
ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE OPINION - Canberra Reserves Trail Enhancement Program – Uriarra Loop Trail, Kambah Pool Centenary Trail, Tidbinbilla (ESO202400025)

In accordance with section 140 (4) of the *Planning Act 2023* (the Act), I provide the following environmental significance opinion:

APPLICANT

ACT Parks and Conservation Service, as represented by Mr Thomas Mungoven, Project Officer.

APPLICATION and DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

The applicant has applied under section 140 (4) of the Act to the Conservator of Flora and Fauna for an environmental significance opinion to the effect that the development proposal set out in the submission is not likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact (the application).

The development proposal is for the re-alignment of Uriarra Loop Walk and the Centenary Trail (Kambah Pool Entry), and re-surfacing of Baraygnu Murawung Walk and Black Flats Walk in Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve as part of the Canberra Reserves Recreational Trail Enhancement project.

LOCATION

Works are proposed in several locations:

- Blocks 452 and 409 Stromlo district – Uriarra Loop Walk;
- Block 1627 Tuggeranong district – Centenary Trail (Kambah Pool Entry);
- Block 240 Paddy’s River district – Baraygnu Murawung Walk and Black Flats Walk.

MATTERS TO WHICH THIS OPINION APPLIES

This opinion applies only to the development proposal as described in the application.

OPINION

Provided the works are undertaken in a manner consistent with the following conditions in addition to the mitigation measures contained in the supporting application for an ESO, they are unlikely to cause a significant adverse environmental impact.

This opinion is granted subject to the following conditions made under s140 (4)(b) of the Act:

1. Conditions of approval including mitigation measures as stated in the submission.
2. Pre-construction threatened flora surveys should be undertaken prior to construction. A minimum 2 m construction avoidance buffer should be established around any threatened flora detected within the development footprint.
3. Pre-groundwork surveys should be undertaken to identify the presence of burrows. A minimum 5 m construction avoidance buffer should be established around any burrows detected within the development footprint.
4. Any surface rock removed during trail construction should be repositioned on adjacent surface or moved to nearby areas of higher quality native grass cover to increase potential Pink-tailed Worm-lizard habitat.
5. Trees and/or shrubs removed by the proposal are replaced at the below ratios:

DBH class (cm)	REPLACEMENT RATIOS
<5	1:1
5 - 20	1:3 + relocate as native mulch or at Conservator discretion
21 - 30	1:8 + relocate as coarse woody debris or at Conservator discretion
31 - 40	1:13 + relocate as coarse woody debris or at Conservator discretion
41 - 50	1:40 + relocate as coarse woody debris or at Conservator discretion
50+	1:90 + reinstate as vertical habitat structure or at Conservator discretion
100+	1:180 + reinstate as vertical habitat structure or at Conservator discretion

6. The proposed works may be subject to random compliance inspection by Conservation Officers as requested by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna.

Attached is a Statement of Reasons for the decision.

Kieran Lawton
Conservator of Flora and Fauna

8th July 2024

STATEMENT OF REASONS REASONS FOR THE DECISION

The proposed development is a proposal mentioned in Schedule 1 of the *Planning (General) Regulation 2023* – requiring environmental impact statement, being:

Part 1.2, item 18 - proposal for development in a reserve, unless the proposal is for minor public works to be carried out by or for the Territory in accordance with a minor public works code approved by the conservator of flora and fauna under the Nature Conservation Act 2014, section 318A;

The proposed works are within Molonglo River Reserve, Woodstock Nature Reserve, Bullen Range Nature Reserve and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.

The proponent wants the application for the development approval assessed in the merit track on the grounds that the proposal is not likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact, and has applied to the Conservator of Flora and Fauna to that effect.

Meaning of *significant* adverse environmental impact

An adverse environmental impact is ***significant*** if—

- (a) the environmental function, system, value or entity that might be adversely impacted by a proposed development is significant; or
- (b) the cumulative or incremental effect of a proposed development might contribute to a substantial adverse impact on an environmental function, system, value or entity.

In deciding whether an adverse environmental impact is ***significant***, the following matters must be taken into account:

- (a) the kind, size, frequency, intensity, scope and length of time of the impact;
- (b) the sensitivity, resilience and rarity of the environmental function, system, value or entity likely to be affected.

In deciding whether a development proposal is likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact it does not matter whether the adverse environmental impact is likely to occur on the site of the development or elsewhere.

It has been determined that the proposal is unlikely to have a significant environmental impact, based on the documentation submitted, known values of the site, and provided the works and ongoing management are carried out in accordance with the conditions attached to this ESO.

Project description

The development proposal is for the re-alignment of Uriarra Loop Walk and the Centenary Trail (Kambah Pool Entry), and re-surfacing Baraygnu Murawung Walk and Black Flats Walk in Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve as part of the Canberra Reserves Recreational Trail Enhancement project.

