Reviving *Eucalyptus ovata* and *E. brookeriana* woodlands: pathways to conservation

WHAT ARE THEY?

Listed as a critically endangered ecological community under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), Tasmanian Forests and Woodlands dominated by black gum or Brookers gum (*Eucalyptus ovata/E. brookeriana*) are a type of eucalypt forest or woodland found only in Tasmania.

Tasmanian woodland dominated by Brookers gum (Source: Huon Valley Council 2019).

Mainly occurring in scattered remnants in lowland and damp sites, including riverine habitats, this ecological community is generally found on low-lying, poorly draining soils that are wet or seasonally waterlogged. These forests and woodlands play a crucial role in maintaining water quantity and quality by regulating the water table and filtering water running off the landscape as it enters waterways, preventing soil erosion and stabilising riverbanks and floodplains.

Tasmanian Forests and Woodlands dominated by black gum or Brookers gum have declined in extent by at least 90 per cent due to historical clearing, and very little remains in good condition, particularly in the Midlands region.

This community offers vital habitat and resources for native plants and animals, including breeding and foraging grounds for over 30 nationally listed threatened species including swift parrots, eastern quolls, eastern-barred bandicoots, and Tasmanian devils. Along waterways, they serve as corridors for native wildlife movement through the landscape, which in turn helps maintain biodiversity and build species resilience.

Tasmanian Forests and Woodlands dominated by black gum or Brookers gum support insect and bird pollinators essential for plant reproduction, and soil-disturbing animals that enhance soil fertility and moderate fuel loads through improved water infiltration, nutrient cycling, and the distribution of fungi and seeds. In addition, woodlands serve as windbreaks, provide shelter for farm stock and crops and mitigate the effects of rising temperatures and increased drought by modifying the microclimate on farm.

Australian Government

NRM North

Midlands Conservation Partnership

Bush Heritage Australia

LANDSCAPE RECOVERY FOUNDATION

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THREATS	IMPACTS	MANAGEMENT ACTION
Land clearance and conversion (e.g. cropping, plantation, irrigated pasture)	• Eliminates vegetation and disturbs seedbank. • Fragmentation and connectivity loss. • Loss of habitat and biodiversity. • Isolated patches are more susceptible to further degradation. • Modification to landscape can disrupt natural water flows. • Clearing of native vegetation can increase dryland salinity.	• Avoid clearing native vegetation containing these species. • If you are planning to convert land that could contain the woodland you must seek advice from the Commonwealth's Environment department (EPBC section). • Retain understory plants and fallen logs where possible. • Create buffer zones around remnant vegetation. • Revegetate surrounding areas and create corridors for wildlife by connecting remnants.
Exotic weeds and feral animals	• Weeds may outcompete native plants for water, nutrients and space. • Feral herbivores, e.g., deer and rabbits, can damage existing vegetation and predate upon regrowth. • Woody weeds lead to further degradation by providing cover for feral animals such as cats, rabbits and deer.	• Develop, and implement long-term management plans for controlling invasive weeds and pests and preventing new introductions and infestations. • Remove highly invasive weeds, and replant or sow local native understorey species. • Implement control measures for feral animals i.e. deer and rabbit culling, to protect regrowth.
Heavy grazing	• Over grazing leads to severe vegetation degradation and hinders regrowth. • Heavy grazing from hard hooves of domestic stock, i.e., cattle, sheep and goats, leads to soil compaction and initiates soil erosion.	• Develop management plans to ensure strategic grazing regimes appropriate for the area, including stock rotation • Fence sites to manage stock access. • Promote native vegetation to improve soil carbon stocks and water retention
Pasture improvement, fertiliser and herbicide application	• Pesticide/herbicide spray drift from crops and pastures can cause disease and dieback in woodlands. • Fertilisers can give exotic species a competitive advantage over natives.	• If using broad scale herbicide application, such as boom spraying, incorporate a buffer zone between application area and remnant vegetation. • Adopt a combination of weed removal techniques, such as spot spraying, manual removal and burning.
Climate change	• Altered fire and flooding regimes. • Decline in tree health due to prolonged drought and heat stress. • Exacerbating proliferation of invasive species and poor regeneration and recruitment of native species.	• Replanting in and around declining woodlands. • Establishing hardy plants and seed sources that will survive in altered environments under a changing climate. • Re-establishing a native understorey which is dense and complex.

Thank you to Isaac Standaloft from Black Gum Conservation Group for contributing to this information.

MORE INFORMATION?

To learn more about how NRM North are improving Midlands biodiversity or to get involved, visit nrmnorth.org.au or contact NRM North at: admin@nrmnorth.org.au or 6333 7777.

For tailored advice on managing threatened vegetation communities, get in contact with Tasmanian Land Conservancy or Bush Heritage Australia at: mcp@tasland.org.au and refer to the additional resources provided below.

Eucalyptus ovata from Black Gum Conservation Group planting (Photo credit: Isaac Standaloft).

Eucalyptus ovata sapling from Black Gum Conservation Group planting (Photo credit: Isaac Standaloft).

FURTHER READING:

Improving Midlands biodiversity: stewardship and restoration (2024) NRM North.

Davidson, N. (2022). Restoration of the Tasmanian Midlands.

Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. (2020). *Tasmanian Black Gum and Brookers Gum Forests and Woodlands: a nationally significant ecological community.* Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

Environmental Challenges (2025) *Bush Heritage Australia.* (Accessed 5 March 2025).

Reviving Tasmania's lowland native grasslands: pathways to conservation (2024) NRM North.

Tasmanian Vegetation Monitoring and Mapping Program & Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania. (2022). *Vegetation Condition Benchmarks version 1 Dry Eucalypt Forest and Woodland.*

Threatened Species Scientific Committee. (2019). Approved Conservation Advice (incorporating listing advice) - Tasmanian Forests and Woodlands dominated by black gum or Brookers gum (Eucalyptus ovata / E. brookeriana). In *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)* (pp. 4–93) [Report].

Townsend, A., Jordan, G., & Woehler, E. (2021). BLACK OR BROOKERS GUM FORESTS AND WOODLANDS, AN IMPORTANT ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITY. In *NRM South* [Report].

https://wildcaretas.org.au/groups/black-gum-conservation-group

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