Do you live next to a bushland reserve?

As a bush neighbour you are in a special position to know and enjoy our wonderful natural areas, and to help them through the changes they face as part of an urban landscape.
Council’s bushland parks

Baulkham Hills Shire Council manages 1400 hectares of bushland in over 170 different reserves. These include a variety of landscapes such as tall eucalypt forests, colourful sandstone heath and shady rainforest gullies.

Some parks only contain a small patch of bush, but they are still an important part of Sydney’s bush habitat network - particularly the rare and endangered bush types such as Sydney Turpentine-Ironbark Forest.

New challenges for our bush

Once part of a vast natural landscape that stretched right across the continent, many of our bushland reserves are now islands in a sea of houses.

Without careful management, plants and animals will continue to disappear and the wonderful natural qualities of our bush will be lost as:

- weeds out compete native plants,
- vandalism such as dumping and mowing destroys native plants and spreads weeds,
- urban stormwater erodes parts of creeks and fills other parts with sediment,
- pollution changes the chemistry of our creeks and soils, e.g. nutrient rich runoff kills trees and creeklife,
- wildlife faces new dangers, e.g. foxes, roads, and a lack of safe places,
- overuse by people erodes or compacts soil and tramples plants.

Our reserves provide food and shelter for a wide variety of animal life including birds, bats, frogs, reptiles, insects and other tiny critters.

In some of the larger bushland parks, like Bidjigal, small native mammals such as Sugar Gliders, Bandicoots and Echidnas can still be found. We are lucky - as they have disappeared from most of Sydney’s other urban bushland.

Bidjigal Reserve....

..previously known as Excelsior, is one of the largest bushland reserves in the Shire at 300 hectares.

It is no longer managed solely by Council. A large portion of it now has its own board of trustees, including Aboriginal traditional owners.

Repairing and protecting

Baulkham Hills Shire Council employs specialist staff and contractors to manage our bushland reserves. We spend most of our time:

- controlling weeds and encouraging natural regeneration of damaged bushland,
- managing bushfire risk,
- expanding bushland by replanting adjacent areas with local native species,
- supporting volunteers via the Bushcare program,
- providing visitor facilities and materials such as tracks, signage and brochures,
- controlling feral animals such as foxes, so the reserves are safer for native animals,
- managing projects and planning for the future,
- securing funds: most of councils bushland budget comes from grants, from federal, state, and regional programs.

Our most useful tool and greatest threat

Council, the Rural Fire Service and NSW Fire Brigade co-operate in an ongoing program to reduce bushfire hazards for reserve neighbours, and provide the type of fire cycles that promote healthy bushland and good wildlife habitat. Our two main methods are:

- regular, controlled burning,
- permanent fuel reduced zones in strategic areas. These are created and maintained by specialist Council field staff using mechanical slashing and selective hand clearing.

Many Bushcare volunteers are helping with fuel management.

Bush neighbours can also join Community Fireguard (run by NSW Fire Brigade) and Firewize (run by Rural Fire Service), to learn how to reduce bushfire risk, and to help defend their properties during a bushfire.
Here’s how to be a good bush neighbour

Keep your backyard in your backyard

Please don’t expand your lawn or garden into the bush or “improve” the bush by planting.

Mowing the bush isn’t looking after the bush

It destroys the shrub and groundlayers, which contain most of the bushland’s diversity and wildlife habitat. Weeds will invade the damaged bush when mowing stops.

In many of our reserves, vegetable gardens, compost bins, play equipment, outdoor settings, overextended lawn and garden areas are taking over valuable public land.

This can cause a safety hazard and block firebreaks. It usually destroys the bushland’s regeneration capacity, and encourages weeds - creating ongoing maintenance problems.

It’s also against the law and penalties (even criminal convictions) apply.

Talk to us before you start!

We can show you how to look after the bush beyond your back fence. But your work needs to be authorised as part of a Bushcare project. We want to ensure you keep safe, don’t break the law and get good results.

Volunteer for bushcare

It’s a great way to learn new skills, and meet people while helping to look after your local environment.

Council runs a Bushcare program, offering training, equipment and guidance to assist residents in maintaining local reserves. There is a network of bushcarers in the Shire, from large groups with regular workdays to individuals working occasionally.

Great results can be achieved when Council and neighbours work together. But remember to get permission before starting any work.

Tread gently in the bush

It’s great that people want to visit and enjoy our reserves, but too much “people traffic” can cause soil compaction, erosion and damage to regenerating native plants. By keeping to formed tracks, you can avoid most of this damage.

Leave the bush in the bush

Rocks and fallen timber provide homes for native animals, and plants need flowers and seeds to reproduce.

Please don’t remove or disturb them, it’s a criminal offence. Our plants and animals need all the help they can get to survive in urban reserves.

