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## BIOREGIONS THROUGHOUT THE FLINDERS SHIRE

A bioregion is an area constituting a natural ecological community with characteristic flora, fauna, and environmental conditions and bounded by natural rather than artificial borders.

Throughout Queensland there are 13 different bioregions. Within the Flinders Shire four of these bioregions can be found. To the northeast is the Einasleigh Uplands and to the northwest is the Gulf Plains, to the south is Mitchell Grass Downs and to the Southeast are the Desert uplands.

### Einasleigh Uplands

The Einasleigh Uplands bioregion straddles the Great Dividing Range in inland Northeast Queensland. It covers an area of 12,923,100 hectares, which is about 7.5% of Queensland.

The major land use in this bioregion is extensive grazing, but mining and cropping are locally significant.

It is known in this area as basalt gorge country, basalt is a type of lava. It has weathered to form rich red or black volcanic soils.

Surface water in the bioregion is drained by both east and west flowing rivers. The major catchments within the Einasleigh Uplands Bioregion are the Burdekin River and Flinders River.

This bioregion largely consists of a series of ranges and plateau surfaces, varying in altitude between 100m in the west to 1100m in the east. The bioregion contains a number of protected areas. They are:

- Bulleringa National Park
- Chillagoe – Mungana Caves National Park
- Dalrymple National Park
- Great Basalt Wall National Park
- Hann Tableland National Park
- Porcupine Gorge National Park
- Undara Volcanic National Park
- Palmer River Goldfields

The Einasleigh Uplands is particularly significant for macropods (common name) and contains more species of rock wallaby than anywhere in Australia. Endangered animals include the Red Goshawk, Gouldian & Star Finch and the Golden - Shouldered Parrot. Some of the rare species you may see while in this area are The Black-Necked Stork, Yellow-Naped snake, Ghost Bat and the Cotton Pygmy-Goose

Current threats in this bioregion come from feral animals such as cats, goats, rabbits and the European Red Fox.

### Gulf Plains

Gulf Plains are characterized by gentle sloping sandstone tablelands along its eastern margin. This covers an area of 22,143,799 hectares which is approximately 12% of Queensland.

This bioregion is only just in our shire; however its major population centres are Normanton, Burketown and Kowanyama. There is a small port at Kurumba where most of the regional fishing fleet is based; the Gulf and its estuarine wetlands support a significant fishing industry. The Gulf Plains bioregions are particularly significant for the very large numbers of waterbirds that periodically congregate there.

The dominant land use is cattle grazing on native pastures. The climates of the Gulf Plains include a dry season during winter and a monsoonal wet season (months).

The region contains 4 protected areas greater than 1,000ha. They are:

- The Mitchell – Alice Rivers National Park
- Staaten River National Park
- Lawn Hill Resources Reserve
- Bulleringa National Park

There is a total of 36 rare and threatened fauna species of the Gulf Plains bioregion. Rare species for this Bioregion that are on record are:

- Radjah Shelduck
- Masked Owl
- Hawksbill Turtle
- Pygmy long-eared bat

### Mitchell Grass Downs

As the name suggests, the region is characterized by extensive grasslands dominated by Mitchell grasses, this bioregion covers 23,788,550 hectares which is about 13.8% of Queensland. Most of the land in the bioregion is used for extensive grazing of sheep and cattle production.

Mitchell Grass tussocks on rolling plains dominate this bioregion. Soils are predominately deep, heavy grey or brown clays often with a self-mulching and sometimes stony surface.

Plains supporting grasslands on brown, crackling, and sometimes-stony clay soils control Mitchell Grass Downs. Throughout this bioregions limestone and deeply weathered Cretaceous sediments, sometimes covered by superficial Quaternary deposits, form low hills and ridges.

The towns that are within this bioregion include Longreach, Winton, Aramac, Hughenden and Boulia.

