

Conservation Covenants

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Government reserves provide excellent protection for some of the most valuable areas of Western Australia's native vegetation; however, the long-term future of much of our precious natural heritage rests in the hands of private landholders. Conservation covenants provide a unique opportunity for individuals to make a significant, lasting difference to the conservation of Western Australia's natural heritage.

The National Trust of Australia (WA) is a community-based heritage organisation, which works to conserve and interpret heritage values for "the long-term social, economic and environmental benefit of the community" (National Trust Vision Statement). Through the provision of nature conservation covenanting and land management support, the National Trust is working with private landowners to conserve valuable bushland for the benefit of the community. The National Trust has a membership of approximately 4500, which includes many of our conservation covenantors, who receive a complimentary membership on registration of their covenant.

The National Trust recognises that greater outcomes can be achieved by working in partnership with other individuals and organisations. The conservation covenant program is essentially based on the principle of partnership, as the conservation covenant is a voluntary agreement between a landholder and the National Trust to protect natural values on private property by restricting potentially damaging activities. National Trust covenants are generally registered in perpetuity; this means that, while the landowner may on-sell, the organisation remains involved in the ongoing protection and management of the covenanted land.

The covenant program was formally established in 1999; however, the National Trust has been providing covenanting services for conservation purposes since 1971, after influencing a change in legislation to allow this. Unlike many other conservation covenant programs, which have only been operating for a relatively short period of time, the National Trust can demonstrate the effectiveness of conservation covenanting over time. A total of 115 covenants have been registered, covering over 45,390 hectares and protecting more than 12,160 hectares of bushland (as at Dec 2007).

The National Trust is the only conservation covenanting organisation in Western Australia to use a positive deed to complement the conservation covenant, which is restrictive in nature, promoting active land management of conservation values. National Trust staff also work with the landowners to develop a management plan, which highlight positive actions to minimise the impact of certain land management practices and improve the quality of the bushland. Staff members assist with the implementation of the management plan and monitor the condition of the bushland through regular stewardship visits and contact with landowners.

The value of conservation covenants as a means of protecting native bushland is widely acknowledged; conservation covenant programs are successfully operating around Australia. The National Trust actively maintains links with other conservation covenant programs Australia-wide in order to share experiences and information, with the aim of improving efficiency and service.

The National Trust also has a number of partnerships with other organisations and government agencies, including the Department of Environment and Conservation, WWF Australia and several environmental groups, including Greening Australia and Bush Heritage Australia. By working together, we have greater likelihood of achieving common goals, while making optimum use of staff time and resources.

The conservation covenant program relies on external funding to continue its work; to-date, major sponsors have included Lotterywest and the Australian Government (through the Natural Heritage Trust). The National Trust is active in the pursuit of funding opportunities and is currently working closely with Catchment Councils to secure funding in recognition of the services that the program provides in these areas. Formal partnerships have been established with the Avon and South West Catchment Councils and negotiations are continuing to extend this approach to the South Coast and other regions.

The National Trust, through the conservation covenant program, plays an important community role in representing and protecting the interests of our conservation covenantors on issues such as land rights. For instance, a covenantor may experience conflict with a third party seeking access to the property. Where such access affects the landowner's rights over the covenanted land, the National Trust advocates strongly on their behalf to ensure the conservation value of the land is maintained. The National Trust ensures its conservation covenantors are made fully aware of the conservation incentives and provides support and assistance in applying for grants to carry out on-ground works. It also raises awareness within the community of current issues that may impact on heritage values.

Through the provision of conservation covenanting services, the National Trust is helping private landowners to conserve areas of valuable natural habitat for the benefit of the community. The legal protection and positive management provided by the program will help ensure that our natural heritage can be retained, to be enjoyed by the community now and in the future.

Voluntary covenanting can be initiated by the land owner forwarding a letter of invitation to the National Trust. Staff will then arrange an appointment with the landowner and commence the design of a suitable conservation covenant for the bushland of interest. The [letter of invitation](#) is available for download on the National Trust natural heritage website.

To find out more about conservation covenants and the National Trust's other natural heritage programs, please visit our website at www.naturalheritage.org.au or contact us on the details below.



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