

Bushcare / Dunecare / Parkcare Policy.

Adoption Date:	11/08/2009
Amendment Date:	20/09/2022, 28/10/2025
Minute Number:	MIN09.1049, MIN18.518, MIN22.645, MIN25.564
Next Review Date:	15/01/2029
Related Legislation:	Work, Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW) Local Government Act 1993 (NSW) Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 (NSW) Biosecurity Act 2015 (NSW) Biosecurity Regulations 2017 (NSW)
	Coastal Management Act 2016 (NSW) Foreshore Reserves Policy (SCC) Crown Land Management Act 2016
Associated Policies/Documents:	Bushcare/Dunecare/Parkcare Procedures (SCC) Plan of Management – Generic Community Land – Parks – 2001 (SCC)

	Plan of Management – Generic Community Land - Natural Areas – 2016 (SCC)
	Coastal Management Program (CMP) for the Shoalhaven Open Coast and Jervis Bay – 2024 (SCC), and future Gazetted CMPs
Directorate:	City Services
Responsible Owner:	Manager - Open Spaces and Recreation
Record Number:	POL24/109

Contents

1.	Policy Purpose	1
	Objectives	
2.1.	Policy Statement	1
3.	Definitions	2
	Roles and responsibilities	
	Implementation	
5 .	Related Legislation, Policies or Procedures	6
6.	Risk Assessment	7
7.	Data and Reporting	7
8.	Monitoring and Review	7
9.	Ownership and Approval	8
	Public Policy	

1. Policy Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to describe the vision, aims and objectives of the Natural Area Volunteer (Bushcare, Dunecare, etc) and Parkcare programs and to describe the roles and responsibilities of Council, staff and the volunteers involved.

2. Objectives

2.1. Policy Statement

The Shoalhaven Local Government Area (LGA) includes landscapes of outstanding natural, cultural, aesthetic, social and economic value. Council is responsible for around 1200 public reserves that are classified as Community Land under the *Local Government* (LG) *Act 1993* (NSW). These reserves include both Council-owned and Council-managed Crown Land. Over 250 are categorised as Natural Areas, and over 500 are categorised as Parks. The management of these lands is undertaken in accordance with State Government legislation.

Shoalhaven City Council's vision is that community members are engaged in partnership with Council in conserving, maintaining and increasing the resilience of Natural Areas and parklands. This includes biodiversity conservation, ecosystem function, and social and cultural heritage – for their intrinsic values, as well as supporting liveable communities for the benefit of current and future generations.

The Shoalhaven community has conveyed to Council the high importance it places on the values of public reserves and the desire to build community connection whilst participating in conserving activities and caring for local environments.

Accordingly, Bushcare, Dunecare and Parkcare meet the following key priorities of the Shoalhaven Community Strategic Plan 2032:

- 1.3 Support community wellbeing through fostering active and healthy communities
- 2.3 Protect the natural environment and enhance sustainability.

Natural Area Volunteers (Bushcare, Dunecare, etc)

The Natural Area Volunteer (NAV) program is about volunteer participation in the regeneration, protection and enhancement of Natural Areas in public ownership.

Natural Areas include bushland, wetland, escarpment, watercourse and foreshore – areas of high conservation value that have a high likelihood of occurrence for threatened biodiversity. Natural Areas also have significance for their Aboriginal cultural heritage and the social heritage of the community. As such, they are critical elements of the natural and scenic values, which define the character of the Shoalhaven LGA.

The program is a key mechanism for fostering community connection to, and caring for, the local environment. Bushcare is a collaborative approach between Council and volunteers in delivering the management, restoration and regeneration of Natural Areas. This helps foster a greater sense of stewardship to fulfil the core objectives for the management of Natural Areas.

Natural Area volunteers may become involved in a variety of activities including bush regeneration, weed control, pest plant and animal control, stormwater control, track and trail

construction and maintenance, flora and fauna surveys, public and school education, site assessment and environmental monitoring. The program includes activities across a variety of natural habitat types and includes 'Dunecare' and other types of 'care' groups (see definition below).

Parkcare

Parkcare supports volunteer participation in the repair, protection and enhancement of parks in public ownership. The Parkcare program provides an opportunity for members of the community to participate in the maintenance, repair, protection and enhancement of these open spaces for which the objectives are 'to encourage, promote and facilitate recreational, cultural, social and educational pastimes and activities', and to 'provide for passive recreational activities or pastimes and for the casual playing of games' (LG Act).

Parkcare volunteers can participate in a variety of activities within designated parks including grass maintenance, landscape construction and maintenance, weed control, stormwater control, track and trail construction and maintenance, flora and fauna surveys, public education, site assessment and environmental monitoring.

3. Definitions

Term	Meaning
Bushcare	Traditional name for volunteers involved in the management of Natural Areas (defined below). Most Natural Area Volunteers (defined below) work in groups called 'Bushcare' groups.
Bushcare Coordinator	An appropriately qualified Council staff member who is employed to coordinate the Shoalhaven Bushcare Program.
Bushcare Group	A formal group of volunteers undertaking Bushcare as per the above definition.
Bushcare/Parkcare Project	A project that is delivered, at least in part, by a Bushcare or Parkcare Group or combination of groups.
Council	Shoalhaven City Council.
Council Land	Land that is either owned by Council; or Crown Land for which Council is the Trust Manager or has care, control, and management responsibility.
Dunecare	Traditional name for volunteers involved in the management of dunes – generally within land categorised as Natural Area. (defined below).