This project aims to:

- deliver trail maintenance and upgrade services to improve safety;
- upgrade trails to the Australian Walking Track Standard;
- increase disaster resilience and long-term sustainability; and
- enhance the visitor experience of Canberra's iconic trails.

Uriarra Loop Walk

The walk starts near the suburb Strathnairn and follows the Murrumbidgee River. Sections of the walk were deeply scoured due to significant flooding of the river during the La Nina events over the past two years. As a result, the public are creating desire lines to avoid the track's hazards.

The proposal aims to move the trail to a more stable area upslope out of flood damaged areas to provide a clear and safe path for users and avoid risks from future floods. This will also reduce public disturbance of surrounding vegetation through creation of desire lines.

The new trail footprint will be approximately 500m², with a temporary construction footprint of approximately 850m². A small excavator will be used to remove surface vegetation – no trees will be removed, and native shrubs avoided where possible. The old trail will be closed once construction of the new trail is complete and allowed to rehabilitate naturally.

Centenary Trail (Kambah Pool Entry)

A section of the current trail directs users off a single trail onto Kambah Pool Road before continuing, which creates unnecessary risks to users. The proposed trail passes through a highly disturbed car park and disused construction laydown area. The new trail footprint will be approximately 500m², with a temporary construction footprint of approximately 600m². A small excavator will be used to remove surface vegetation – no trees will be removed, and native shrubs avoided where possible.

A low height raised steel and fibre reinforced panel boardwalk will be installed to span a boggy section. Strips of ground cover will be taken to bare earth and concrete piers will sit on the ground surface. A custom frame will be built to house the sheets of fibre reinforced panels. It will sit low to the ground and allow for water to pass

through the space between piers and mitigate any damage caused to the trail and surrounding vegetation during wet periods.

Baraygnu Murawung Walk and Black Flats Walk

Both walks start off at Black Flats carpark in Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve with a bitumen section which has degraded over time, creating trip and slip hazards and is difficult to maintain. Works will replace approximately 500m² of degraded bitumen sections with hard packed granite paths to remove hazards and facilitate future path maintenance.

All works will occur within the footprint of the existing trails with no realigning required. The bitumen will be removed and disposed at an off-site facility. Plate compactors or roller will be used to compact crushed granite and re-surface the trail. No trees or shrubs will be removed and off-track movement will be avoided where possible.

Documentation Submitted

- Explanatory note regarding supporting documentation for the application for an Environmental Significance Opinion;
- Heritage assessment letters for Uriarra Loop Walk and the Centenary Trail;
- Guidelines for unanticipated discovery of heritage items;
- Letters of Authorisation;
- Form 1M.

Natural conservation values present

Uriarra Loop Walk

The proposed section for re-alignment sits within Woodstock Nature Reserve and is adjacent to the Murrumbidgee River. The site is mapped as 'Derived Native Shrubland' under the ACT GOV Vegetation Classification. Vegetation within the proposal area is dominated by weedy exotics, with African Lovegrass (*Eragrostis curvula*) as the dominant ground cover and Box Elder (*Acer negundo*), Briar Rose (*Rosa rubigosa*) and Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*) as the dominant shrub species for most of the footprint. Common native shrubs (Tea tree (*Kunzea ericoides*) Hop Bush (*Dodonea viscosa*) and Black Thorn (*Bursaria spinosa*)) become dominant on the west of the footprint, with African Lovegrass remaining the dominant groundcover.

Over 200 species have been recorded within 500m of the site, with at least 8 species listed as threatened under the *Nature Conservation Act 2014*:

- White-winged Triller (*Lalage tricolor*)
- Scarlet Robin (*Petroica boodang*)
- Pale Pomaderris (*Pomaderris pallida*)
- Macquarie Perch (*Macquaria australasica*)

- Murray Cod (*Maccullochella peelii*)
- Murray River Crayfish (*Euastacus armatus*)
- Trout Cod (*Maccullochella macquariensis*)
- Murrumbidgee Bossiaea (*Bossiaea grayi*)

Bertya rosemarinifolia is a rare shrub on the ACT protected plants list and occurs on site, providing good small bird habitat. Murrumbidgee bossiaea (*Bossiaea grayi*) is known to occur in proximity to the proposal site, but is currently only recorded on the opposite side of the Murrumbidgee River.

Mature native trees are present to the north and south of the re-alignment, but are of sufficient distance from the works to avoid impacts.

The existing trail and proposed new trail are within the Ecological Network and is mapped as a potential ecological connectivity corridor for small woodland birds, and potential core habitat connectivity for amphibians, native bees, and riparian reptiles and mammals. The area is also mapped as high value in the connectivity regional linkages. Connectivity values are primarily linked to the vegetated riparian corridor.

