2022. Their efforts enabled 39 flood-affected national parks to reopen in time for the busy Easter long weekend, ensuring local communities and businesses didn't miss out on the economic injection the long weekend usually provides, and allowing visitors to enjoy the parks.
- **Focus on continuous improvement of visitor experiences:**
 - Annual reporting under the Queensland Ecotourism Program Assurance Framework was completed for the first year (2021-22). This included a review of ecotourism facilities' visitor numbers and revenue, the



Care

environmental impact of facilities, and identifying areas for improvement. The Assurance Framework guides monitoring, evaluation and reporting under the Queensland Ecotourism Program.

- **Continued implementation of adaptive park management:**
 - Under the Values-Based Management Framework, business intelligence report cards (demonstrating effectiveness and efficiency of park management) were completed for five parks—Boodjamulla, Currawinya, Lamington, Noosa and Undarra Volcanic National Parks.
 - The desired ‘Levels of Service’ scores were assessed and benchmarked for all terrestrial parks, forests and reserves within the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service estate. Levels of Service is a park planning tool designed to guide prioritisation and management of protected areas based on their values, threats and complexity of management. A ‘desired LoS score’ determines an appropriate level of management—a minimum standard—that is required to deliver good management and fulfil obligations at park level.
 - Assessment of Lamington National Park’s eligibility for IUCN ‘green listing’ continued. A protected or conserved area that reaches the IUCN Green List Standard is certified and recognised as achieving ongoing results for people and nature in a fair and effective way. As of June 2022, there were only 61 green listed sites globally.
- **New opportunities for attracting financial support for protected areas:**
 - The department established a dedicated donations webpage, allowing conservation-minded donors to contribute amounts of up to \$20,000 to protected areas (or other programs of their choice) and to facilitate large-scale donations by providing contact details for the department.



Connect

- **Delivery of world-class visitor experiences, now and into the future:**
 - Work continued on developing an *Ecotourism Plan for Queensland's Protected Areas 2022–2027* to replace the expired *Queensland Ecotourism Plan 2016–2020*. The plan provides the framework and actions for supporting the ecotourism industry within and adjacent to national parks and other protected areas. A draft plan was developed for consultation.
 - Work continued on delivery of the Queensland Ecotourism Trails program. The primary objective of the program is to collaborate with Traditional Owners and regional communities to deliver new tourism opportunities for Queensland, founded on social, environmental and economic outcomes. These opportunities will showcase the state's natural assets and cultural heritage and enhance connection to Country.
 - A Cultural Heritage Management Agreement was executed with the Native Title Claimant Group, plus in principle agreement was reached for an Indigenous Land Use Agreement, to build the Wangetti Trail. The Wangetti Trail also received federal approval through the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, and a design and construction contract to build the southern portion of the trail was awarded.
 - Construction was completed on the Cardwell Mountain Bike Pump Track with the official opening held on 28 June 2022.
 - The Mon Repos Turtle Centre received Advanced Ecotourism, Respecting Our Culture and Climate Action certifications by Ecotourism Australia, with the centre being recognised as one of Australia's best ecotourism experiences. The certifications recognise the centre's commitment to turtle conservation, support for the local community, promotion of the cultural values of the area's First Nations people, and visitor education. More than 30,000 people visit the centre each year to experience the wonder of seeing a turtle lay its eggs, or to watch hundreds of hatchlings emerging from their nests.
 - A new and improved immersive education room was opened at Walkabout Creek Discovery Centre, with the new facilities also including upgrades to the wildlife and visitor centre. The new room is themed around the D'Aguiar National Park habitat, featuring stunning images wrapped around the walls and floor-to-ceiling, with life-like trees, rocks and grasses, and allows students to interact up close with some of our unique native species. All visitor strategies consider visitor education as a component.



