

B10. Management of Newly Created Assets (Natural Areas)

Local governments undergoing rapid growth and development are facing problems associated with newly created natural areas acquired through development of new housing estates. Natural areas set aside as part of a new public open space or as a condition of development approval are initially managed by a Developer. The Developer is often required by the Western Australian Planning Commission to create a Management Plan for the retained bushland reserve. The proposed Management Plan must be approved by the local government concerned.

It is important that the Management Plan created by the developer is carefully analysed to ensure all aspects concerning future management of the reserve and proposed infrastructure plans are appropriate to sustainable and ongoing management of the new asset (natural area).

It is critical to get involved at this early stage and ensure that any draft management plans for nature reserves within new urban or industrial areas are reviewed by an Environmental (or other) Officer who will be responsible for management of the site after hand-over to the local government. Failing to do so may result in a very poor outcome and unnecessary increased costs of management after hand-over. It is important to ensure that the management plan includes hard numbers such as plant densities for revegetation, maximum number of weeds per square metre and inclusion of satisfactory weed management and monitoring programs.

The Developer then undertakes management of the reserve (according to the Management Plan) until hand-over to local government. There are some common issues which can occur during the phase before hand-over when the newly created reserve is still under management of the Developer. These issues can attribute to the degradation of the reserve before hand-over. Some of the issues relating to newly created reserves include:

- Rubbish blowing in from building sites;
- Poorly designed infrastructure such as tracks and fencing (presence/placement/type);
- Vehicle/pedestrian access management;
- Weed control (lack of);
- Community connection/involvement;
- Buffer treatment;
- Nutrient management (turfed, irrigated buffer areas); and
- Monitoring (lack of).

A reserve in good condition can quickly become degraded during the phase before hand-over, in which case the local government is handed a reserve that is more difficult and costly to manage than it may have been if actions were taken to avoid degradation of the natural area from the beginning.

It is suggested that local governments, where possible, monitor the implementation of management actions carried out by the interim manager (Developer). It may be necessary to hold the Developer to the agreed management plan and ensure that potentially degrading processes are not allowed to occur. In overseeing management actions prior to hand-over, the local government can ensure the original condition of the natural area is maintained and save resources, combating future management issues.