

The state of Landcare and Bushcare in Greater Sydney 2021/22

Landcare and Bushcare volunteers play an integral role in maintaining and protecting Sydney's unique and beautiful bushland.

Greater Sydney Local Land Services surveys Landcare and Bushcare groups in the region every two years to track the wellbeing of the volunteer community. This information helps us to understand the type of support these volunteers need and promote the benefits of environmental volunteering across our region.

The most recent survey focused on the 2021/22 financial year and targeted incorporated Landcare groups, council and National Park's-supported Bushcare programs as well as local and regional networks.

We **received responses** from **34 Bushcare programs, 24 Landcare groups** and **6 Landcare networks**.

Across Greater Sydney

879 Landcare and Bushcare groups



7,100 regular volunteers



11,791 one-off volunteers



187,000 hours of work



669,000 plants propagated in **26** community nurseries



What did the data tell us?

In the **2021/22** financial year, **879 groups** and networks engaged in Bushcare and Landcare activities. **Bushcare groups**, supported by local councils and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, make up **93%** of the groups surveyed in our region (815 groups). **Independent Landcare** groups and networks account for **5%** of the surveyed groups with (12 out of 42 of these being unincorporated and supported by Landcare networks). There were also **26** community-run nurseries, of which 22 were associated with a Bushcare program and 4 run by independent Landcare groups or networks.

7,100 regular volunteers contributed a total of **187,362** hours of work, estimated to be equal to **\$7.8 million** of in-kind labour (at \$41.72 per hour). This was supplemented with work from **11,791** one-off volunteers.

In the first half of 2021/22, COVID-19 resulted in reduced numbers of workdays and volunteer hours for most surveyed groups.

Bushcare groups worked across urban, suburban and peri-urban parts of the region on public reserves and the national parks estate. Landcare groups worked on both publicly and privately managed land and were more commonly found in peri-urban parts of Greater Sydney.

Ten of the surveyed groups and programs are using First Nation's Caring for Country strategies and **11** are "working towards" this. The strategies reported ranged from co-management agreements with traditional owners to cultural burning, weed management at cultural sites and Welcome to Country experiences.

Wellbeing of Landcare groups

Two thirds of Landcare groups and networks reported their wellbeing to be stable. **10%** reported that they were thriving. **20%** reported that their groups were surviving with just one group reporting to be barely hanging on.

The biggest challenges reported by Landcare groups and networks relate to loss of volunteers, volunteer motivation and securing ongoing funding. An overwhelming workload for the group was also ranked as one of the biggest challenges, along with an aging volunteer base.

To thrive in the future, groups would like to see more funding (long-term), more support through collaborations and partnerships, more young adults and staff. A number of groups also report disillusionment with systemic issues such as encroaching urban development.

The main source of funding for Landcare groups and networks was reported to be government grants (11 groups, 3 networks). Fee for service, foundations, corporate sources and membership fees were additional sources of income.



Support

Eighty-six percent of surveyed groups engaged with Greater Sydney Local Land Services. The most common types of engagement were speaking with a Local Land Services Officer, interacting with the Regional Landcare Coordinator, reading a GS LLS Newsletter and attending Volunteer Coordinators Network meetings. Of these engagements, **87%** were either extremely or somewhat satisfied.

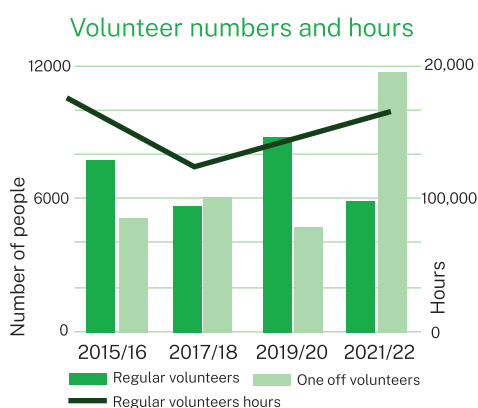
Greater Sydney Local Land Services provided **\$183,949** of support to Landcare and Bushcare in the 2021/22 financial year via the National Landcare Program, NSW Landcare Program and other NSW Govt. funding.

Landcare across the region accesses additional support from local councils, National Parks and the Environment Trust (**73%**, **33%** and **20%** of surveyed groups, respectively). The type of support includes funding, capacity building, partnering on projects, supervision and equipment. Half of the surveyed programs and groups were members of the regional Landcare body, Greater Sydney Landcare.

