

THE ROAD TO CONSERVING WOODLANDS: RE-AFFIRMING SOME PAST PRESCRIPTIONS AND DEVELOPING THE NEW

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1. Protect the best patches, by minimising current threats to key assets.
2. Expand woodland patches, by exploiting site resilience and promoting natural regeneration.
3. Develop suitable woodland disturbance regimes, such as fire, grazing, thinning, or other management interventions.
4. 'Plug the holes' by restoring degraded patches and then monitoring the outcomes.
5. Implement conservation programs that are congruent with farm operations, economics and infrastructure.
6. Ensure conservation programs are tied to long-term binding covenants.
7. Improve and maintain communication strategies in regards to the 'so what' question about woodlands.

Introduction

For over 10 years I have worked principally on threatened and endangered woodlands in southern NSW (see map on next page), dominated by Yellow Box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*), Grey Box (*E. microcarpa*), White Box (*E. albens*), and co-dominates of White Cypress-pine (*Callitris glaucophylla*), Blakelyi's and River Red-Gums (*E. blakelyi* and *E. camaldulensis*). My research has focused on (1) assessing the outcomes of fencing grassy woodlands on private land – a popular intervention to arrest woodland decline; and (2) investigating the impacts of past and present disturbance regimes on roadside vegetation, and influences on plant recruitment processes. From this research, I have learnt how past land-use history influences present-day woodland vegetation structures and compositions (Spooner and Lunt 2004; Spooner 2005), and how management actions such as grazing can result in both positive and negative outcomes (Spooner *et al.* 2002; Spooner and Briggs 2008), due to often irreversible changes to ecosystem conditions (Lunt and Spooner 2005; Spooner and Allcock 2006). The following seven points encompass the major lessons I have learnt from my work and experiences in southern NSW.