Centenary Trail (Kambah Pool Entry)

The proposed section for re-alignment sits within Bullen Range Nature Reserve and is adjacent to the Murrumbidgee River. The site is mapped as 'Exotic Grassland' under the ACT GOV Vegetation Classification. The proposal site passes through a short section of woodland dominated by Red Box (*Eucalyptus polyanthemos*) and Scribbly Gum (*E. rossii*) before moving into the open grassland. Ground cover is dominated by exotic species, though some native Kangaroo Grass occurs in the southern portion of the proposed re-alignment.

Over 300 species have been recorded within 500m of the project area, with at least 10 species listed as threatened under the *Nature Conservation Act 2014*:

- Key's Matchstick Grasshopper (*Keyacris scurra*)
- White-winged Triller (*Lalage tricolor*)
- Scarlet Robin (*Petroica boodang*)
- Pale Pomaderris (*Pomaderris pallida*)
- Macquarie Perch (*Macquaria australasica*)
- Trout Cod (*Maccullochella macquariensis*)
- Murray Cod (*Maccullochella peelii*)
- Murray River Crayfish (*Euastacus armatus*)
- Pink-tailed Worm-lizard (*Aprasia parapulchella*)
- Austral Toadflax (*Thesium australe*)

The proposal footprint is unlikely to contain important Pink-tailed Worm-lizard habitat, given surface rock is largely avoided by the proposal and vegetation cover is heavily dominated by exotics. However, any surface rock within the proposal footprint should be moved to a nearby patch of surface rock.

Key's Matchstick Grasshopper is known to occur in the broader Kambah Pool area. However, this species is unlikely to occur in the African Lovegrass dominant footprint of the proposed trail.

There are several wombat burrows in proximity to the proposal, which will be avoided during earthworks.

The existing trail and proposed new trail are within the Ecological Network and is mapped as a potential ecological connectivity corridor for small woodland birds and small terrestrial mammals, and potential core habitat connectivity for native bees and grassland reptiles. The area is also mapped as high value in the connectivity regional linkages.

Baraygnu Murawung Walk and Black Flats Walk

The proposed sections for re-surfacing are in Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. The reserve conserves a wide variety of ecosystems and contributes to regional ecological connectivity through its links to reserves within ACT/NSW including Namadgi National Park in the south and Bullen Range Nature Reserve towards the north.

The area is mapped as 'Robertson's Peppermint – Red Stringybark very tall grass-forb sheltered open forest' under the ACT GOV Vegetation Classification. The woodland is in good condition with minimal exotic weed species. Some orchids occur within proximity to the path footprint.

Over 350 species have been recorded within 500m of the project area, with at least 9 species listed as threatened under the *Nature Conservation Act 2014*:

- White-winged Triller (*Lalage tricolor*)
- Scarlet Robin (*Petroica boodang*)
- Austral Toadflax (*Thesium australe*)
- Southern Brown Bandicoot (Eastern) (*Isodon obesulus obesulus*)
- Southern Greater Glider (*Petauroides volans*)
- Koala (*Phascolarctos cinereus*)
- Pilotbird (*Pycnoptilus floccosus*)
- Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby (*Petrogale penicillata*)
- Smoky Mouse (*Pseudomys fumeus*)

Potentially Significant Environmental Impacts

This proposal is unlikely to create significant environmental impacts due to careful site selection and the small footprint of works. The sites of the proposed new sections of trail have been carefully chosen to avoid impacting native vegetation, and are expected to avoid further damage to the surrounding environment. The proposed works are likely to improve habitat value. The small footprint of the proposed paths and marginal habitat value of the various sites means that the works are unlikely to significantly impact threatened species or act as a barrier to fauna movement.

The applicant has identified a range of mitigation measures to minimise impacts on conservation values, including weed management, erosion control measures and restriction and control of access, along with site specific mitigation measures.

Based on the above measures, the environmental impact from this project is not likely to be significant.

Conditions have been included to ensure that works will minimise impact to the environment.

1. Conditions of approval including mitigation measures as stated in the submission.
2. Pre-construction threatened flora surveys should be undertaken prior to construction. A minimum 2 m construction avoidance buffer should be established around any threatened flora detected within the development footprint.
3. Pre-groundwork surveys should be undertaken to identify the presence of burrows. A minimum 5 m construction avoidance buffer should be established around any burrows detected within the development footprint.
4. Any surface rock removed during trail construction should be repositioned on adjacent surface or moved to nearby areas of higher quality native grass cover to increase potential Pink-tailed worm-lizard habitat.
5. Trees and/or shrubs removed by the proposal are replaced at the below ratios:

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50+	1:90 + reinstate as vertical habitat structure or at Conservator discretion
100+	1:180 + reinstate as vertical habitat structure or at Conservator discretion

6. The proposed works may be subject to random compliance inspection by Conservation Officers as requested by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna.

It has been determined that if the works are undertaken in a manner consistent with the above conditions attached to the ESO in addition to the mitigation measures contained in the supporting application for an ESO, they are unlikely to cause a significant adverse environmental impact.