

14 Wilderness

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The National Agreed Criteria for a Comprehensive Adequate and Representative Reserve System for Australia's Forests (JANIS 1996) specify that 90% (or more, if practicable) of an area of high quality wilderness that meets the minimum area requirements should be protected in reserves.

The assessment of wilderness in the South-West Forest Region of Western Australia used the National Wilderness Inventory (NWI) methodology, developed by the Australian Heritage Commission and adopted as the standard approach to the assessment of wilderness in Regional Forest Agreements throughout Australia.

14.2 DATA

The data used in the NWI analysis come from a number of sources. The distance-related indicators (settlement, access and apparent naturalness) are essentially current AUSLIG digital mapping data updated with additional information in the detailed study areas. The disturbance information, which provides the base data for the biophysical naturalness indicator, is based primarily on the disturbance data developed for the identification and assessment of old-growth forest (see Chapter 13).

14.3 METHODS

The concept of wilderness embraces measures of remoteness, naturalness and lack of disturbance. The National Forest Policy Statement: A New Focus for Australia's Forests (Commonwealth of Australia 1992b) states that "forested wilderness areas will be protected by means of reserves developed in the broader context of protecting wilderness values of all lands." Consistent with this, the approach to the identification of wilderness areas in the South-West Forest Region included non-forest vegetation types where they form a mosaic within largely forested areas.

The NWI methodology developed by Lesslie and Maslen (1995), produces a database of "wilderness quality" across the region. This is achieved by measuring the variation in wilderness quality across the landscape using four wilderness quality "indicators" that represent the two essential attributes of wilderness: remoteness and naturalness. These indicators are:

- remoteness from access;
- remoteness from settlement;
- apparent naturalness; and
- biophysical naturalness.

Map 17 shows biophysical naturalness for the South-West Forest Region. The index of wilderness quality derives from a summing of these individual indices and is represented by a range from zero to 20. To identify areas with high wilderness quality, the criteria used in this assessment were areas with a NWI wilderness quality of at least 12 and an area larger than 8000 hectares.

14.4 RESULTS

This assessment of the South-West Forest Region identified no areas that meet the threshold requirements. Although some area of wilderness quality greater than or equal to NWI 12 occur within the South-West Forest Region, none of these areas reaches the wilderness area size threshold of 8000 hectares.

Areas below the wilderness size threshold, but with high values of remoteness and naturalness identified through this study, were used in the assessment of national estate values discussed in Chapter 15. Map 16 shows wilderness quality for the South-West Forest Region.

14.5 CONCLUSION

No areas of wilderness above threshold have been delineated within the South-West Forest Region.

