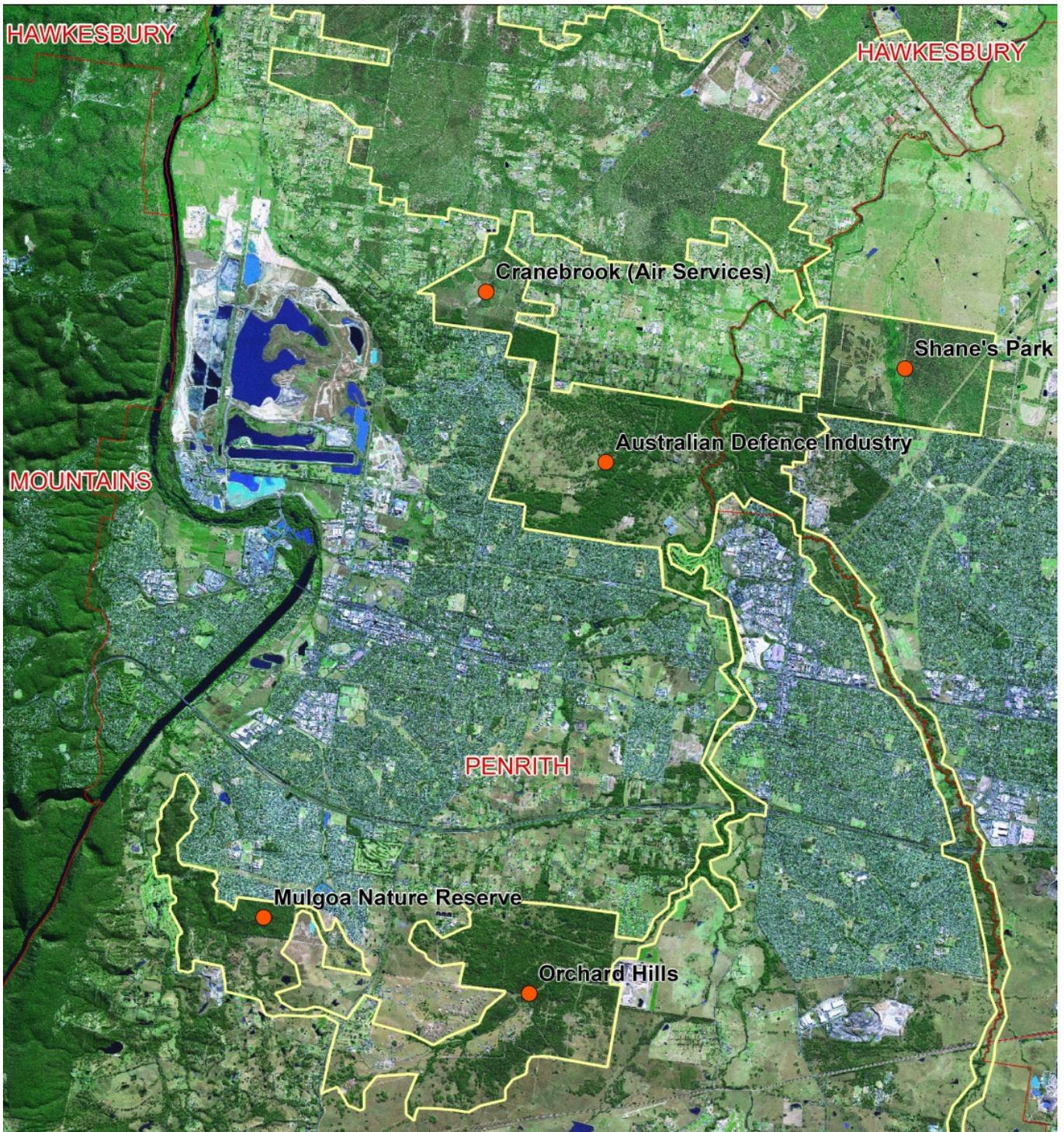


# Cumberland Conservation Corridor

A concept for protecting and managing the remnant Ecological Communities of the Cumberland Plain.

