

Calling for community comment:

The potential for native forestry in the Oberon area

On July 17 a meeting was held at Oberon to work towards the development of a native forestry industry in the Oberon LGA that provides social, economic and ecological benefits both to the local community and to the greater Blue Mountains area. It was called following discussions between several groups that identified the following common interests:

- Oberon Council is keen to diversify economic development in the area, to integrate ecological and social needs with economic opportunities and has been looking into the potential of native forestry in the area.
- The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) is keen to facilitate development around the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area which is compatible with WH values.
- The Future of Australia's Threatened Ecosystems (FATE) Program from UNSW is keen to encourage economic activity that generates incentives for conservation on private land using native species.
- The Hawkesbury-Nepean CMA and other CMAs are looking to help fund innovative projects that match economic use to environmental need and have biodiversity outcomes.

The meeting was attended by Oberon Council managers and Councilors, representatives from BMWHI and the FATE Program, Hawkesbury-Nepean CMA and members of the Oberon community including farmers and other local business people. The meeting consolidated the common interests, explored opportunities and concluded that the potential for multiple benefits was high. The meeting agreed to work towards a shared vision and take positive steps towards starting a project based on the shared vision.

This document summarises the discussions that took place at the meeting; describing a vision for the project and suggesting possible pathways towards the vision. The council seeks comments on the proposed project and intends to hold public meetings in local areas to gauge the degree of local support.

What opportunities does the current situation provide?

1. The area has existing softwood (*Pinus radiata*) plantations at varying stages of development, including up to 40,000ha of State Forests and 18,000 ha on private land. Many of these are not economic due to mismanagement and are located opportunistically due to uptake by landholders and timber companies. There is significant existing forestry infrastructure and lots of surplus wood and prunings which are barely utilised. There is local interest in native hardwood species such as:
 - Blackwood Wattle (*Acacia melanoxylon*), a local species and 3rd highest value timber for furniture.
 - Shining Gum (*Eucalyptus nitens*) could provide a first peeling for veneer after 10 years and sawlogs after 19-20 years

Other species have been recommended for the Southern Tablelands:

<http://www.ffp.csiro.au/tigr/atcmain/whatwedo/projects/farmforestry/sppnotes.htm>

2. There are significant weed problems across the landscape, including noxious weeds on small blocks, marginal grazing land and mismanaged forestry blocks. There are also significant areas of native vegetation which are now protected through NV legislation and regulations but are isolated from each other. An active native forestry initiative could address the weed problems and, if plantations were strategically located and contained several species (including some local natives), they could help connect areas of remnant native vegetation with major biodiversity benefits.
3. There is pressure for subdivision of larger landholdings into small blocks with demand from 'tree-changers' and urban elites looking for rural recreation. Significant numbers of small-holdings of 20-

40 acres already exist, owned by people (often wealthy) who are not dependent on farm income but interested in maintaining land value.

4. Tourism related opportunities exist, especially with cooperation between councils and opening of the sealed 'Tablelands Way' between Goulburn and Oberon by Christmas.
5. There are also opportunities to get regional support with Strategic Alliance with Lithgow and Mudgee Councils and a 6 council grouping (Oberon, Lithgow, Mudgee, Bathurst, Upper Lachlan/Crookwell, Mulwaree/Goulburn).
6. Significant work has already been done by FATE and BMWHI group, just waiting for interest from a local council to enact the Western Edge Native Farm Forestry (WENFF) plan which will be applicable to Oberon.

Where could we be in 2020?

1. Multi-species plantations could be strategically located across the landscape that improve hydrology, sequester carbon, provide habitat and shelter and generate a harvest of different products at different stages of development, including biomass from thinings or coppicing, native foods, foliage or flowers, timber. Lower value, shorter rotation species could be harvested first and longer-term, higher value timber harvested later.
2. A local biomass processing plant could be established that can utilize forestry infrastructure and forestry waste as well as biomass harvests from multi-species plantations. Possible products include eucalyptus oils, fuel pellets and ground biomass for hardboard production. The biomass could also be used for electricity generation at a small, local power station or co-generation at Wallerawang.
3. A landscape corporation or cooperative could be established with a management group that:
 - supports and facilitates the establishment and management of the multi-species plantations;
 - develops opportunities for cross-property collaboration on freehold, community title and forestry land;
 - seeks payments for carbon sequestration and other alternative sources of income;
 - coordinates the supply of material to the biomass processing plant.
4. A more buoyant and diverse local economy could result with businesses built around adding value to products and services provided by the multi-species plantations eg:
 - new and existing sawmills
 - furniture and other timber products
 - purveyors of native food, foliage and flowers
 - tourism-related businesses

Possible pathways

- Describe the project in general terms and seek input from the community
- Seek input from other councils and CMAs
- Explore opportunities for funding and other support
- Conduct a scoping study that concludes with a development plan.
- Translate the development plan into an implementation plan and prospectus to attract landholder participation and industry and stakeholder investment.

For more information or to become involved with this project contact:

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Future of Australia's Threatened Ecosystems (FATE) Program

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