Term	Meaning
Group Action Plan	A plan developed jointly between the Council and the Bushcare/Parkcare group which clearly outlines, amongst other information, the group's goals and activities for each Bushcare site. These are not reserve management plans, instead providing approved actions that the volunteers are willing to work on. Each action plan must not conflict with any other plans or strategies prepared for the site or surrounding areas, such as specific or generic plans of management, coastal zone management plans and programs, or applicable policies. If any potential conflict arises, these higher-level plans, programs or policies have precedence.
Natural Area	Public land classified as Community Land categorised as a Natural Area in accordance with section 36 of the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i> (NSW), managed to the objectives given in section 36E of the Act; or other land areas mapped under Council's Asset Custodian Model to be managed as a Natural Area.
Natural Area Volunteers	The involvement of volunteers in the management of Natural Areas as defined below. The term includes volunteer groups such as Bushcare, Dunecare, school groups, rubbish clean-up groups and the like.
Natural Areas Volunteers Group	An advisory group on all matters relating to the future directions of the Bushcare program and this policy, maintaining an active dialogue with the Bushcare community in accordance with the group's Terms of Reference.
Park	Public land classified as Community Land categorised as a Park in accordance with section 36G of the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i> (NSW), managed to the objectives given in section 36G of the Act; or other land areas mapped under Council's Asset Custodian Model to be managed as a Park.
Parkcare	The involvement of volunteers in the management of Park areas, as defined above. The term Parkcare does not include volunteer involvement or management of land located in or around roads, such as that done by 'Adopt a Road' groups, except for the areas of unused roads where these are managed as parkland and are included in an approved Parkcare group action plan. The term Parkcare does not include maintaining any sports equipment/areas in a Park.
Parkcare Coordinator	An appropriately qualified council staff member who is employed to coordinate the Shoalhaven Parkcare Program.
Parkcare Group	A formal group of volunteers undertaking Parkcare as per the above definition.

Term	Meaning
Site Risk Assessment	An assessment of the Work, Health and Safety hazards and risks associated with each Bushcare/Parkcare Group's site and the control measures to be implemented to reduce the risk associated with the identified hazards.
WHS	Work, Health and Safety
Volunteer	A person who is approved to work with Bushcare/Parkcare for no renumeration.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1. Provisions

The mutual aims of the Natural Area Volunteer and Parkcare programs are:

- 1. Achievement of ecologically sustainable management of the natural bushland areas, parks and reserves within the LGA through active engagement with the community.
- 2. Community use of parks and Natural Areas that provide enhanced positive experiences.
- 3. The capacity of the community to engage in the management of their local parks and Natural Areas is enhanced and maintained.
- 4. Recognition and protection of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural heritage of parks and Natural Areas are accepted by the community.

Further to these mutual aims, the specific aims for the Natural Area Volunteer program are:

- 1. Conservation of biodiversity and maintenance of ecosystem function in respect of land categorised as Natural Areas.
- 2. The restoration and regeneration of Natural Areas in accordance with accepted best practice bush regeneration techniques.
- 3. Public awareness, appreciation and shared vigilance of the values of Natural Areas as public land is demonstrated by community support and measurable improvement in their condition.

NAV/Parkcare Objectives:

- The biodiversity, ecosystem function and connectivity, water quality and resilience, of NAV/Parkcare sites across the LGA are maintained, protected and regenerated using local native plants.
- 2. The conservation of threatened biodiversity and locally endemic flora and fauna species is to be prioritised.
- 3. Adopted Plans of Management for Community Land will be implemented in partnership between Council, the Natural Area Volunteers Group for Bushcare, and individual NAV/Parkcare groups.
- 4. Aboriginal cultural heritage is respected, protected and maintained in consultation with Council's Aboriginal Advisory Committee, Local Aboriginal Land Councils and

traditional elders and in accordance with due diligence provisions for Aboriginal Places and Aboriginal Objects.

- 5. The cultural, social and aesthetic values of the community are respected.
- 6. The understanding of the natural and cultural values of local environments and the benefits of the NAV and Parkcare Programs are fostered and enhanced by the community.
- 7. The NAV and Parkcare programs are continuously improved to be equitable, apolitical and inclusive, with a high level of collaboration between stakeholders (e.g., Council, Natural Area Volunteers Group and volunteers).
- 8. The health and wellbeing of all volunteers, staff, contractors and the public are maintained in accordance with the *Work, Health and Safety Act 2011* (NSW).
- 9. The awareness of the NAV and Parkcare programs throughout the community is increased, and the recruitment and retention of volunteers is prioritised.
- 10. There is high level of awareness, collaboration and cooperation with resource management and community organisations, and other environmental volunteer groups within the Shoalhaven LGA such as Landcare and Shoalhaven Riverwatch.
- 11. The management of the NAV and Parkcare programs is conducted in an effective, efficient and accountable manner.

