Step 6

Assess conservation significance

The summary of conservation significance gives an indication of the management units that should receive priority when activities to enhance conservation of grassy ecosystems are being considered.

Characteristics of management units are compared to show the sites that are more or less important for conservation. Units can then be ranked in order of priority to show where conservation management activities should begin.

It is possible to decide on which sites need early attention by comparing differences in the site, vegetation and the habitat condition of each management unit. In this way it is also possible to ensure that management reflects what is important to the landholder as well as what is important for conservation in each management unit. Scores for each assessment activity can be used to determine the relative condition of each management unit.

Management units that are ranked high for condition often have greater vegetation diversity and are in a more 'natural' condition. Such areas should get first attention in a conservation management program if the biodiversity of the site is to be retained or enhanced.

Sometimes management units may be ranked low for conservation significance but species of special interest may occur on them. Such sites should be considered as a higher priority in a conservation management program.

Enhancement of conservation significance can be achieved through modifying management, assisting natural regeneration or undertaking programs of vegetation restoration or rehabilitation programs. These actions may be particularly important to improve areas with high conservation significance by enhancing adjacent areas with lower conservation significance where they can act as buffers, increase the size of habitat or provide corridors between areas. Revegetation programs can assist in the maintenance of landscape–scale conservation.

Aims

- Identify important characteristics that indicate that a site should be conserved and managed to retain or enhance biodiversity.

- Use these characteristics to identify areas of conservation significance and to prioritise for implementing management activities that retain or enhance biodiversity in these areas.

Materials

Sheet 1–5

Sheet 6

1	2
3b	4
5a	6

Features that identify a site as important for conservation

High ranking revealed after assessment of site, vegetation and habitat condition has been undertaken.

Presence of threatened, rare or uncommon species or communities.

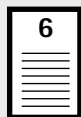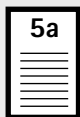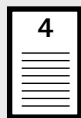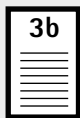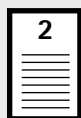Presence of plant or animal species of special interest.

Proximity of a site to other areas of native vegetation with potential to form part of a vegetation corridor or increase landscape conservation.

Cultural interest (for example, heritage values, special geological features, areas of Aboriginal or archaeological significance or scenic values).


Themeda australis

Method

1. **Collate records of conservation significance** onto Sheet 6.

   - Record the area of the management unit.

   - Record the site condition rating.

   - Record the dominant species on the management unit.

   - Transfer the rankings for vegetation and habitat condition for each management unit.

   - Give a value to native vegetation patches based on their size. These patches could be entirely within a management unit or the site, or extend beyond the site that is being assessed. Refer to Table I.

2. **Identify if there are threatened species,** other species of significance or endangered ecological communities using personal knowledge and consult with others.
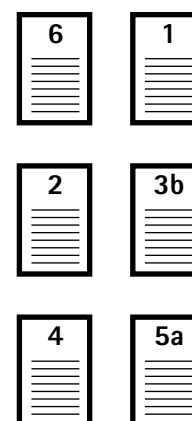
Table I: Native vegetation patch size and connectivity ranking.

Scores are based on size and how well they are connected to other remnants. Remnants may extend beyond the site that is being assessed. Patches include native grassland.

Size and connectivity	Score
No native vegetation	None (0)
Continuous patches of vegetation of less than one hectare	Very Low (VL)
Patches over five hectares	Low (L)
Patches of over 10 hectares	Moderate (M)
Patches over 50 hectares	High (H)
Patches over 100 hectares	Very High (VH)

Example

**Step 6: Summary of conservation significance of each land management unit**

	Reference	A
Area of management unit (hectares)	Sheet 1	10–50
Site condition ranking	Sheet 2	M
Dominant species	Sheet 3b	Phalaris
Vegetation community	Sheet 3b	Introduced pasture
Vegetation condition ranking	Sheet 4	L
Habitat condition ranking:	Sheet 5a	L
Patch connectivity ranking	Table I	0
Threatened species or other species of significance present and endangered ecological communities	Expert advice	Striped Legless Lizard

Goodenia pinnatifida

Plantago varia
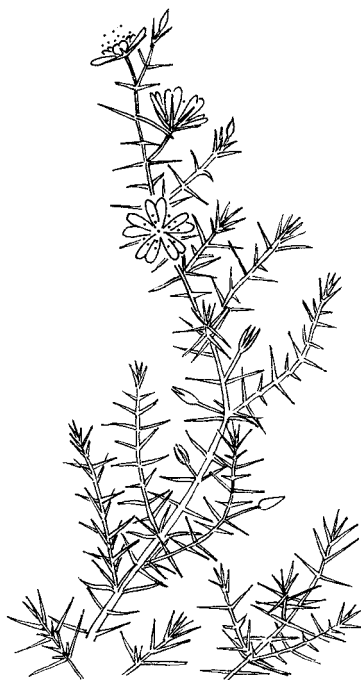
Stellaria pungens

Brachyscome rigidula