

Bushcare / Parkcare Policy

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to describe the vision, aims and objectives of Bushcare and Parkcare and to describe the roles and responsibilities of Council, staff and the volunteers involved in these two programs.

2. Statement

The Shoalhaven Local Government Area (LGA) possesses landscapes of outstanding natural, cultural, aesthetic, social and economic value. Council is responsible for more than 700 public reserves that are classified as Community Land under the *Local Government (LG) Act 1993* (NSW). Such Council-owned and Council-managed Crown Land includes 243 reserves categorised as Natural Area, with a total area of 1754 ha, and over 500 reserves designated for passive recreation (parkland). 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, including biodiversity conservation and 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 to participate in conserving and caring for local environments.

Accordingly, Bushcare 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.

Bushcare

Bushcare is a program 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 Bushcare 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.

Bushcare 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.

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.

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. Provisions

The mutual aims of the Bushcare 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 Bushcare 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.

Bushcare/Parkcare Objectives:

1. The biodiversity, ecosystem function and connectivity, water quality and resilience, of Bushcare/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 and individual Bushcare/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 Bushcare and Parkcare Programs are fostered and enhanced by the community.
7. The Bushcare 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 Bushcare 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 Bushcare and Parkcare programs is conducted in an effective, efficient and accountable manner.

Bushcare/Parkcare Group Action Plans

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

Bushcare/Parkcare Group Action Plans outline the goals of each Bushcare/Parkcare group and the sequence by which they will be achieved. The location of work sites and the required activities will be detailed. Timeframes for activities will be documented.

Bushcare 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, where additional review is sought.

Work carried out by a Bushcare/Parkcare group must be carried out in accordance with a Bushcare/Parkcare Group Action Plan and the Bushcare/Parkcare Procedures.

Bushcare/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.
- Estuary management plans; and
- Generic policies and plans.

The action plans are a mechanism for delivering those components of generic or specific plans of management for reserves (s36 LG Act 1993), whereby 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/Parkcare Action Plan and any other plan, Council's Bushcare Coordinator or Parkcare Coordinator must be notified immediately.

4. Implementation

Roles and Responsibilities

The following roles and responsibilities apply for the key stakeholders involved in the Bushcare 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 community in accordance with the Terms of Reference for this advisory group.

Council will consider the need for a Parkcare representative group if required.

Council:

The City Development Directorate has responsibility for implementation of the policy for the Bushcare program. The City Services Directorate has responsibility for the Parkcare program.

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/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 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 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. Review

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