Connect

- The Queensland Government announced \$130,000 in funding towards the development of a tourism master plan for Magnetic Island. With over two-thirds of Magnetic Island dedicated as national park, this is an opportunity to highlight the island's natural beauty in a planned and environmentally and socially sensitive way, and will provide the blueprint for developing a long-term tourism strategy for Magnetic Island. The Magnetic Island tourism master plan project is being led by the Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport in partnership with Townsville City Council. The community will be invited to provide feedback on the Magnetic Island 2030 Master Plan.
- **First Nations and community engagement:**
 - The Queensland Government appointed a Riversleigh World Heritage Advisory Committee, bringing together increased representation from the World Heritage Area's Traditional Owners, the Waanyi peoples, as well as community, local council and scientific experts. The Riversleigh World Heritage Area is part of the Australian Fossil Mammal Sites and comprises over 10,000 hectares of Boodjamulla National Park. The first meeting was held in August 2022.
 - The Queensland Government appointed a K'gari World Heritage Advisory Committee, bringing together increased representation from the World Heritage Area's Traditional Owners, the Butchulla peoples, as well as community, council and scientific experts. The first three meetings were held in February, May and September 2022. The final meeting for 2022 will occur in December 2022, coinciding with the 30th anniversary of the inscription of K'gari to the World Heritage List.
 - First Nations cultural content, including language, artwork, co-branding, Elders messaging and/or story were incorporated into almost 100 signs and publications in 2021–22.



Progress measures

GR = grow measures | CA = care measures | CO = connect measures

	Progress measure (from the Protected Area Strategy)	Progress in year 2 (2021–22) as at 30 September 2022
GR1	The number of investment partnerships to grow the protected area system.	Two investment partnerships contributed to growing the protected area system in 2021-22.
GR2	Proportion of Queensland's land area secured in protected areas.	8.2 per cent of Queensland's land area is secured in protected areas.
GR3	Extent of lands managed as private protected areas.	4,474,543 hectares of lands are managed as private protected areas.*
CA1	Number of partnerships and collaborations to care for protected areas.	As at 30 September 2022, 31 formal partnerships and collaborations were in place to care for protected areas.**
CA2	Number of public protected areas being managed under the Values-Based Management Framework.	226 protected areas have an approved values-based management framework management instrument or Key Value and Level of Service Assessment guiding the management of park values.
CA3	Extent of private protected areas participating in NatureAssist small grant programs for effective conservation management.	In 2021–22, 79 private protected areas received small grants funding for effective conservation management through Nature Refuge Landholder Grants.
CO1	Increased social media engagement about protected areas.	<p>Between 1 October 2021 and 30 September 2022, 517 posts were published on Queensland National Parks social media platforms, which reached a combined audience of more than 15.5 million people. As at 30 September 2022, Queensland National Parks Facebook and Instagram channels have over 239,000 combined followers.</p> <p>The Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) has over 13,000 followers across its social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter).</p>
CO2	Upgraded visitor infrastructure and information at key visitor sites on public protected areas.	<p>Major national park visitor infrastructure and information projects undertaken in 2021–22 included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$3.3 million to complete the new Castle Rock Campground upgrade at Girraween National Park. • Completion of Mount Archer National Park Zamia track walking upgrade at \$615,556 over three years.
CO3	Increased number of protected areas with published values-based management instruments.	30 protected areas have published values-based management instruments.

- * Occasionally amendments to Conservation Agreements are required to support adjustments to the private protected area network. Although 12 new nature refuges were added to the protected area system during the reporting period, there has been a net decrease in the hectares of land managed. This is largely due to improvements in mapping technology allowing for more precise boundary alignment of the 220,905-hectare Rutland Plains Nature Refuge, when the Conservation Agreement was converted from a termed agreement to a perpetual agreement.
- ** We acknowledge that there are many other partnerships and collaborations that are not included here but are equally important in caring for protected areas. For the purposes of reporting against this performance measure the following types of partnerships and collaborations are captured, and these may be added to in future years:
 1. Number of First Nations groups with joint management arrangements in place (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal land) in the Cape York Peninsula region; North Stradbroke Island (Minjerrabah) Region Indigenous Joint Management Area and Cangen-Yangan Indigenous Joint Management Area.
 2. Number of Partnership agreements supporting private protected areas to undertake land management activities to conserve natural and cultural values.
 3. Number of First Nations groups with a published co-designed values-based management framework management instrument in place.
 4. Number of other co-designed management instruments.
 5. Number of partnership arrangements to support development of a Healthy Country Plan.
 6. Number of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) to undertake management activities on protected areas.





Image: Wattle Gully Nature Refuge
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