

RESEARCH

FITZGERALD BIOSPHERE RESERVE - REMNANT VEGETATION PROJECT

by Chris Robinson

*Do you live near The Fitz?
Do you know about this project?*

THE Fitzgerald Biosphere Reserve is one of a network of reserves around the globe, established under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program to conserve the world's biodiversity in balance or harmony with expanding human populations and increasing consumption of resources. A Biosphere Reserve should be a working example of how human activity (such as farming) and nature conservation can continue indefinitely in a sustainable manner.

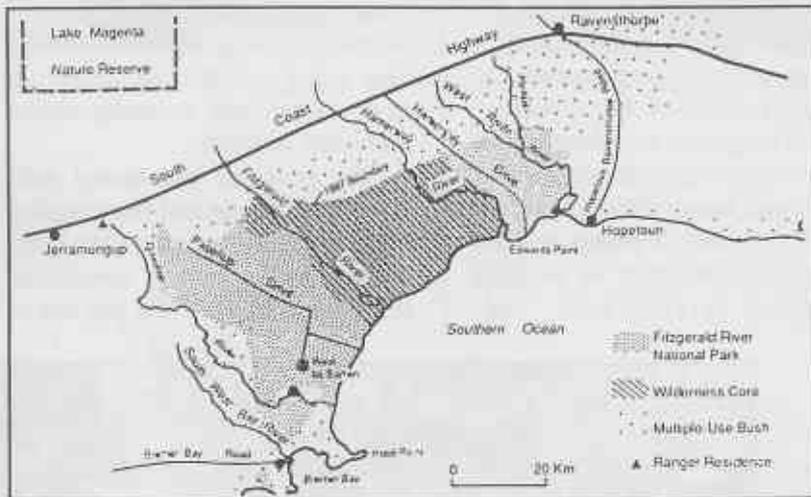
Ideally, in a Biosphere Reserve, farming should be in equilibrium with the basic resource (the land) and should not have any impact upon the core. (See map) However, the reality is that within the Fitzgerald Biosphere zone of cooperation, land degradation through rising watertables, salinity, erosion and nutrient runoff is increasing. The aim of this project is to attempt (in the zone of cooperation) through preservation of existing remnant vegetation and strategic revegetation, to halt the current decline of the land to achieve a sustainable balance and to promote biodiversity.

In the initial phase of this project we are identifying strategically important areas and types of vegetation to be prioritised for protection. Communities, such as yate swamps, which have not yet declined due to excessive flooding or salinity, will be identified and protected through planning a combination of fencing existing vegetation and planting to reduce or minimise recharge.

Bush corridors are also a priority. Existing corridors will be identified and protection promoted through fencing schemes. Opportunities to join smaller remnants with revegetation to form significant stepping stones to large reserves of



Remnant vegetation north of the Fitzgerald.



to expand corridors will also be sought.

Although fencing existing remnants is the most immediate priority, revegetation will be the most important long-term means of achieving sustainable agriculture and protecting biodiversity in the zone of cooperation. Without strategic planting of broad areas, regional watertables will continue to rise, killing vegetation in its path and rendering farmland useless.

Landholders will be assisted in planning where to site revegetation. They will be especially encouraged to use species that are local and hence adapted to local conditions

and will provide habitat for populations of local wildlife. Thus protection of biodiversity and agriculture will be compatible and achieved simultaneously. Direct seeding may be the most cost-efficient means of broadscale revegetation. Expert advice will be available on farm for collection, extraction and identification of local seed and the various techniques for sowing.

This project is part of the South Coast Regional Initiative Program.

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