



THE WETLANDS OF THE ARID NT

Inventory and Significance

The Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory (PWCNT) has received funding from the Natural Heritage Trust for a project called 'Inventory and Significance of Wetlands in the Arid NT'.

This leaflet introduces the project to landholders and other interested parties. We are seeking to inform and involve landholders. Working with and learning from local people will be important to the success of the project.

The study region

The study region covers a large area of the Northern Territory from 20° latitude (roughly 40 kilometres south of Tennant Creek) to the South Australian, Queensland and Western Australian borders.

What is an arid zone wetland?

Wetlands is a term that can mean different things to different people. Our definition is based on international agreements and includes waterholes, rivers, swamps, clay pans, salt lakes and springs. It also includes artificial wetlands such as dams, sewerage ponds and bore drains.

Wetlands in the arid part of the Northern Territory range enormously in size from vast salt lakes to small spring fed pools. A few hold permanent water but most of the wetlands are dry most of the time. One of their distinguishing features is that following rain, they continue to hold water after the surrounding landscape has dried out. This stored water may be above the ground or in waterlogged soil and is important for some plants and animals.

Purpose of the project

There is very little documented information about wetlands in the arid zone of the Northern Territory. The project aims to determine:

- what sort of wetlands occur in the study region;
- where these wetlands are;
- how big these wetlands are;
- how many there are of each sort of wetland; and
- what plants and animals live in these wetlands.

There are wetlands of importance in the arid region of the Northern Territory including Lake Surprise, the Karinga Creek system, Lake Amadeus and the permanent waterholes in the headwaters of the Finke River. These wetlands are important for waterbirds and may act as refuges for a variety of wildlife. These wetlands have been listed in the 'Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia' which is maintained by the Commonwealth Government.

How will the project be conducted?

There are several stages to this project:

- collate existing information about wetlands in the arid region of the Northern Territory;
- develop a working classification of wetlands in the arid NT as a basis for choosing field sites to sample each sort of wetland;
- consult with landholders throughout the project;
- conduct field surveys to collect information about the different sorts of wetlands including what plants and animals they contain. Surveys will be at sites throughout the study region including areas identified by landholders. Aerial surveys will also be used to locate and map wetlands;
- use the results of the field surveys to map and classify the wetlands of the arid NT; and
- communicate the results of the study and produce a final report, which will discuss the significance of the different sorts of wetlands.

The study commenced in 1999. Field work will be carried out by Parks and Wildlife in 2000 and 2001 and the project will be completed by December 2001.

How can landholders be involved?

We would like landholders to be involved throughout the project. People on the land have valuable information about wetlands across the region and may have concerns about management issues such as weeds, feral animals or uncontrolled fire that may damage particular wetlands. Landholders are also welcome to accompany our survey team.

Contacts

If you would like more information about this project, or wish to discuss issues about wetlands in the arid NT, please contact us.

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