

Detrimental Impacts of Cattle Grazing on Biodiversity at North Kama.

The Friends of the Pinnacle seek an urgent change to the way the North Kama property is managed. Cattle grazing is undertaken across the property to reduce fuel loads and fire risk to adjacent houses, in accordance with the ACT Government's [Strategic Bushfire Management Plan](#). Current science indicates that this grazing regime will instead degrade biodiversity and provide negligible protection to adjacent houses.

Grazing by livestock was appropriate when North Kama was an agricultural lease – some 20 years ago. North Kama is now part of an important biodiversity corridor across the Belconnen Hills, targeted for publically funded biodiversity restoration activities.

Broad-acre livestock grazing is no longer appropriate in North Kama, for three key reasons:

1. Impacts on existing biodiversity

It is well established in the scientific literature that grazing by livestock has major detrimental effects on biodiversity (Yates and Hobbs 1997), including for birds (Maron and Lill 2005; Martin and Possingham 2005), reptiles (Brown et al. 2008; Driscoll 2004), frogs (Hazell 2003; Hazell et al. 2001), invertebrates (Bromham et al. 1999; Lindsay and Cunningham 2009) and native plant species (Briggs et al. 2008; Prober and Thiele 1995). Livestock grazing can also worsen invasion by exotic species (Hobbs 2001). Livestock grazing in North Kama is very likely to be exacerbating landscape fragmentation and habitat loss by rendering the property unsuitable for a broad range of species.

2. Impacts on restoration

Grazing prevents natural tree regeneration and is a major cause of the decline of trees across rural landscapes (Dorrough and Moxham 2005). Grazing is a major impediment to restoring North Kama to a state where it can contribute to connectivity for woodland birds between Kama Nature Reserve/Molonglo corridor and The Pinnacle Nature Reserve. Grazing has highly constrained the recent plans for biodiversity plantings in North Kama by Greening Australia and FOTPIN.

3. Fire protection

Grazing throughout North Kama is likely to have large environmental impacts, whilst providing very little, if any, real protection from fire to houses in Hawker. The biggest protective effect for houses is more likely to come from limiting fuels within 40m of buildings (Gibbons et al. 2012). FOTPIN believes that biodiversity conservation is the over-riding objective for management of North Kama, and so this trade-off (big impact on biodiversity, little/no benefit for asset-protection), warrants a shift in fire hazard reduction practices towards fuels within 40m of houses. Livestock grazing throughout North Kama is not a means of reducing the threat of wildfire to houses near North Kama.

FOTPIN acknowledges that under some circumstances, targeted livestock grazing has the potential to contribute to reducing weed loads in woodlands, but recognises that use of livestock in this context requires an experimental approach with specific strategies, including extensive fencing and detailed monitoring (Dorrough et al. 2004; Lunt 2005), which is not currently the case in North Kama. Therefore, FOTPIN urges an end to livestock grazing in these threatened box-gum woodlands so that biodiversity can be enhanced, and so that community and government restoration activities including natural regeneration, planting and weed control can proceed and be more effective.

References

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