



Conservation Planning for the Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve

Highfields, Toowoomba Region, Queensland, Australia

Background

The Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve is an area of native vegetation located on O'Brien Road at Highfields, north of Toowoomba city. It was gifted to the former Crow's Nest Shire Council nearly 24 years ago by local music celebrities Charles & Motee Rogers. In recognition of the high conservation values of the Reserve, an educational walking trail was established in 2002 (see Attachment 1). The Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve became the responsibility of Toowoomba Regional Council in 2008, following the amalgamation of Toowoomba city and seven adjacent shires including Crow's Nest.

Toowoomba Regional Council infrastructure threats

The conservation values of the Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve are currently under threat from three Toowoomba Regional Council infrastructure proposals, being construction of a library, O'Brien Road being widened to four lanes, and a proposed new road (www.rogersreserve.blogspot.com.au/p/save-reserve-2017.html).

These proposals follow earlier plans for a pathway through the reserve, which Toowoomba Regional Council abandoned in response to community opposition (<http://rogersreserve.blogspot.com.au/2014/01/the-chronicle-announces-that-petition.html>).

A lack of effective conservation planning

The native vegetation of the Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve is regional ecosystem (RE) 12.5.6a (see Attachment 2). Regional ecosystem 12.5.6 has been classified

as endangered under Queensland legislation because it has been severely impacted by land clearing since European settlement, with less than 10,000 ha and 30% of the original pre-clearing area now remaining (www.environment.ehp.qld.gov.au/regional-ecosystems/details/?re=12.5.6).

Because such a large proportion of the original area of endangered ecosystems has already been destroyed across Australia, the remnants that survive are a focus for conservation attention. Given this, it is both surprising and disturbing that Toowoomba Regional Council has proposed to construct infrastructure in an endangered ecosystem. The proposals show that Council has not yet put in place effective upfront planning for the conservation of the Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve and other remnants of RE 12.5.6a.

Toowoomba Regional Council's lack of effective conservation planning for the Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve and other remnants of RE 12.5.6a is in contrast to the endangered ecosystem conservation management planning of other local governments.

An example is Gold Coast City Council's conservation of the Miami Bushland Reserve. Like the Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve, the Miami Bushland Reserve protects a small isolated remnant of endangered ecosystem (RE 12.11.23) within an urban landscape. As Gold Coast City Council states in the Miami Bushland Reserve Plan of Management, "The scarcity of this regional ecosystem makes the conservation and appropriate management of the Reserve's values of paramount importance" (<http://www.goldcoast.qld.gov.au/documents/bf/miami-conservation-plan.pdf>).

Effective local government endangered ecosystem conservation management planning can also be seen in the endangered ecosystem planning work of Councils across Sydney. For example, Ku-ring-gai Council states that "In order to protect our amazing plant and animal species, we need to do all that we can here in Ku-ring-gai to protect our natural environment, especially our endangered ecological communities," (www.kmc.nsw.gov.au/About_Ku-ring-gai/Land_and_surrounds/Flora_and_fauna/Flora/Endangered_ecological_communities), and Blacktown City Council's Biodiversity Strategy aims to "Conserve, restore and enhance remnant endangered ecological communities and the flora and fauna which they support within the LGA" (www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au/Environment/Land_Biodiversity/Biodiversity_Strategy).

Sydney local governments have been able to effectively conserve the environmental values of their endangered ecosystem bushland reserves in the face of much greater population, development, infrastructure provision, and land availability pressures than exist in the Toowoomba region, so any arguments by Toowoomba Regional Council that it has no choice but to impact on the Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve are completely invalid.

Toowoomba Regional Council's lack of effective conservation planning for the Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve has occurred despite the environmental values of the Reserve having been known for a long time, and despite Council's *Vegetation Study*,

Toowoomba Regional Planning Project, Final Report advising “That TRC implement measures to protect and manage significant native vegetation on council-controlled lands for conservation outcomes in accordance with the values and options described in this report”.

Why all proposals impacting on the reserve are unacceptable

The native vegetation of the Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve is an endangered regional ecosystem. Ecosystems comprise much more than just trees. Ecosystems are made up of biotic (living) and abiotic (physical non-living) components, and the interactions between those components. Biotic components include animals (birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians such as frogs, invertebrates such as butterflies), plants (canopy trees, other tree layers, understorey, algae), fungi and bacteria. Regional ecosystem 12.5.6a often has a vineforest understorey, which can be seen in the Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve. This understorey is just as important as the canopy trees. Abiotic components include soil, water, sunlight and wind. The interactions between these biotic and abiotic components include food relationships (animals eat plants or other animals), pollination (some animals pollinate plants), habitat (some plants provide shade or wind protection for other plants or animals, some plants provide shelter and nesting sites for other animals including in standing or fallen dead trees) and nutrient cycling (fallen leaves and branches are decomposed by fungi and bacteria and enrich the soil).