Your pets belong at home with you

It’s distressing to see your cat or dog with a dead native bird, possum or lizard, but even well fed pets - particularly cats - regularly kill and injure wildlife.

Just their presence in the bush can be enough to disturb native animals.

Most native animals injured by cats eventually die of disease or stress.

Give your pet a longer, safer life

Prevent it from roaming. The average life span of a cat kept inside is 12 years. For a cat allowed to roam it is only 3.

So keep your cat inside - especially at night - and make sure that your dog is secure on your property.

Volunteer for bushcare

It’s a great way to learn new skills, and meet people while helping to look after your local environment.
Get to know your local plants and wildlife

There is an amazing diversity of plants and animals in your local bushland. The more you learn about them, the more interesting your local bush becomes - and you may be able to provide us with valuable information.

Observant bush neighbours are often the first to notice changes, such as the re-appearance of bandicoots after a fox baiting program, or a decline in small bush bird numbers.

How can I do that?
Keep a wildlife diary.
There are many natural history organisations who can help. Ask us for details.
Come along to local activities such as guided bushwalks and Bushland Day.

Getting on with all the neighbours

The bush is a natural place that cannot be modified to make it completely safe for humans. Some inhabitants, such as spiders and ants, can bite or sting. They should be treated with respect and left alone. There are many fascinating creatures that play an important role in our local ecosystem so please don’t harm them!

Use less fertiliser
Stormwater runoff can carry excess fertiliser into bushland where it promotes weed growth and can make native plants sick. Use compost and slow release fertiliser, this will keep your garden and the bush looking good.

Grow bush friendly plants
Some common garden plants can spread into the bush and become weeds. Please take special care to keep these plants under control - or replace them with something less invasive.
Contact us, or visit Bidjiwong community nursery for advice (residents are entitled to 3 free local native plants each year).

What about snakes?
Snakes are protected by law and can not be taken from reserves, kept or killed without a license.
They are not naturally aggressive. The best way to avoid them is to keep an eye on the ground ahead while walking in the bush during the warmer months.
Don’t approach them. Give them a chance to retreat and they will, then you can both go on your way.

Create more wildlife habitat in your backyard

Talk to us or check out some of the books, brochures and websites available. Here are some backyard habitat basics:

- have less lawn - Common (Indian) Mynas love lawn, but few native animals can use it (unless its left unmown!),
- grow more shrubs - small birds need dense vegetation to shelter and feed on,
- use less pesticides - learn to appreciate insects as part of our wildlife and as food for lizards and birds,
- allow native grasses and groundcovers to grow, flower and seed - many butterfly caterpillars feed on grasses,
- be less tidy - messy places can be great habitat,
- grow a variety of plants to provide nectar, fruit and attract insects,
- provide logs, rocks and tree hollows,
- provide water (add logs, rocks and moist leaf litter nearby to encourage frogs).

Lawn clippings and garden waste are good for your garden not the bush

So please don’t dump them over the back fence! Garden waste might break down eventually but it looks terrible, introduces weeds that spread, smothers native plants and creates a fire hazard.
Penalties for dumping in the bush are up to $5,000.

Turn it in to something useful
Garden waste can make soil enriching compost for your garden or water saving mulch. Take a trailer load of prunings to the community nursery to be mulched on the first Saturday of each month - call first to book.

Even if the bush already looks weedy, garden dumping just makes it harder for Council and Bushcare volunteers to restore it to good health.

Dob in a dumper
If you notice somebody dumping waste on public land please contact Council’s Compliance Officers or the RID squad straight away!
More information?

Ask Council

3 Columbia Court, Baulkham Hills
PO Box 7064 Baulkham Hills BC 2153
Phone 9843 0555, Fax 9843 0409
council@thehills.nsw.gov.au
www.thehills.nsw.gov.au

After hours emergency environmental issues: call 9843 0555 and listen for the appropriate number
24 hour Vandalism Hotline 1300 884 885
Bidjiwong Community Nursery, Ted Horwood Reserve, Renown Rd Baulkham Hills Mulching day bookings 9843 0310

Some other useful contacts

Report all bushfires 000
Regional Illegal Dumping Service (RID) 4732 7447
Rural Fire Service 9654 1244 www.rfs.nsw.gov.au
NSW Fire Brigade. Fire safety info 9742 7400
www.nswfb.nsw.gov.au

National Parks and Wildlife Service
www.npws.nsw.gov.au Includes “Backyard Buddies” (Information about urban wildlife and habitat gardens) 1300 BUDDY (28339)
Sydney Metro Catchment Management Authority
9895 7753
Sydney Wildlife (forstering and rehabilitating native fauna - snake removal) website 9413 4300
WIRES (Wildlife Information and Rescue Service)
8977 3333 www.wires.org.au