

## Protecting the Kimberley's natural wealth

**A new ten-year 'Healthy Country' agreement between private conservation organisation, Bush Heritage Australia, and Wunambal Gaambera Traditional Owners in the north-west Kimberley will protect more than 160 plants and animals found nowhere else on earth.**



Credit: Annette Ruzicka

The goal of the partnership is to protect the biodiversity and cultural values of 925,000 hectares of land and 1.6 million hectares of sea country to World Conservation Union Standards.

Wunambal Gaambera Country, known as 'Uunguu' or 'living home', is home to more than 65 endemic animals and 102 plants. Dugong and marine turtles feed in seagrass beds off the coast, while goanna, bush turkey, antilopine kangaroo and rock wallabies inhabit spectacular woodland and escarpment country.

Further, Wunambal Gaambera people's rich culture in their rock art dates back at least 17,000 years.

'Our Healthy Country Plan identifies 10 priority areas, including looking after law and culture, "right-way fire", kangaroos and emus, rainforest, waterholes, bush plants, rock art, marine turtles and dugong,' said Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation Chairperson, Catherine Goonack.

'The dry season activities not only give our Traditional Owners a chance to get onto country but the opportunity to pass on cultural knowledge to our children.'

The 10-year plan also increases Bush Heritage Australia's protection of biodiverse land Australia-wide to nearly 1.3 million hectares in its reserve and project areas.

'Few landscapes are more important for nature conservation at this scale than those of Wunambal Gaambera Country,

said Bush Heritage Australia Chief Executive Gerard O'Neill.

'We are extremely privileged to be working with the Wunambal Gaambera people in helping them keep their country healthy and cultural heritage protected.

'Our partnership has appointed Healthy Country Manager Dr Tom Vigilante to assist Wunambal Gaambera people, WGAC and the Uunguu Rangers implement the 10-year plan.'

In 2011 the Wunambal Gaambera people had their native title recognised by the Federal Court. This was followed by the announcement of an Uunguu Indigenous Protected Area of more than 343,000 hectares; a second stage of the Uunguu Indigenous Protected Area will be announced later this year.

Source: Bush Heritage Australia

From ECOS online <http://www.ecosmagazine.com/?paper=EC12392>