If any part of this complex system is disturbed, such as through the construction of infrastructure, then it can impact the entire system. Because of the complexity of ecosystems, the impacts of clearing for infrastructure extend well beyond just the area that has been cleared. Two well-known related key processes that occur as a result of such clearance are “fragmentation” and “edge effects”. These processes are discussed in numerous references including the *Remnant Vegetation Corridor Management Strategy for Crow’s Nest Shire* (http://bruceboyes.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/Remnant_Vegetation_Corridor_Management_Strategy.pdf) which was a reference for Toowoomba Regional Council’s *Vegetation Study, Toowoomba Regional Planning Project, Final Report*.

Issues of fragmentation and edge effects in environmentally significant areas are acknowledged in the Toowoomba Regional Planning Scheme, which is a best-practice planning scheme in regard to biodiversity conservation. The Toowoomba Regional Planning Scheme identifies the vegetation of Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve as being within the Biodiversity Areas Overlay “Areas of Ecological Significance”, where impacts must be avoided altogether, or if this is not possible then minimised through outcomes that include avoiding further fragmentation and reducing edge effects. In advancing proposals for infrastructure construction in parts of the Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve, Toowoomba Regional Council is apparently disregarding its own Planning Scheme.

The diversity of plants and animals present in the Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve shows that despite its small size and relative isolation, ecosystem processes are

still functioning. While the impact of vegetation clearing for just one piece of infrastructure may seem minor, the impacts extend beyond the area cleared, and every impact compounds the effect of other impacts. This is what is known as the “death of a thousand cuts”, where a series of what some may see as insignificant impacts adds up to completely destroy the ecological processes of an area.

Progress of the “death of a thousand cuts” in Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve can be seen in the extent of vegetation already lost from the Reserve as a result of infrastructure construction and residential development (see Attachment 3).

What should be done?

Because of the serious negative impacts of any infrastructure or development proposals on the significant conservation values of Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve, Toowoomba Regional Council needs to abandon or reject *all* such proposals. If Council allows the Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve to be negatively impacted then it will deny current and future generations an important part of their natural heritage.

The only development that should be permitted in the Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve is the existing nature trail, which was carefully designed and constructed so that it would effectively control visitor access to the Reserve without compromising environmental values.

As well as abandoning all current and future infrastructure and development proposals affecting Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve, Toowoomba Regional Council needs to urgently advance conservation management planning for the Reserve and all other areas of conservation significance within the Toowoomba Region.

Prepared by Bruce Boyes, 14 May 2017.

Qualification: Master of Environmental Management with Distinction.

Experience: More than 20 years of environmental management experience, including:

- involvement in the conservation of the Charles and Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve when working as Natural Resource Management Project Officer for Crow’s Nest Shire Council in 2001-2002 (see Attachment 1); and
- leadership of endangered ecosystem conservation planning work in the Lockyer Valley (www.bruceboyes.info/2004/03/biodiversity-recovery-plan-for-gatton-and-laidley-shires-south-east-queensland-2003-2008).

Website: www.bruceboyes.info.

Trail helps preserve Highfields bushland

The Charles and Motee Rogers Park Bushland Reserve Nature Trail has been officially opened by Crows Nest Shire Council Mayor Cr Geoff Patch.

The reserve, adjacent to the Highfields Cultural Centre, is on land donated to the council by Toowoomba musical legends Charles and Motee Rogers.

"I'm very happy about it," Cr Patch said.

"It's something very close to my heart, the preservation of the Australian bush. I think it's a wonderful thing."

The reserve is one of the last remaining patches of bushland in the Highfields area and has been identified as an "endangered" ecosystem.

It protects a representative sample of forest that once covered the Highfields area and provides vital habitat for a range of important native plants and animals.

