
ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE OPINION - Shepherds track realignment (ESO 202500061)

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 Project Officer,
Mr Thomas Mungoven.

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 realignment of sections of Sheperd’s Track within Woodstock Nature Reserve to enhance its sustainability, safety, and user experience as described in the submission.

LOCATION

Block 1642 Belconnen and Block 452 Stromlo.

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 application.
2. Access to the site must be granted to Conservation Officers if a random compliance inspection is requested by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna.
3. Works should be undertaken outside of the Peregrine Falcon breeding season, with a “stop work” protocol in place should an active nest be discovered in an area that encroaches the 100m buffer area further than existing known nests.

The Office of the Conservator must be notified should additional active Peregrine Falcon nests be identified within proximity of the works.

4. Should a Pink-tailed Worm-lizard(s) be discovered, works must stop temporarily and where possible relocate it into appropriate habitat immediately adjacent to the disturbance footprint. If the reptile escapes down into an ant burrow or is not accessible, then works in that section must stop and they must contact the Conservator's Office for appropriate next steps.
5. Works must stop if active nests and/or hollows are found, to limit disturbance to nesting animals. The Office of the Conservator must be notified should active nests be identified within proximity of the works.
6. Works should avoid all areas known to support orchid species, with protection measures undertaken for the known records to prevent disturbance (i.e. by clearly marking "no go" zones marked with fencing, e.g. star pickets and bunting).
7. 'No-go' zones are required to be marked off with fencing (e.g. star pickets and bunting) to avoid impacts to mature trees and regeneration areas.
8. Excavator and machinery use must be restricted to tracks / disturbed areas to limit disturbance. Strict quarantine measures must be implemented for machinery, tools, and footwear when moving between work areas, especially when leaving areas where Chilean Needle Grass occurs, to prevent weed spread.
9. Soil disturbance should be limited by ensuring works are undertaken during appropriate conditions. Works following high rainfall should be avoided, where possible.

Attached is a Statement of Reasons for the decision.



Bren Burkevics
Conservator of Flora and Fauna

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February 2026

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 Woodstock Nature Reserve.

The proponent is seeking an environmental significance opinion to remove the requirement for an environmental impact statement 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 for an opinion 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 realignment of sections of Sheperd's Track within Woodstock Nature Reserve to enhance its sustainability, safety, and user experience.

Shepherds Track connects Shepherds Lookout to the Molonglo River, forming part of a scenic and ecologically significant corridor. The track has deteriorated due to erosion, overgrown vegetation, and uneven surfaces, creating safety risks and reducing user experience. While the 1.2 km section to Shepherds Lookout is well-maintained and offers panoramic views of the Murrumbidgee River, the descent to the Molonglo River is steep, narrow, and affected by erosion, track braiding, infrastructure degradation, and weed infestation.

To address these issues, the project proposes realigning four sections of the track to reduce gradients, improve surface quality, and add signage for safer, more enjoyable access. Degraded areas will be rehabilitated through erosion control and native revegetation, enhancing ecological resilience and reducing maintenance, as well as reducing weed spread likelihood from realignment. The tracks will be built as per PCS Recreational Trails Manual and best practice design principles to ensure sustainability, safety, and minimal environmental impact.

Track construction will involve a new full-cut walking track with a 5m buffer for micro-adjustments to avoid sensitive areas, improve drainage, and enhance user experience. A footbridge over the Molonglo River will be relocated with new mega anchor footings and construct approach paths. Further correspondence with PCS confirms that the bridge will be removed by unbolting and lifting out with an excavator and tracked along the level ground to its new location (approximately 60m). New anchors will be installed where the bridge will be relocated, and the impact will be no wider than the bridge itself (approximately 1.2m).

Track maintenance will involve vegetation trimming away from the track with no shrubs/trees removed, clearing drainage and replacing several treated timber steps with stone steps.

Documentation Submitted

- Explanatory note regarding supporting documentation for the application for an Environmental Significance Opinion;
- Letter of Authorisation
- Form 1M.

Natural conservation values present

Woodstock Nature Reserve is a key part of the Murrumbidgee River Corridor and is ecologically important because it protects significant patches of critically endangered Box Gum Woodland.

