

South Coast bushfire recovery funding boost a boon for local wildlife

Wildlife and communities on the NSW South Coast will benefit from more than half a million dollars of funding over the next three years for projects to heal and regenerate the region following the devastating 2019-2020 bushfires.

Local Eurobodalla environment group, Coastwatchers, will be leading the effort through a new partnership with large-scale conservation initiative, the Great Eastern Ranges (GER).

Funding is being provided through GER's grant from the Australian and NSW government's Bushfire Local Economic Recovery Fund and a partnership with the World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia.

"With the focus mainly on northern NSW and Queensland where the bushfires first started, the South Coast got largely overlooked, yet it was one of the areas that was the most severely impacted," says Keith Joliffe from Coastwatchers.

"So the funding that is coming through the Great Eastern Ranges is particularly valuable, because it means we can roll out a number of activities to help our region recover from the bushfires, and build the resilience of our wildlife and bush."



Members of an EcoCrew planting trees and shrubs at one of several properties on the NSW South Coast where habitat is being restored and reconnected for local wildlife. Photo © WWF-Australia / Sii Studio

Projects have been specially crafted to complement and build-on existing conservation efforts in the region. These include:

- Restoration of habitat on burnt and unburnt private properties such as the planting of trees and shrubs, traditional burning to manage weeds, and the installation of nest boxes to replace lost trees hollows.

- The creation of wildlife corridors to help local animals to recover and reestablish themselves in the region. This includes the South Coast’s dwindling koala population which is sliding towards local extinction.
- Engaging landholders to record the animals and plants that share their land to help inform conservation priorities and needs.
- Surveys of spotted-tailed quolls and Congo’s threatened greater glider population.
- Encouraging landholders to get involved in Land for Wildlife to help protect important habitat.

A project officer has been employed to oversee the work with additional employment opportunities being created through the engagement of locals in bushfire recovery efforts, including Batemans Bay Local Aboriginal Lands Council rangers and EcoCrews – a social enterprise of Campbell Page funded by the Australian and NSW government’s Bushfire Local Economic Recovery Fund which provides eco-friendly jobs and training for young locals.

Gary Howling, CEO of the Great Eastern Ranges, says that the South Coast was identified as a priority due to the significant impact of the bushfires and the exceptional natural values of the region.

“The work that Coastwatchers is leading on the South Coast alongside many other local groups will support the recovery of local wildlife, restore and reconnect vital habitat and build the resilience of this priority landscape in the face of future climate disasters.”

“By bringing lots of smaller efforts together in this coordinated and strategic way, it has a ripple effect that creates impact at the whole-of-landscape scale,” says Gary.

Other local groups working with Coastwatchers include the Eurobodalla Shire Council, South East Local Land Services and Wollongong University’s ‘Team Quoll’.



WWF-Australia’s Tim Cronin and CEO of Great Eastern Ranges Gary Howling with Vanessa Finlay on her property near Moruya. Photo © WWF-Australia / Sii Studio