

Conservation in Action.

The value of private land conservation.



HIGHLIGHTS

“Effort and education need to be placed for a shared belief at least that there are alternative ways that land can be used, and the growth and perpetuation of biodiversity is both an industry and an appropriate use that benefits other land use practices.”

Assoc Professor John Hunter

GLENRAC INC in partnership with Associate Professor John Hunter, University of New England, Armidale NSW

INTRODUCTION

GLENRAC, in partnership with Biodiversity Conservation Trust, has been developing landholder networks to share information and provide support for private land conservation activities. Associate Professor John Hunter kindly provided a case study of his family’s private conservation property experiences.

We currently own seven conservation properties within the Northern Tablelands region of NSW in various forms of conservation covenants, or in the process of submission for covenanting. Being on ground managers of the properties who have various types of neighbours with varying attitudes, we share how we relate to them.

THE ISSUE

The issue relates to attitudes towards conservation lands and the ability to fully implement conservation actions, which can be hampered or even derailed by both neighbours and the local community who do not understand conservation as a goal in and of itself. In many ways, owning conservation land within an agricultural matrix can lead to feeling like one is in a siege situation. Attitudes of the local community can range from bewilderment, disdain, to outright hatred as if the

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presence of a conservation lands is a direct affront or even threat to their values and way of life.

With almost all the properties we own or manage for conservation, direct impacts to the conservation values of the property have occurred due to neighbour opposition to the concept of biodiversity conservation. Instances include personal verbal attacks, at times minor threats, and impacts to the land including cutting of trees for fodder, bulldozing into lands, extensive spray drift causing death of trees and other vegetation, hunting and vandalism. While these extremes are rare, they can occur. This of course is not a universal problem.

There are some communities where conservation concepts are part of the communities' shared belief systems, other particularly more remote locations where for personal safety, communities need to rely on each other and therefore tolerate different ways of living. Effort and education need to be placed for a shared belief at least that there are alternative ways that land can be used, and the growth and perpetuation of biodiversity is both an industry and an appropriate use that benefits other land use practices.

This is a larger social issue and requires both sociological research, education of the ancillary benefits to all, and for the government at all levels to provide unified action to promote conservation and management of biodiversity areas as a legitimate activity.

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THE SOLUTION

This is not a single-issue target based outcome for an individual property but one that affects many properties and owners of conservation lands and their mental and physical health, and whether they can sustain long term activities or simply burn out and leave.

There is no “industry” for private conservation land managers. Landholders in primary production have a multitude of resources and community-based programs and as a ‘legitimate’ business can receive tax advantages for the management of their land. However, conservation land management is still considered, or treated largely as, a voluntary activity and not effectively a real ‘business’ activity.

This also leads to a lack of pathways for intergenerational management. Lacking community understanding and the ability to see biodiversity land management as a legitimate activity to derive income necessarily means that inperpetuity agreements are difficult to manage in the long term with aging ownerships.

Who manages the land properly as owners age? A lack of legitimacy creates both a lack of ability to pass to subsequent generations within a family but also a smaller pool of people who are willing to take on actions that will continue to protect biodiversity properties. Targets should include a raised understanding across the community of the validity of biodiversity land management as a legitimate activity and a necessary goal.

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MOVING FORWARD

The interactions with all neighbours have led to a greater understanding of different perspectives.

There must be a greater level of social research, both of the owners of conservation lands and of the attitudes of different 'cultural' regions within the agricultural landscape: not just the recording of new conservation landowners and promoting the happy face of conservation.

For a longer-term involvement of people within the conservation 'industry' and intergenerational ownership of what is increasingly common in-perpetuity agreements, we need to be planning and looking further down the years, implementing activities that help support owners (and future owners), and to move much of rural society to understanding the benefits of integrated management styles.

This requires sociological and psychological research projects along with the promotion of scientific benefits for all.