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Comment
Draft ACT Pest Animal Management Strategy (2011-2021)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Strategy.

The Strategy is thorough, comprehensive and well researched. I hope the ACT Government will provide the resources that are required to implement the Strategy.

I am working in the Mount Majura nature reserve and my comments relate to issues associated with this reserve.

1. Mount Majura nature reserve (MMNR) is managed primarily for conservation. The reserve contains critically endangered ecological community and a number of declared species. MMNR is an island surrounded by other land uses except in the south where it is bounded by the Mount Ainslie nature reserve. The relatively large size of MMNR is not sufficient to buffer against the suburban fringe impact on the conservation values of the reserve.
2. In addition to the urban fringe impact, management of pest species and excessive populations of species that adversely impact on the values of MMNR appear to be restricted or not permitted because of the proximity of MMNR to residential area. As far as I understand from discussions with staff of the Parks and Conservation Service, the effective control of foxes is not permitted because the potential impact on unrestrained pets. Methods such as the use of baited ejectors are target specific. Visitors of the reserve should be reminded about their legal obligations to keep dogs on the lead in the nature reserve. Well-advertised control measures can produce a win-win situation, by at the same time targeting pest species and enforcing dog-on-lead rules in the nature reserves.
3. The following species, introduced or native, have an adverse and visible impact on the conservation values of MMNR and are a concern in regard to conservation: European Rabbit, Brown Hare, Eastern Grey Kangaroo, European Red Fox, Pied Currawong (breeding in MMNR), Noisy Miner, Eastern Gambusia (all water bodies affected), European Honey bee (occupy critical bat and bird habitat particularly in the suburban perimeter). A number of species directly benefit from human activity, for instance Noisy Miners thrive in the suburban perimeter, which is managed to reduce the fire risk.
4. The impact of the species listed in (3) on biodiversity, natural and assisted regeneration, soil, and other values are well documented. The impact of large populations of grazing and browsing animals is particularly devastating during drought and results in irreversible loss of biodiversity and top soil. The loss of native ground-cover benefits weeds.

For a photographic documentation of the impact caused by rabbits and grazing pressure see:
<http://picasaweb.google.com/ACTFOMM/RabbitSigns>

5. The work to counteract the loss of native ground-cover, shrubs and trees and the lack of natural regeneration is costly and not sustainable under current grazing pressure. I am not aware of efforts to address the irreversible loss of topsoil due to erosion as a result of large scale overgrazing and lack of groundcover.
6. The effective management of populations of grazing and browsing animals would reduce costs of other conservation measures such as the control of weeds and revegetation.
7. As far as I am aware only one of the species listed in (3) – the European Rabbit – has been managed in MMNR in the recent past and only because of the consistent lobbying effort by the public.
8. There were no resources in the 2010/2011 breeding season to maintain the low rabbit population that resulted from the control in previous years. Intermittent (“on-off”) programs are a waste of resources and de-motivate PCS staff, volunteers and contractors alike from carrying out control because they give the false impression that “nothing can be done”. (See also: FoMM Submission to the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment (08.04.2011) Managing rabbits in Canberra Nature Park <http://majura.org/2011/04/08/fomm-submission-managing-rabbits-in-canberra-nature-park-08-04-2011/>)
9. Pest control programs require a landscape-wide approach across different land tenures. Rural landholders in the Majura valley recently expressed frustration about the lack of a coordinated approach to manage (weeds and) pest animals, particularly rabbits that - according to a number of Majura valley landholders - invade rural properties from government managed land (Sustainable Farming in the Majura Valley. ACT Rural Landholder’s Association in collaboration with the Molonglo Catchment Group Inc. September 2011. Report: Caring for our Country Project No CAG09-00263).
10. Unrestrained dogs and cats are an ongoing issue in MMNR.

To conclude, Government should

- develop leadership in the management of introduced and overabundant grazing and browsing animal species at landscape scale,
- secure investments by ongoing follow-up and maintenance programs, and
- adopt effective control methods in peri-urban areas.