

THE VALUE OF ROADSIDE RESERVES FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

In 1994 the Corowa Shire Council had a Roadside Vegetation Survey conducted. This survey recognised the significance of public roadsides for conservation of native vegetation.

"The lack of designated flora reserves within the Shire and the poor conservation status of vegetation on private land stresses the importance of retaining remnants on roadsides and stock reserves in as good a condition as possible. Once eliminated or badly degraded they can never be replaced in their original form" (Central Murray Roadside Vegetation Survey 1994; page 27). This survey classified roadsides into high, medium and low conservation categories.

Low conservation – CV1 – Trees well spaced, with little or no regeneration or shrub understorey.

Medium conservation – CV2 – Trees more closely spaced, with some regeneration and/or a sparse native shrub understorey.

High conservation – CV3 – Trees closely spaced with good regeneration and/or a dense understorey of native shrubs.

The Corowa Shire Council has since undertaken a number of actions to help raise awareness of the value of our roadside vegetation to the community including erection of "Significant Roadside Environment Area" signs and training of Council road workers. The Council has also updated its policy on collection of firewood from public roadsides.

A study by the CSIRO indicates that only 5% of native vegetation remains in the sheep/wheat belts of NSW, of which we are a part. Most of this vegetation remains beside roads on public land. The small amount of native vegetation remaining is in a severe state of decline. One of the pressures placed upon the remaining vegetation is firewood collection. It is estimated that six million tonnes of firewood and fuel wood are being consumed in Australia every year, almost as much as wood-chipping. The areas mainly being sourced are the wheat and cotton belts of NSW. The effects of continuous firewood removal on the structure of the remaining vegetation is very similar to clear-felling (Dr. Traill, 2000: K Maxwell, 2000).

These natural areas provide important habitat for animals and plants, help maintain biological diversity, and may provide wildlife corridors. Roadside vegetation in many cases is the last remaining examples of what the country once looked like (Breckwoldt 1990) as they are the only places where the natural vegetation types still persist. Vegetation can assist in preventing wind and water erosion and rising water tables. These areas provide valuable native seed collection sites. Within the Corowa Shire approximately 95% of the native seed collection for the purpose of re-vegetation projects was collected from road reserves.

Road reserves in the Shire support such threatened species as the Grey Crowned Bbler, Apostle Bird, Superb Parrot and gliders. Reptiles, small mammals and the majority of our variety of plant species occur on roadsides. Regeneration of native plants is occurring on a number of Shire roadsides.

Degradation to roadside vegetation that occurs with removal or large quantities of timber for firewood has the potential to decimate natural ecosystems and communities that may never be recovered.

The Corowa Shire has declared that firewood collection from high and medium conservation roadsides is no longer permitted. These areas are marked on the associated map. Removal of firewood is permitted on low conservation roadsides or those areas not marked as being of high or medium value. A permit must be obtained from the Corowa Shire Council before any collection of firewood from roadsides is undertaken. Anyone discovered removing firewood without a permit is subject to legal action.

Standing timber such as dead trees provided important hollows for nesting sites and are not permitted to be removed from any roadside within the Corowa Shire. Fallen timber is permitted to be removed, with a permit from low conservation roadsides.

Please respect the importance of roadside vegetation in supporting an amazing diversity of native plants and animals by not collecting firewood from these areas.