



Aboriginal perceptions of “healthy country”

The Issue

The landscape health concept is currently being explored as a management tool in the tropical savannas of north Australia where sustainable regional development on Aboriginal lands is a key challenge. The working definition developed by researchers contributing to the Tropical Savannas CRC is a broad and holistic one that provides for differing cultural perspectives on nature, encompasses human-nature relationships and dependencies, and recognises the intrinsic values of functioning savanna environments.

The analogy drawn between human health and the health of natural systems has an obvious attraction in the savannas. The Aboriginal population in particular is seeking to restore a viable relationship between social communities and environments, and to develop new ways of utilising and sustaining resources. With a large and increasing proportion of north Australian environments being held under Aboriginal tenure, there is a pressing need to better understand Aboriginal environmental knowledge and the relationships between social, cultural, economic and ecological well-being.

CSIRO Research

CSIRO has recently commenced a project that examines Aboriginal perspectives of landscape health in a range of bioregions across the savannas. The project will involve a range of regional case studies, initially conducted in the Daly River region of the Northern Territory. The health of riparian systems and water resource management will be a central focus.

The research will be conducted by Dr Sue Jackson who has a number of years experience working with Aboriginal communities on resource management projects and in conducting social research in a cross-cultural context.

Key questions:

- What are Aboriginal people's perspectives on landscape health, and how can they be accommodated in formal assessments of environmental quality across the savannas?
- What biophysical and socio-cultural indicators might be suitable for an integrated assessment of landscape health on Aboriginal lands?
- How can environmental governance and indigenous participation in natural resource management be enhanced at local and regional scales?

Research Staff

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