



Cumberland Plain Woodland



RBG/Jaime Plaza

Conservation Status

Cumberland Plain Woodland is listed as an endangered ecological community under the *NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* and the *Commonwealth Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Description

In the NPWS vegetation mapping of the Cumberland Plain, two forms of Cumberland Plain Woodland have been identified — shale hills woodland and shale plains woodland.

Shale hills woodland occurs mainly on the elevated and sloping southern half of the Cumberland Plain. The dominant canopy trees include grey box (*Eucalyptus moluccana*), forest red gum (*E. tereticornis*) and narrow-leaved ironbark (*E. crebra*). It has a shrub layer dominated by blackthorn (*Bursaria spinosa*), with other shrubs, such as *Acacia implexa*,

Indigofera australis and *Dodonaea viscosa ssp cuneata*.

Shale plains woodland is the most widely distributed form of Cumberland Plain Woodland. *Bursaria spinosa* is the dominant shrub species and there are canopy trees such as grey box (*E. moluccana*), forest red gum (*E. tereticornis*), spotted gum (*Corymbia maculata*) and thin leaved stringybark (*E. eugenioides*).

The diverse understorey layer is similar for both forms of Cumberland Plain Woodland. It is common to find grasses, such as kangaroo grass (*Themeda australis*), weeping meadow grass (*Microlaena stipoides var stipoides*) and herbs, such as kidney weed (*Dichondra repens*), blue trumpet (*Brunoniella australis*) and *Desmodium varians*.

Distribution

Before European settlement, Cumberland Plain Woodland was extensive across western Sydney, covering 125,000 hectares. Today,

there is only nine percent of the original extent, with a further 14 percent remaining as scattered trees across the landscape (NPWS 2002a, NPWS 2002b). Cumberland Plain Woodland is an important part of the western Sydney landscape and occurs on the well structured clay soils, derived from Wianamatta shale.

There are bushland remnants of Cumberland Plain Woodland in an area bounded by Scheyville (north), Penrith (west), Parramatta (east) and Thirlmere (south). Cumberland Plain Woodland occurs in the Auburn, Bankstown, Baulkham Hills, Blacktown, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Holroyd, Liverpool, Parramatta, Penrith and Wollondilly local government areas.

Examples to see

Cumberland Plain Woodland can be seen at Scheyville National Park, Windsor Downs Nature Reserve, Leacock Regional Park and Mulgoa Nature Reserve.

Ecology

Cumberland Plain Woodland occurs throughout the driest part of the Sydney Basin and is well adapted to drought and fire. The understorey plants often rely on underground tubers or profuse annual seed production to survive adverse conditions.

It is thought that Aboriginal people used fire to promote the growth of tuberous food plants. The common shrub *blackthorn* is excellent bird habitat and provides food for a wide range of insects. Cumberland Plain Woodland is habitat for threatened species such as the pink pimelea (*Pimelea spicata*) and the Cumberland land snail (*Meridolum corneovirens*).

Threats

Clearing for agriculture and urban development is the greatest threat to Cumberland Plain Woodland. Because it exists now only in fragments, Cumberland Plain Woodland is vulnerable to disturbances, such as weed invasion, increased soil nutrients, rubbish dumping and frequent fire. Weeds, such as African lovegrass, African olive, bridal veil creeper and Rhodes grass are a major threat.

Recovery and management

The recovery of this ecological community is being addressed as part of the Cumberland Plain Endangered Ecological Communities Recovery Plan, which is currently being prepared.

Because the original extent of Cumberland Plain Woodland has been greatly reduced, high conservation value remnants will be identified in the recovery plan and recommended for protection through a range of mechanisms including reservation, environmental protection zoning and development control processes. Other protection measures can be through plans of management and voluntary conservation agreements. These measures will enable the remnants to be better managed for conservation and vegetation corridors to be formed.

Cumberland Plain Woodland remnants should be managed to maintain all vegetation layers. The understorey needs to be conserved as its removal reduces the viability of the remnants and encourages weeds. Cumberland Plain Woodland can regenerate naturally once threats, such as weeds, grazing and mowing/slashing, are controlled. The edges of remnants are prone to weeds and need to be regularly

monitored. Frequent fires (occurring less than five years apart) can lead to a loss of plant species, which are unable to quickly set seed or regenerate in a

short space of time. Replanting should only occur when natural regeneration is not possible, and locally sourced seeds should be used to ensure genetic integrity.

For further information contact

Central Threatened Species Unit, NSW Department of Environment and Conservation, PO Box 1967, Hurstville NSW 2220 Phone 02 9585 6678. www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au

References

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NPWS (2002b) Interpretation Guidelines for the Native Vegetation Maps of the Cumberland Plain, Western Sydney, Final Edition, NPWS, Sydney.

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