



# PROJECT PROPOSAL

## Biodiversity & Conservation Community Camps Supported by BCT

### BACKGROUND

Western Landcare NSW Incorporated (WLNSW) supports nature conservation work that helps to support biodiversity and sustain the agricultural industry across Far West NSW.

With thanks to a few brave early adopters, rehydration projects are now popping up right across the Western rangelands. The transformation of ground cover is tempting neighbours to get onto Western Local Land Services (WLLS) for mapping services to show where rehydration ponds and banks may help areas of protein producing land to regenerate. Excitement is in the outback air as the method behind this 'madness' becomes more widely understood, accepted, and respected.

Likewise, early adopters of industrial age nature-positive ideologies have long been aware of the holistic health benefits of spending time in nature. Camping provides an opportunity in busy lives for families and friends to get back to basics - sleep closer to the ground, fetch wood to build a fire to stare into (rather than screens) and share stories over simple meals as we 'reboot' in nature.

### Why co-host Community Camps with Western Landcare?

Whilst Landcare community objectives around conservation and natural resource management are well known and documented, more reasons to protect biodiversity are emerging, which will help to open new possibilities for Western Landcare.

'Nature prescriptions' are growing in popularity around the world. As cognitive health continues to decline (as highlighted by the recent Federal Labor pledge of \$1billion to establish/refurbish 100 mental health facilities across Australia) and a variety of physical ailments and disease are on the increase (2022 ABS report suggests that 47% of Australians were estimated to have one or more chronic diseases with 20% having two or more), health professionals are becoming increasingly interested in how nature can help people to heal holistically.



UNSW Medicine & Health 2023 research found that,

“...nature prescriptions provided both physical and mental health benefits. Patients had reduced blood pressure, as well as lower depression and anxiety scores... The evidence shows that nature prescriptions can help to restore and build capacities for better physical and mental health...” and “Nature prescriptions are emerging as a supplement to standard medical care... Canada has a national nature prescription program.”

### Feedback from Meetings & Sessions

Western Landcare covers 40% of NSW following the QLD border around to Brewarrina, Bourke, down to Cobar, Hillston and along the Victorian border to Balranald, Wentworth and back up the SA border to Broken Hill and Tibooburra. In short, there's a whole lot of land and not so many people so *we do conservation* differently in the Far West; in fact, we do many things differently, on a must needs basis with resourcefulness and with the ability to adapt to what is at hand, we make things work.

Our partners share our observation around current information delivery platforms not attracting enough in-person attendance at sessions being offered around Far West NSW. Two-day camps will provide our partners with an opportunity for ‘engagement overtime’ and ongoing response to questions and feedback, not just during the information sessions but also over meals and during free time.

The Landcare brand proudly means what it says – volunteers, staff and members *care for the land* they live and work on. Partnering on projects with other landcaring organisations, such as Western Local Land Services (WLLS), Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT), Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC), Southern Drought & Innovation Hub (SDIH), Nature Conservation Council (NCC), Far West National Parks & Wildlife Service (Fwnpws) and more, the camps offer an opportunity to deliver vital information *about nature, in nature*.

Each of these partners has offered support to co-design and/or co-facilitate unique Community Camps. For example, community camps can be re-named to suit the content being delivered:

**Biodiversity & Conservation Community Camp** (BCT and partners to discuss importance of reestablishing and protecting habitat on properties)

**Conservation Community Camp & Carp Muster** (running camps in river communities – learn about river health while catching Carp for donation to Charlie Carp or have a chef join us onsite to demonstrate how to cook Carp)

**Rehydration Community Camp & Machine Operations** (demonstrating machine operation on rehydration projects – attendees get hands-on experience)

**Community Camp & Muster Dog Training** (have a trainer on the camp to demonstrate how to train a working dog)



## **Caring for Country Community Camps** (LALC to explain and demonstrate Aboriginal ways of looking after land)

Informed by several years of working with children, youth and families in the child protection sector, followed by a role with *The Rites Of Passage Institute* led by CEO Dr Arne Rubinstein, Western Landcare's new Regional Landcare Coordinator, Melanie Gates, is keen to strengthen the bond between land care and health care.