The Mitchell Grass Downs spans the watershed separating many of the northern from southern flowing rivers in Queensland. Rivers that originate from the Mitchell grass Downs bioregion are:

- Barcoo
- Thompson
- Diamantina
- Hamilton
- Burke
- Georgina

These rivers supply most of the surface water through the channel country bioregion into the Lake Eyre Basin. The Flinders, McKinley and Gregory Rivers flow from the northern parts of the Mitchell grass downs bioregion into the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Data has been compiled on the number and habitat preferences of native fauna species show that there are at least 54 mammals, 225 birds, 21 amphibians and 110 reptiles recorded from this bioregion. A number of feral animals occur throughout the bioregion such as goats, pigs, horses, camels, rabbits, cats and foxes. These species are likely to impact of the native wildlife.

The native fauna characteristic of Mitchell grasslands is distinctive – animals that have adapted to the open, seasonally arid grasslands. Birds in this bioregion are typically seed – or insect-eating ground dwellers such as the little button-quail, Australian bustard and singing bushlark. These birds find food and nest sites in and between the grass tussocks. The budgerigar and cockatiel feed on the ground but use the hollows of the trees along watercourses for nesting. These birds visit in the wet to breed then leave when the downs start to dry out and the food becomes scarce.

Many reptiles and small mammals are found in the Mitchell grass downs. Most of them live in the soil cracks and some found exclusively in this habitat.

Some species are the:

- Julia Creek Dunnart
- The narrow-nosed planigale
- Forrest's mouse

Mitchell grass downs bioregion has a number of rare reptiles which are found nowhere else. Such as:

- The bearded dragon
- Collett's snake or 'Downs Tiger'
- The skink

### Over Grazing

Mitchell grasses are generally considered to be resilient to grazing. However, continual overgrazing can dramatically reduce pasture productivity and biodiversity. Overgrazing prevents regeneration of Mitchell grass tussocks, changes plant composition and reduces seed production and insect population.

### Woody Weed Invasion

Introduced woody weed into the grasslands is a significant threat to biodiversity and production. Large areas of grasslands are overrun by the exotic species prickly acacia, parkinsonia and mesquite. Prickly acacia is a serious problem in the northern Mitchell grasslands. This shrub currently infests 7 million hectares and impacts heavily on the grazing industry by decreasing productivity and increasing maintenance cost (loss of grass cover, soil degradation and interfering with stock access to water points).

### Feral Animals

As in many parts of Australia, a number of feral animals have made there home in the Mitchell Grass Downs. Feral pigs, cats and foxes are particularly common. These species are known or suspected to affect native fauna through habitat destruction or modification, competition for resources and predation. The increase of these feral predators is contributing factors to the decline of fauna in these areas.

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## Desert Uplands

The Desert Uplands lies in central northern Queensland, straddling the Great Dividing Range between Blackall and Pentland. Sandstone ranges and sand plains dominate this bioregion. Coal deposits can be found deep down. The Desert Uplands cover (7032297ha) ie: 4% of Queensland.

Although not a true desert, the Desert Uplands has desert like characteristics. The rainfall is low and the soils are sandy and have a low fertility. The land throughout the bioregions is used for cattle grazing.

Most of the Desert Uplands bioregion remains in a relatively natural condition and its biodiversity including both animals and plants, appear largely intact.

The bioregion contains the following protected areas:

- White Mountain Nation Park (108 000ha)
- White Mountain Resource Reserve (12 056ha)
- Moorrinya National Park (32 607ha)
- Forest Den National Park (5890ha)

The major communities are Barcaldine, Aramac, with smaller centres such as Prairie, Torrens Creek, Pentland and Jericho.

The Desert Uplands appears to have been used by a number of different Aboriginal groups as part of their territories. The lack of permanent water may have been one of the factors dictating that this area was only used on a seasonal basis. Some of the Main Aboriginal groups that have been identified using this area are the Yirandali, Kutjala, Yilba and Myian tribes. The Kudjala, Birri, Jangga, Jirandali and Ngarragoonda groups currently have Native title claims on some areas throughout this bioregion.

In the Desert Uplands bioregion there are 21 rare and threatened flora species as well as 33 fauna species. There is 6 endangered species of fauna and 1 species of flora which are on record in this bioregion:

### Animals

- Edgbaston goby
- Red goshawk
- Gouldian Finch
- Allan's Ierista
- Star finch
- Red-finned blue eye

### