Away from conflict: a new paradigm for industry, regional communities, environmental organisations and Traditional Owners to look after the Great Western Woodlands

Dr Alexander Watson, Great Western Woodlands Program Director
Outline

• Great Western Woodlands

• Mining in GWW

• A way forward?
16 million hectares of a relatively untouched bush
The largest area of intact habitat of any type remaining in southern Australia
We believe this is the largest remaining temperate woodland...

Photographer - Barbara Madden
...and Mediterranean shrubland on Earth.
From Leslie et al. 2007
In June, 2008, public launch of the report “The Extraordinary Nature of The Great Western Woodlands”.

The study collated data from the Australian Federal Government, Western Australian Herbarium, Western Australian Museum, DEC and BirdsAustralia.

- Free copies are available from www.gww.net.au
Of Australia’s 23 ‘vegetation groups’, 14 are found in the Woodlands!
3500 plant taxa.

(20% of Australia’s plant species in 2% of Australia’s land area)
REPTILE HOTSPOT

• 49 mammal sp.

• 138 reptile sp.

• 14 frog sp.

• 215 bird sp.
The report also identified key threats
Large, intense FIRE is a MAJOR threat

Over the last 36 years, 4.5 million hectares burnt

Over the last 7 years, 2.5 million hectares burnt
Weeds and feral animals
Biggest threat is a lack of a consistent management plan across the region.
Mining in GWW

YILGARN CRATON

GREAT WESTERN WOODLANDS
CRATON
How do we manage this landscape?
Most conservation measures (e.g., reserve system, rehabilitation and corridors) occur in heavily disturbed landscapes.
The Great Western Woodlands offer the unique opportunity to study and manage biodiversity within an intact landscape.
The Wilderness Council has identified some important ecological processes that need to be managed across tenures.
Strongly – Interactive Species

- Major predators (such as Western Quoll)
- Dispersive species (such as Honeyeaters and Pigeons)
- Species that change the dynamics or structure of habitats (such as some termites), and,
- Species that provide resources for many species, particularly at times when few other resources are available (such as flowering *Eromophila* species and the fruit of *Exocarpos*).
Hydro-Ecology — the relationships between water (both surface and ground water), vegetation, wildlife, and landform at local and regional scales.
WildCountry Science Council

“to manage biodiversity across GWW, and the rest of Australia, we need to manage ecological processes (or ecological ‘drivers’) across land tenures”
Invert the paradigm:

- Manage the threats to biodiversity across the entire landscape and have nodes of human activity.

Instead of:

- We manage this area for conservation, and you manage that area for ‘X’ (e.g., mining) = a recipe for ecological disaster!
Our message has been
“the biodiversity in GWW can only be conserved by working together”

- Local, State and Federal Governments
- Traditional Owners
- Mining Companies
- Pastoralists
- All Industries associated with tourism
- Local communities
- Beekeepers
- 4wd drive clubs

- And everybody else that has an interest in the area!
How?

• A **new regional plan** is needed (developed by all stakeholders, with the focus on across tenure management).

• This should include **legislation** over the entire area given International significance of the region (e.g., Cape York Heritage Act, GBR).

• Establish a **Trust Fund** – mining companies and NGOs co-investing in regional management.

• Establish an **Indigenous Ranger Program** for greater on-ground management of threats.
Close working relationship with the Traditional Owners
Initial discussions with mining companies have been very positive:
- Want greater certainty
- Better investment of environmental expenditure
Currently, State Government is underway to develop a plan to spend $3.9 million over four years.
Thanks from the GWW COLLABORATION

gondwana link