Melanie believes that hosting camps as an environmental education delivery platform for locals and people 'from away' across Far West NSW will help to:

- educate local landcarers and community groups about their natural environment so they understand the current biodiversity status and what work is required to rehydrate, protect and conserve habitat for native flora and fauna.
- educate landcarers about how agriculture and conservation can co-exist.
- help visitors better understand flora and fauna living on semi-arid rangelands
- break down social barriers for individuals feeling isolated in our remote communities.
- 'plant seeds' to help heal difficult interpersonal dynamics (especially between parents and teenagers) – Dr Arne has agreed to support Landcare with this aspect of the program.

Although we tend to go about things differently in the Far West, our partners are willing to offer presentations at community camps that are relevant to rangeland rehydration and regeneration that both supports biodiversity and sustains agriculture around the region for future generations.

### **Review & Conclusion**

A review and discussion with the WLNSW team and WLLS employees highlighted a shared concern that Landholders are suffering from 'engagement fatigue' as more continue to disengage from learning opportunities, especially in-person presentations where driving over 100km is required. Recent low attendance numbers have prompted many service providers to explore alternate delivery platforms, so rather than continue delivering nature-based information indoors via PowerPoint presentations, WLNSW would like to trial another way – community camps.

A camp can include group (peer to peer) learning opportunities for sharing ideas on tailoring solutions for specific environments, as well as PLCM private consultation with BCT representatives by appointment. One-on-one support (advisory) service sessions could offer a more personalised support/education session allowing a landholder to engage in personal discussion that builds a relationship and trust with the agency as they develop a deeper understanding of how the BCT projects can work on their properties.



Community Camps present families with an opportunity to relax and connect in nature without trying to get back home to the daily chores after attending workshops or information sessions. Although attendees will need time to prepare for a camping trip, the opportunity to really immerse in the concept of connecting to self, family, community and the natural world will provide the ongoing evidence that the preparation required to attend the camp far out ways any inconvenience.

The conclusion from the collective feedback was to reinvigorate a delivery method for this project and work with our stakeholders in a productive and inclusive way to jointly deliver project outcomes. The WLNSW board has approved for Melanie, Sonia and Kelly (Lawson) to continue conversations around the Biodiversity & Conservation Community Camp concept with BCT. The following information is a proposal and draft concept of how the camp could run.

## Project Proposal: Biodiversity & Conservation Community Camp

*Biodiversity & Conservation Community Camps: Bringing Environmental Knowledge & Experience Together to Create Biodiversity Leaders in Far West NSW*

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### Overview:

This project proposal outlines a draft plan to host a Biodiversity Conservation Camp that focuses on a fun and engaging way to provide environmental education that focuses on developing relationships that builds trust with agencies who are providing support and advisory services to the pastoralist community, in particular, sustainable agriculture projects.

The camp will provide participants with a deeper understanding of local biodiversity, the importance of conservation, and opportunities to consider when they seek to sustainably manage and preserve their land and local environments, but building trust in local agencies is key to the camp concept success.

Key features of the camp are guest speakers, workshops, spending quality time with family, friends and neighbours, networking, Junior Landcare games and activities, music, quiz nights, and local bush catering. **The aim of the camp concept** is to provide a relaxed, family-friendly event for landholders to build curiosity in BCT projects, WLLS events and programs, and to consider future environmental projects for their properties.

WLNSW believe that this family-friendly delivery method may become a preferred model of delivery based on the success of other organisations, such as The Rites of Passage Institute,



that charge a fee of over \$1500 per pair (parent and child) per camp and now thrive from running educational camps and facilitator training. The potential to create a sustainable business model is currently being explored by Melanie and Landcare NSW's Community of Practise lead, Peter Piggot.

## Expected Outcomes

### Target Audience:

- **Local Landholders and their families**
- **Students and young environmental advocates.**
- **Environmental professionals and experts**
- **Local knowledge keepers**
- **General public looking for an educational outback adventure for the family**

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## Programming

Program Components Consist of:

### 1. Guest Speakers and Workshops:

- **Environmental Experts and Local Knowledge Keepers:** Specialists in biodiversity, ecosystem restoration, and sustainable land management will deliver talks on current conservation challenges, successful local projects and opportunities/collaborations to consider with agencies or neighbours.
- **Indigenous Knowledge:** Guest speakers from local Indigenous communities will share traditional ecological knowledge and practices related to land stewardship and conservation.
- **Workshops:** Interactive sessions on habitat restoration, species protection, skill building that creates sustainable environments.