Vegetation surveys were conducted in October and November 2025 by Parks and Conservation staff. No rare or protected plants were found on proposed alignments, though several occur in the broader project area, particularly the threatened Murrumbidgee Bossiaea (*Bossiaea grayi*). Other rare plants include Small Crowea (*Crowea exalata*), Corrugated Sida (*Sida corrugata*), Late Mauve Doubletail (*Diuris dendrobioides*), Southern Hooked Rustyhood (*Oligochaetochilus hamatus*) and Bertya (*Bertya rosmarinifolia*). Late Mauve Doubletail orchids (*Diuris dendrobioides*) were recorded 5–10 m off-track near rocky outcrops.

There was no threatened fauna recorded along proposed alignments, though several occur in the broader area, including Gang-gang Cockatoo (*Callocephalon fimbriatum*), Scarlet Robin (*Petroica boodang*), Varied Sitella (*Daphoenositta chrysoptera*), Little Eagle (*Hieraaetus morphnoides*), and Pink-tailed Worm-lizard (*Aprasia parapulchella*). The area is also potential habitat for the Superb Parrot (*Polytelis swainsonii*).

There is a long-established Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) nesting site on cliffs below the existing track. Observations by PCS land managers indicate that regular public use and routine maintenance have not affected breeding success. Mitigation actions will include maintaining a 100m buffer from the cliff top and keeping the existing fence in good condition, avoiding construction during breeding season. A section of the track will be realigned to reduce overall tracks within the 100m buffer.

Potentially Significant Environmental Impacts

Two of the four realignment sections pass through modelled habitat for Pink-tailed Worm-lizards (PTWL); however, surveys show African Love Grass dominance and lack of surface rock and native grasses, resulting in overall unsuitable to low-quality habitat. While there are historic records on the alignment, the likelihood of PTWL occurrence is very low and impacts to this species are unlikely.

Impact to the Peregrine Falcon nesting grounds is well considered. Given the location of the track realignment is separated from the Peregrine Falcon nesting sites by a 100m buffer and broken by treed vegetation and a ~30m elevation gain, the trail design will have a low likelihood of meaningful disturbance to nesting. The birds have continued to nest with the existing trail encroaching into the buffer area, and the trail works will reduce encroachment into this buffer area. Further communication with PCS also confirms the improved alignment increases the distance between the track and the nesting area and presence and alignment of a fence extending from the lookout to the existing track, which serves as an effective barrier to prevent inadvertent access to the cliff area.

Late Mauve Doubletail orchids (*Diuris dendrobioides*) were recorded 5–10 m off-track near rocky outcrops. While they are outside of the proposed works footprint, they are in close proximity, and it is worth noting that orchid species are often not easily detected (not visible outside of flowering period and difficult to detect when flowering). As such works should avoid all areas known to support orchid species.

Chilean Needle Grass (*Nassella neesiana*) occurs along certain sections of the trail. Weed measures are in place to prevent further weed spread.

Conditions have been included to ensure that works avoid impacts to known ecological areas and limit disturbance, with strict quarantine measures to prevent weed spread.

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 application.
2. Access to the site must be granted to Conservation Officers if a random compliance inspection is requested by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna.
3. Works should be undertaken outside of the Peregrine Falcon breeding season, with a “stop work” protocol in place should an active nest be discovered in an area that encroaches the 100m buffer area further than existing known nests. The Office of the Conservator must be notified should additional active Peregrine Falcon nests be identified within proximity of the works.
4. Should a Pink-tailed Worm-lizard(s) be discovered, works must stop temporarily and where possible relocate it into appropriate habitat immediately adjacent to the disturbance footprint. If the reptile escapes down into an ant burrow or is not accessible, then works in that section must stop and they must contact the Conservator’s Office for appropriate next steps.
5. Works must stop if active nests and/or hollows are found, to limit disturbance to nesting animals. The Office of the Conservator must be notified should active nests be identified within proximity of the works.
6. Works should avoid all areas known to support orchid species, with protection measures undertaken for the known records to prevent disturbance (i.e. by clearly marking “no go” zones marked with fencing, e.g. star pickets and bunting).
7. ‘No-go’ zones are required to be marked off with fencing (e.g. star pickets and bunting) to avoid impacts to mature trees and regeneration areas.
8. Excavator and machinery use must be restricted to tracks / disturbed areas to limit disturbance. Strict quarantine measures must be implemented for machinery, tools, and footwear when moving between work areas, especially when leaving areas where Chilean Needle Grass occurs, to prevent weed spread.
9. Soil disturbance should be limited by ensuring works are undertaken during appropriate conditions. Works following high rainfall should be avoided, where possible.

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.