

OFFICERS' REPORT**6.2 CONSERVING OUR BUSHLAND RESERVES: VALLEY RESERVE AND DAMPER CREEK RESERVE****Submitting Councillor: Cr Rebecca Paterson****RECOMMENDATION***That Council:*

- 1. Designates Valley Reserve and Damper Creek Reserve as conservation reserves, as per the conservation reserve definition found in the Monash Council Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2016-2026.*
- 2. Draws up a statement of purpose for both reserves in consultation with the Friends group for each reserve that outlines the long term vision for each reserve, their community value, and the role each reserve plays in conservation.*
- 3. Draws up a management plan for each reserve in consultation with the Friends group for each reserve that identifies the primary purpose of both reserves as conserving native flora and fauna and that ongoing management of the reserves will remain consistent with this purpose.*
- 4. Renames the Reserves to; Valley Conservation Reserve and Damper Creek Conservation Reserve provides entry signage and updated collateral by 31/12/2020 to reflect this change.*
- 5. Gives in principle support to an integrated site plan (ISP) for Valley Reserve subject to the outcome of future budget discussions.*
- 6. Further updates signage in and around the reserves where required once the statement of purpose, management plan, and for Valley Reserve, the ISP are completed.*

BACKGROUND

Friends of Scotchman's Creek & Valley Reserve and the Friends of Damper Creek Reserve, have approached council and councillors to request that both Valley Reserve and Damper Creek Reserve be designated as conservation reserves.

Both friends groups have been custodians of these reserves for up to 60 years and worked with Council's bush land crew to help manage weeds and in plantings and also undertake Water Watch and other activities to track the health of the creek with Melbourne Water.

We currently have 42 bushland reserves being maintained to conserve biodiversity and 10 reserves are considered high to very high conservation significance. Valley Reserve has state biodiversity significance while Damper Creek Reserve has local significant.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This initiative aligns with the Council Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2016-26 (ESS), Priority 2: Urban Ecology highlights a strong commitment for council:

Action 2.2: Long term biodiversity outcomes are achieved on Council owned and managed conservation reserves.

While conservation plans have been in place for bushland areas to manage reserves in accordance with best practice conservation and land management principles, no reserves in Monash are currently called conservation reserves, which limits our opportunity to share the value of these sites to our community.

As a garden city, Monash has a number of strategies which highlights the importance to conserve and protect our of our bushland and green spaces, including the Urban Biodiversity Strategy, Open Space Strategy and Urban Landscape and Vegetation Canopy Strategy.

The Monash Council Open Space Strategy identifies the importance of the environmental benefits of open space relating to the conservation of habitat and biodiversity, and the protection of biological and cultural heritage. The strategy also notes that only 3% of Monash open space is currently bushland/forest and identifies the importance of managing bushland reserves so as to limit damage to bushland. The Monash Open Space Strategy also supports the presence of trails and playgrounds.

Placing signs at Valley and Damper Creek Reserves to communicate to users that they are Conservation Reserves is an operational decision for Council to make as the land owner. Ultimately Council as owner / custodian of the land determines the uses on the land, and has responsibility for ensuring that the land is used in a manner consistent with the purposes of the zone that applies. It does not require a change to the Planning scheme.

In recent years, the playspaces at Damper Creek Reserve (2014) and Valley Reserve (2015) were upgraded. Both of these reserves are zoned as Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ). Community activation of these reserves through the use of recreation infrastructure such as playspaces and walking trails will not be compromised by this proposed renaming. This includes any future recreation infrastructure improvements and developments.

The focus for this initiative would be to create greater awareness in the community on the environmental value of these reserves.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of the proposed conservation designation is minimal. The Management Plan will require some internal resourcing and will call on work done to date and work done during the development of the Integrated Site Plan. The main costs for the initial signing will be minimal but the final signage depending on numbers and size could be between \$20,000 and \$50,000.

Budget has been allocated to manage the reserve quality. Funds may also need to be allocated to support the development of updated conservation management plans for these two reserves that reflect one of their key purposes of conserving native flora and fauna. There has also been a plan for an indigenous botanical display garden to further educate the public, and this may require some additional funds.

The cost of the Integrated Site Plan is approximately \$50,000 and will be referred to budget discussions.

IMPACT ON INTERNAL RESOURCES

We already have a dedicated bushland crew which manages these reserves to a high standard. The addition of signs will acknowledge the value of these sites to the community, but we need to increase this level of support to maintain and enhance this status to meet this increased awareness.

Additional communications and education may also be required to help visitors understand the impact of the conservation status. For example – limiting access for dogs off-leash leads to protect the local wild life at these sites.