### 2. Children's Landcare Activities:

- **Planting and Habitat Creation:** Children will participate in hands-on Landcare activities, such as planting native species, building habitats for local wildlife, and learning about the importance of pollinators.
- **Eco-Art Projects:** Kids can engage in creative projects using natural materials, creating art pieces that reflect the local ecosystem.
- **Wildlife Exploration:** Guided nature walks to identify native flora and fauna, where kids can learn about biodiversity and animal habitats.

### 3. Local Bush Catering:



- **Sustainable Local Cuisine:** A focus on bush foods and sustainably sourced ingredients, prepared by local chefs. Participants will learn about traditional bush food practices and how they can incorporate them into modern cooking.
  - **Workshops on Foraging:** Participants can join guided walks to learn about edible local plants, sustainable foraging practices, and cooking with native ingredients (depending on the area chosen for the camp).
4. **Sustainability and Conservation Practices:**
- **Eco-Friendly Practices:** The camp will be designed with a minimal environmental footprint, incorporating sustainable practices like waste management, solar energy, and water conservation.
  - **Conservation Projects:** Attendees will be invited to join ongoing local biodiversity conservation initiatives, such as wildlife monitoring or habitat restoration projects.

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### Example ONLY Camp Schedule:

#### DAY ONE – WELCOME BUMP IN 10AM-11AM: Camp Opening, Morning Tea, Orientation and Housekeeping

Introductions to Host, Presenters, Local and Professional Experts, share agenda and treasure hunt/icebreaker activities.

#### DAY ONE – Midday Sessions 11AM-3PM

- Workshop: Option 1 - Butchering Demonstration or Smoking Meats Education
- Workshop: Option 2 – (Kid friendly) – Native Bee & Insect Education House making

**1PM Lunch Served** – *Speakers to provide session over lunch*

- Lunch Speaker 1 - Q&A - Natural Capital/BCT Projects
- Lunch Speaker 2 – Guide to Succession Planning

*Free Time – 3PM – 4PM – Enjoy surrounds – Kids have access to activity stations outside of workshop*

#### 4PM-6PM - Afternoon & Dinner Sessions

- Option 1: Guest Speaker/Workshop/Activity - NCC – River Health
- Option 2: Guest Speaker/Activity/Workshop (kid friendly) – FWLHD Wellbeing in Nature



**6PM Dinner Served:** *Local Bush Catering - Dinner Speaker – Bush Tucker talk around Indigenous ingredients and food culture in Australia*

### 7-9PM - Evening Session - Music and Entertainment

Camp Fire, Live music / bush poetry and Free time

### DAY TWO: Morning Sessions 7AM-10AM

7AM - EARLY MORNING – SESSION - Morning Meditation or Mindfulness Meditation Walk

#### 9AM Breakfast Served:

Family Trivia & Quiz/Raffle Prize/Present Kids craft

### 10AM–12PM - Workshop Sessions (11am morning tea)

- Workshop: Option 1 – RAMPH presentation
- Workshop: Option 2 – Kid friendly activity

### 1PM – 3pm – Lunch, Pack up and Thank You

#### 1PM Lunch Served

THANK YOU and goodbye – Where to next? What events are upcoming? Feedback forms with QR code...

#### Venue:

Far West NPWS has offered free access to National Parks so the camps may be held at a local national park or recreation retreat space that has access to natural biodiversity and potential for hands-on education space. This venue will offer both indoor and outdoor facilities, providing an immersive experience with the natural environment. The camp will have access to all forms of accommodation, from camping to cabins and availability to take caravans and camper trailers.

#### Budget Estimate

**For 20 Adults, 20 Children for a 2 day, 1 night camp:**



1. **Venue & Accommodation:**  
Free use of camping facilities including cabins and homesteads on National Parks.
2. **Travel/Fuel:**  
\$2460 – Minibus hire (\$260 hire plus fuel) plus 50c per km offered to attendees (by request only) capped at \$200 each - **\$2000 estimate only.**
3. **Guest Speakers and Workshop Facilitators:**  
\$5000 - Fees for guest speakers, travel, accommodation and materials.
4. **Children's Landcare Activities and Equipment Hire:**  
\$2000 - Materials for planting, eco-art supplies, and nature walk guides.
5. **Local Bush Catering:**  
\$5,000 - Ingredients, catering staff, travel and food preparation costs.
6. **Marketing and Promotion:**  
BCT additional in-kind support offered - Advertising, promotional materials, and community outreach.
7. **Miscellaneous:**  
\$1,000- First aid, insurance, and contingency funds.

