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**CONSERVING THREATENED ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES IN THE
AGRICULTURAL AREAS OF SOUTH-WEST WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**Progress Report
to Environment Australia
and the Department of Conservation and Land Management
(W.A)**

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by

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1.0 Introduction

The research and support activities described in this report are part of a larger project coordinated by the WA Threatened Species and Communities Unit (WATSCU) of the Department of Conservation and Land Management and funded by the Natural Heritage Trust. This larger project, *Conserving Threatened Ecological Communities (TECs) in Agricultural Areas of South-West Western Australia* aims to identify and develop management strategies for threatened ecological communities (TECs) in the WA Wheatbelt. It is planned to run for 3 years, from February 1998 to December 2000. Murdoch University's objectives and the subject of this report are to:

- (1) assist CALM in liaison and distributing information about the TEC Project;
- (2) determine the information and broader management needs of landholders so this knowledge can be used in developing recovery plans and strategies; and
- (3) at the completion of the project, assess the effectiveness of liaison with TEC landholders as judged through changes in their knowledge, actions undertaken by them and improvement in the status of TECs.

The milestones to be achieved by December 1999 for which Murdoch University is either solely responsible or jointly responsible with CALM include:

- 40 landholders interviewed (sole responsibility)
- liaison established with 6 LCDCs (jointly with CALM)
- 1 field day held (jointly with CALM)
- at least 8 newsletters/articles published (jointly with CALM)

The Murdoch University tasks are being undertaken by a research officer working part time at 0.6.

2.0 Work Program 1999

The work program for the first half of 1999 consisted of the following tasks:

- Complete remaining Central wheatbelt landholder mail questionnaires and personal interviews left over from 1998;
- Enter questionnaire and interview data into both quantitative and qualitative databases (NUD*IST and Excel);
- Begin analysis of all Central wheatbelt data;
- Review and amend as necessary existing landholder survey instruments (i.e. landholder mail questionnaires and personal interview questions);
- Prepare abstract and paper for presentation at State Landcare Conference to be held in September 1999; and
- Attend a field day(s) at the Wagin Woollorama.

2.1 Landholder Surveys - Central Wheatbelt

The major work component for the year to date has been the completion of the Central wheatbelt landholder surveys, i.e data collection, processing and analysing.

2.1.1 Data Collection

A total of 6 Central wheatbelt landholder mail questionnaires and personal interviews were left outstanding from 1998. All of the questionnaires were completed by and interviews conducted with landholders by the beginning of May.

2.1.2 Data Processing

The majority of the mail questionnaires had been entered into an Excel database towards the end of 1998, however the outstanding questionnaires and all of the personal interviews remained to be entered. The Excel database was updated with the 1999 mail questionnaires, while the personal interview tapes have begun to be transcribed. At the

time of writing this report 8 of the TEC and 5 of the non-TEC (used for comparison with the TECs for objective 3 above) interviews have been transcribed and entered into the qualitative database. A large part of the progress report period was spent preparing the qualitative database using a software package known as NUD*IST (non-numerical unstructured data, indexing searching and theorising). The remaining interviews will be transcribed in the coming weeks for inclusion in the qualitative database.

2.1.3 Data Analysis

Analysis of the personal interviews transcribed thus far began in early May using NUD*IST and is expected to be completed by September. The mail questionnaires collected this year will be added to last year's analysis of questionnaires for inclusion in the 1999 end of year interim report.

3.0 Revise Existing Survey Instruments

Both the mail questionnaires and personal interview questions have undergone and will continue to undergo constant revision to improve them where necessary. Such revision will of course be conducted with the view to ensuring standardisation of results over the life of the project.

4.0 Publications

Two publications were produced in the first half of 1999, one for WATSNU, the Newsletter of the Western Australian Threatened Species and Communities Unit detailing the progress of the new research assistant since joining the project in February of this year. The second publication was an abstract and paper for the State Landcare Conference to be held in Esperance in September discussing this project.

5.0 Field Days

In early March the research officer attended the Wagin Woollorama for three days with the CALM ecologist attached to the project, both of whom staffed a display promoting the project. This time was used to familiarise the research officer with the project and those involved in similar endeavours in the wheatbelt. It also provided an opportunity for a number of shorter questionnaires to be filled out by attendees to the field day who passed the display. Unfortunately space restrictions reduced the number of participants willing to fill out the questionnaire.

6.0 Work Program for the Remainder of 1999

The remainder of 1999 will be devoted to the completion of the analysis of Central wheatbelt data, attending the State Landcare Conference in September, as well as conducting all 20 of the Northern wheatbelt landholder surveys and beginning the associated analyses. Initially both the Northern and Southern wheatbelt landholder surveys were to be conducted in 1999, however the time taken to identify TECs in the Southern wheatbelt has meant this task will be delayed until early 2000.