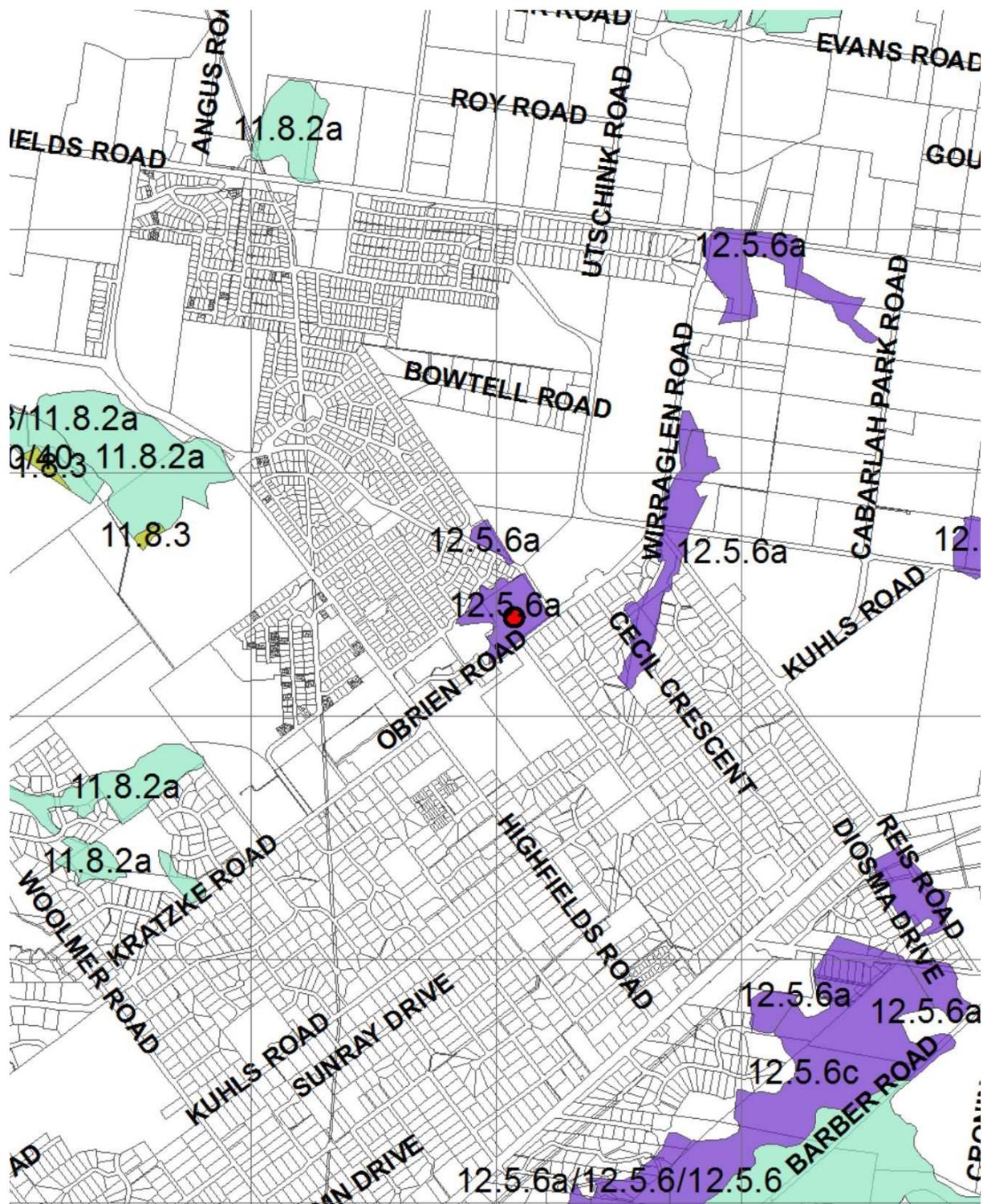
"The construction of the nature trail means that Highfields residents and visitors to the area alike can enjoy the beauty of this rare vegetation remnant, and also learn about bushland conservation and management issues," council's natural resource management officer Mr Bruce Boyes said.

The trail is an education and awareness project of the Crows Nest Shire Council natural resource management program which is sponsored by funding from the Commonwealth Government Natural Heritage Trust (NHT)



BUSH WALK: Crows Nest Shire Council Mayor Cr Geoff Patch (left) cuts the ribbon at the entrance to the Charles and Motee Rogers Park Bushland Reserve Nature Trail. With Cr Patch is council's natural resource management officer Bruce Boyes.

Picture: JENNY GERSEKOWSKI



Excerpt from Queensland Government Remnant 2015 Regional Ecosystems mapping, with the Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve identified by a red marker

Attachment 3



Google Maps 2014 view of Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve



Earlier undated ESRI imagery of Charles & Motee Rogers Bushland Reserve