**Total Estimated Budget:** \$15,460

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## Sponsorship and Funding:

Remaining funding from BCT project funds (\$37,000) can be used to either fund two large scale community camps or three smaller camps in three different districts.

For ongoing nature-positive events with our partners across the Western region, we are committed to seeking funds and sponsorship in various forms from government bodies, environmental NGOs, and businesses that have a focus and dedication on sustainable agriculture and community development.

WLNSW has fostered a committed relationship with Far West NSW LLS, NPWS, RFS, LALC, NCC, SDIH, LHD who have each offered to provide education and guest speakers in-kind (please refer to list for acronym meanings on page 2 under *Feedback from Meetings & Sessions*).

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## Expected Outcomes:

1. **Increased Knowledge and Understanding:** Attendees will walk away with a clear understanding for how biodiversity helps to sustain agriculture. Landholders will know





who to contact for a biodiversity credit price estimate, and how to get rangeland rehydration projects started on their properties. Participants will leave the camp with a sounder understanding of biodiversity conservation and more developed practical skills they can apply on the land and share within their community.

2. **Strengthened Relationships and Networks:** Participants will leave with increased understanding of how community camps can help people to connect with each other and with nature. As social creatures, to gather, connect, and make plans to collaborate on long-term conservation initiatives creates a sense of purpose, meaning, and belonging within a community, so improved mental health outcomes from these camps are expected.
3. **Confidence in Self and Community:** Nature-based conversations and stories are more likely to be shared while in nature, with fun and/or educational activities being performed in a natural environment leading to a more immersive learning experience. City based parents are becoming increasingly aware of the need to spend more time in nature – the lure of a *family outback adventure* will draw many to the Far West, especially as the mental health crisis for children and young people continues. Spending time in nature while nurturing relationships is becoming the new ‘cure’ for many mental health issues so these camps will help to demonstrate that getting ‘back to basics’ is needed to slow brain wave cycles and stabilise the nervous system for better holistic health outcomes. According to *‘Building resilience in local communities: The wellbeing benefits of participating in Landcare’* (KPMG 2021 p. xi), “There is a strong correlation between those who report an improvement in their sense of connection to others and to the environment, and improvement in their mental wellbeing.”
4. **Empower Children and Youth:** Children and young people are likely to feel inspired to become environmental stewards and advocates for biodiversity conservation in their future endeavours. These camps will help to reconnect young minds and hearts with the natural world and with their families. Held in isolated regions, camp programs will bring together families from all walks of life, facilitating conversations that help to expand awareness, networks and friendships that may lead to a deeper sense of personal empowerment in being part of the solution to a changing climate.
5. **Increased Data to Inform Future Camps:** WLNSW will have access to current data from our target groups to continue developing a sound nature-based camp program template that can be shared with other Landcare groups. Local Landcare Coordinators will have a clear template to guide camp programs and allow groups to implement conservation conversations and activities best suited to their unique regions.
6. **Nature and Nurture – A Sustainable Business Model:** Ultimately, the camp program template will help Western Landcare and other Landcare groups to continue operating beyond June 2027. Trialling these camps in the Far West is for the benefit of all Landcare groups.



## Conclusion:

The Biodiversity & Conservation Community Camps will be fun, engaging, immersive, family-friendly, educational experiences, blending scientific learning, hands-on activities, creativity and cultural engagement. By integrating guest speakers, local bush catering, and interactive Landcare projects, we aim to cultivate a renewed sense of trust in Western Landcare. We intend to build new connections and create opportunities for landholders and stakeholders to share NSWWL's vision, to feel valued, supported and empowered to move forward with work that both supports biodiversity and sustains agriculture for generations to come.

## Measurement of Success

The first camp will include data capture of attendees, advisory service bookings, Landcare group membership numbers, new groups established meetings held within three months and to measure interest, engagement, and impact before approving any further camps.

We will also have feedback and information to collate a business plan and model for ongoing camps run by WLNSW that can be shared within the Western region and Landcare NSW.

## Recommendation

It is recommended that WLNSW run three camps between May to August - one camp at Mungo National Park (near Wentworth), one at Kinchega National Park (near Broken Hill) and another at Gundabooka National Park (near Bourke).

Once approval is provided by the WLNSW board, the first location will be chosen as a trial site based on the availability of project partners, guest speakers, camp facilitators and WLNSW and LLS staff availability.