A call for the NSW Government to commit funding and resources towards the urgent establishment of the Cumberland Conservation Corridor



Map incomplete - extends to the North

## Cumberland Conservation Corridor

Over 30kms in length and 10,000 hectares in size. Twice the size of the Western Sydney Parklands. A true conservation outcome.

There is a need in Western Sydney to properly protect and manage the remnant Ecological Communities of the Cumberland Plain.

Whilst all remnants of bushland provide some habitat for flora and fauna, protection of the largest remnants is seen as most important as they provide habitat for a greater diversity of native species.

To maintain a diversity of species it is therefore important that there be connectivity; corridors that link areas of habitat. This allows the migration of species between remnants and safeguards against the chance of localised extinctions should there be a disaster within an isolated remnant. (e.g. clearing of land, fire etc.)

The Cumberland Conservation Corridor concept will see a continuous connection of large bushland remnants stretching from Mulgoa Nature Reserve to Agnes Banks Nature Reserve.

The majority of land needed to create the Corridor is owned by the NSW Government, the Federal Government and the Deerubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council. Some private lands will be needed including the 181 hectare former Air Services Australia site at Cranebrook, owned by a property developer, IFC Capital Ltd.

The creation of the corridor can be seen as an offset to the imminent destruction of Cumberland Plain Ecological Communities within the proposed Growth Centres.

## Acquiring the land for the Corridor

Some land needed to create the corridor will have to be acquired and this can be achieved by utilising funding sources such as the *Conservation Offset Program* which is to be managed by the NSW Governments Growth Centres Commission (GCC). The draft *Conservation Plan* placed on public exhibition by the GCC indicates on page 21 that **\$530 million** will be generated for the purpose of offsetting the loss of vegetation within the Growth Centres and that 75% of that \$530 million, some **\$400 million**, will be used for conservation offsets outside the Growth Centres. This signals that there will be money to acquire sites for the establishment of the corridor.

It is acknowledged that these GCC funds will not be available immediately but will become available over the 30 year lifetime of the Growth Centres development. We cannot wait another decade or more for funding to protect these bushland remnants. What is then needed is for the NSW Government to step in and show its support for the corridor proposal by bankrolling the immediate acquisition of some key corridor sites, such as the former Air

Services Australia site at Cranebrook, which is under imminent threat from urban development. The NSW Government can then be reimbursed by the GCC from the very first lot of collected developer funds.

Private landowners whose land is needed for the corridor should be approached by the GCC on behalf of the NSW Government to work out the best and most economical way to establish the corridor on their land. Options would obviously include the GCC purchasing the land or entering into some type of conservation agreement that pays the landowner to manage their land for conservation. If acquisition is agreed then the owner should be offered a generous price, this may encourage greater participation by other landowners and negate any opposition to the corridor concept.

Many of the sites needed to establish the corridor are owned by the NSW and Federal Governments. They include:

#### NSW Government

- Mulgoa Nature Reserve
- ADI Site Regional Park
- Castlereagh Nature Reserve
- Former Castlereagh Liquid Waste Dump
- John Moroney and Dillwynia Correctional Centres
- Windsor Downs Nature Reserve
- Agnes Banks Nature Reserves
- Possible lands owned by Dept of Lands.
- Land along South and Ropes Creek

#### The Federal Government

- Orchard Hills RAAF/RAN base
- Shanes Park Air Services Australia Site

The fact these lands are already publicly owned means the cost of establishing the corridor can be substantially minimised.

The Federal Government should be encouraged to gift their land to the NSW Government for the Corridor. If they refuse to do so or become obstructionist then it may be necessary to rezone their land for conservation.

Note: the Nth West Growth Centres SEPP zones the entire ASA site at Shanes Park as a conservation area. The Planning Minister did this without consulting with the owner, the Federal Government. This rezoning precedent indicates that land, whilst ownership is being negotiated, can be set aside for conservation through a rezoning by local consent authorities.

As the NSW Government has shown Commonwealth owned land can be rezoned for conservation prohibiting the Federal Government from developing that land.