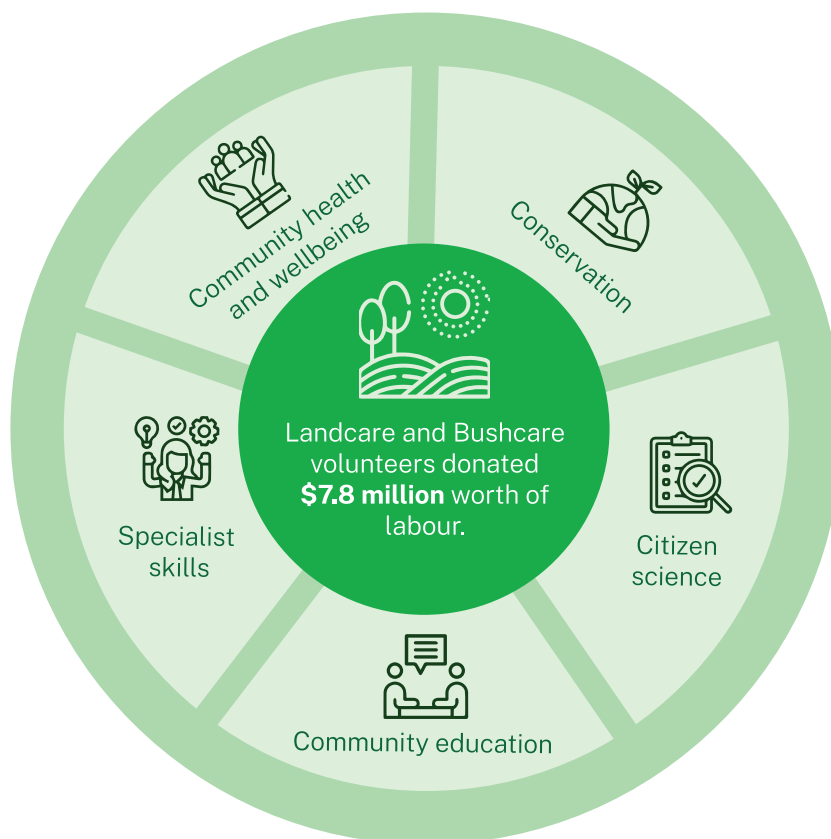
Growth and changes

Compared to the previous reporting period, there was a **30%** drop in the number of regular volunteers, but there was a **13%** increase in the number of hours worked. The number of one-off volunteers more than doubled and this reflects participation in National Tree Day (in 2019/20, COVID impacted this event) and Greater Sydney Landcare's 'Creating Canopies' tree planting program. The reported wellbeing of Landcare groups and networks has been improving over the past six years with notably more 'stable' groups in this reporting period (20 in 2021/22 versus 12 in 2019/20).

The survey results reflect the persistent challenge of attracting and keeping volunteers and reinforces the critical need to secure long-term funding for environmental volunteer efforts and to ensure that these efforts are reinforced region-wide.



The benefits of Landcare and Bushcare volunteering



Conservation

Conservation particularly bush regeneration and planting were the main activities undertaken by Landcare and Bushcare groups. Other activities include community education, weed control, plant propagation, litter removal and riparian or wetland management. Threatened species, threatened ecological communities, wetlands of national and international importance, World Heritage Sites, National Heritage places, state reserves and Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Places are some of the 'Matters of National Environmental Significance' that Landcare and Bushcare volunteers work on. **Fifty-five** of the surveyed programs, groups and networks work on one or more sites that are part of a wildlife corridor or connected to other conservation sites.



Community education

Landcare volunteers spent approximately **12%** of their time raising environmental awareness amongst community across the region.



Specialist skills

70% of Bushcare programs, Landcare groups and networks provided volunteers with training opportunities. Flora and fauna identification, seed collection and plant propagation techniques are amongst the volunteers' specialist skills.



Community health and wellbeing

The volunteers value being part of a community that is connected and committed to nature. We estimated that **\$2.9 million** in avoided healthcare costs was derived from Landcare and Bushcare volunteers across Greater Sydney (**\$403** per person involved with environmental volunteering) (2021 KPMG Building resilience in local communities: The wellbeing benefits of participating in Landcare).



Citizen Science

47 of the surveyed programs, groups and networks also undertake citizen science. Bird surveys, Streamwatch (water surveys) and vegetation monitoring were the most popular activities. Other fauna surveys of threatened species were also reported.



Want to know more visit:

<https://www.lls.nsw.gov.au/regions/greater-sydney/community-groups>