NAV/Parkcare Group Action Plans

Council will promote and implement the aims and objectives of this policy through the establishment of Bushcare, Dunecare and Parkcare groups, in accordance with Council requirements, including approved Bushcare, Dunecare and Parkcare Group Action Plans.

Bushcare, Dunecare and Parkcare Group Action Plans outline the goals of each group, the location of work sites and the required activities.

Bushcare, Dunecare and Parkcare volunteers will be involved in the development of group action plans. In the case of Bushcare Group Action Plans, these may be reviewed by the Natural Area Volunteers Group prior to approval by Council staff, where additional review is sought.

Work carried out by a Bushcare/Dunecare/Parkcare group must be carried out in accordance with a Group Action Plan and the Bushcare/Dunecare/Parkcare Procedures unless written approval from the asset custodian is obtained, for a one-off project.

Bushcare/Dunecare/Parkcare Group Action Plans must not conflict with any other plans or strategies prepared for the site or surrounding areas including:

- Reserve plans of management;
- Coastal Management Programs; and
- Generic policies and plans.

The action plans are a mechanism for delivering those components of generic or specific plans of management for reserves under S36 Local Government Act 1993, where they are practical and safe for volunteers to implement and where there is willingness to do so. If there

is any potential conflict between a Bushcare/Dunecare/Parkcare Action Plan and any other plan, Council's Bushcare Coordinator or Parkcare Coordinator must be notified immediately.

4.2. Implementation

Roles and Responsibilities

The following roles and responsibilities apply for the key stakeholders involved in the Natural Area Volunteer and Parkcare programs.

The Natural Area Volunteers Group:

This is an advisory group on all matters relating to the future directions of this policy, maintaining an active dialogue with the Bushcare and Dunecare community in accordance with the Terms of Reference for this advisory group.

Council:

The City Services Directorate has responsibility for implementation of these programs.

Council staff will be responsible for the overall management of the programs including program coordination, ensuring the management of work, health and safety hazards, training of staff and volunteers, providing operational support to volunteers, completion of group action plans, and insurance requirements are met.

Volunteers' Roles and Responsibilities

Bushcare/Dunecare/Parkcare volunteers must be registered and inducted as volunteers by Council and work in accordance with this policy and relevant Council procedures. Volunteers must work in accordance with safety and behavioural requirements described within Council's induction process.

Procedures

Procedures for the Bushcare, Dunecare and Parkcare programs are documented separately. Checklists will be developed as part of these procedures and used where possible to assist with implementation of this policy.

Procedures will include those for monitoring and evaluating the Bushcare, Dunecare and Parkcare programs. Results of monitoring and evaluation will be reported in relation to the programs' aims listed in Section 3. Indicators to be measured will include: the economic contribution of volunteers; the number of volunteers; and the area of land where management is assisted by the volunteers.

5. Related Legislation, Policies or Procedures

- Work, Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)
- Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)
- Plan of Management Generic Community Land Parks 2001 (SCC)
- Plan of Management Generic Community Land Natural Areas 2016 (SCC)
- Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 (NSW)
- Coastal Management Act 2016 (NSW)

- Biosecurity Act 2015 (NSW)
- Biosecurity Regulations 2017 (NSW)

•

- Coastal Management Program (CMP) for the Shoalhaven Open Coast and Jervis Bay
 2024 (SCC), and future Gazetted CMPs
- Bushcare/Parkcare Procedures (SCC)
- Foreshore Reserves Policy (SCC)
- Crown Land Management Act 2016

•

6. Risk Assessment

The safety of volunteers is a key risk that must be managed. Bushcare/Dunecare/Parkcare Volunteers complete an online induction, which includes relevant WHS requirements. Each volunteer group, in consultation with Council staff complete a Site Safety Plan and Operation Risk Assessment before commencing any work, which is then also communicated at their working bees as part of their risk assessment. Implementation of this policy and the Bushcare/Dunecare/Parkcare Procedures provides management of cultural, social and political risks. These primarily relate to the implementation of unauthorised and/or inappropriate works by volunteers. The provision of adequate oversight and supervision by Council staff is also critical to the risk management of these volunteer groups.

7. Data and Reporting

Bushcare/Dunecare/Parkcare Site Record Sheets are filled in by the volunteer Group Coordinators and returned to Council regularly. The data on of volunteer hours and activity is then recorded in the relevant volunteer program database. These data are used to help inform:

- the review of Bushcare/Dunecare/Parkcare Group Action Plans
- to report on the volunteer effort,
- the value of the Natural Area Volunteer and Parkcare Programs to Council, and
- Natural Areas Volunteers Group meetings.

Council's corporate reporting is completed quarterly, primarily focussed upon the review of group action plans. Other measures are maintained on a continuous basis and reported as required.

8. Monitoring and Review

This policy and related procedures will be reviewed within the term of every new Council, or earlier if circumstances change to warrant a review.

9. Ownership and Approval

9.1. Public Policy

Responsibility	Responsible Owner
Directorate	City Services – Open Spaces and Recreation
Endorsement	Not applicable
Approval/Adoption	Council