Note: Of course the Federal Government can override State and Local Governments if it needs to but this would be unwise because large areas of these two sites are Commonwealth Heritage Listed meaning the Federal Environment Minister is obliged to protect them. It would be politically stupid of the Federal Government to oppose the conservation of these sites.

Penrith City Council is amending its Local Environmental Plan at the moment and it too has the power to effectively rezone huge areas of bushland within its LGA for conservation protection. There is nothing stopping Council from rezoning over 1300 hectares of the Orchard Hills RAAF/RAN base for conservation, as this land is needed for the corridor.

If the NSW Government wants to support the corridor proposal then it should be urging Penrith Council, in its LEP process, to rezone as much of the corridor for conservation as possible. This would then make acquiring parts of the corridor land much cheaper. This is what should happen for the former ASA site at Cranebrook. The landowner has a rezoning application before Council at this moment and a conservation rezoning of the whole site by Council would make the site worthless to IFC Capital Ltd, the developer owner. If Council had the will to do so they could get on with determining the rezoning application of IFC Capital and gift a further 181 ha of high conservation land to the people of Western Sydney, not to mention the NSW Government. The NSW Government should then urgently acquire Cranebrook.

The Deerubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council owns several large properties needed for the corridor. The GCC and DEC should negotiate a long term lease arrangement for these lands.

## **History of the Corridor**

The concept of establishing a conservation corridor across a large part of Western Sydney is not new. In 1997 a Penrith City Council Report – *Fauna and Flora Corridors Study, Conserving Biodiversity in the Penrith Local Government Area* – identified many of the same sites as has been proposed here.

This report recommended the creation of the corridor ten years ago as a necessary strategy to ensure the protection of Penrith's biodiversity. Nothing has been done by Penrith Council to raise awareness of the need to formalise the corridor and ensure large parts of Western Sydney's bushland remnants are protected and properly managed in perpetuity.

The NSW Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) is well aware of what is needed to create this corridor, it is obvious. Certain DEC staff has for many years been working on identifying lands within Western Sydney needed as environmental offsets to counter the massive urban development occurring in the Sydney Basin.

The reasons why DEC has not moved to protect more of Western Sydney's bushland remnants are unknown. One can only assume the reasons are a lack of money and a lack of political will. The Growth Centres funding now means there are no excuses not to act.

## Urgent action is needed by the NSW Government

The massive development pressures on Western Sydney's bushland remnants warrant an urgent response from the NSW Government. They must put in place permanent measures to ensure these bush remnants are protected and managed.

NSW Government money is needed to initially establish the Cumberland Conservation Corridor. The NSW Government can be reimbursed by the GCC for land acquisitions once its *Conservation Offset Program* funds come on stream.

What is needed now is political will. The GCC, Department of Planning and DEC should be sitting down and working out how to move this forward. NGO stakeholders should be consulted and included in the process.

Development within the North and South West Growth Centres has been locked in by the NSW Government and will result in the destruction of a large combined area of Cumberland Plain vegetation. The Government is talking of offsetting this huge loss by protecting land outside of the Growth Centres in perpetuity. Such a huge environmental loss must be countered by a huge win and this Cumberland Conservation Corridor should be seen by all, including our political leaders, as a winner.

We should no longer tolerate the trashing of our precious bushland due to a lack of management and resources. It would be ideal if the proposed corridor was put into the management of the DEC and GCC funds went to DEC for management costs. Many of the corridor sites should be purchased by the NSW Government and put into DEC ownership to form part of the NSW Reserves System.

## References

[http://www.gcc.nsw.gov.au/media/5332/western%20sydney%20growth%20centres%20conservation%20plan\\_final\\_e\\_xib%E2%80%A6.pdf](http://www.gcc.nsw.gov.au/media/5332/western%20sydney%20growth%20centres%20conservation%20plan_final_e_xib%E2%80%A6.pdf)

<http://www.penrithcity.nsw.gov.au/uploadedFiles/Website/Environment/LEPs/draftflorafaunaLEP1999map1.pdf>



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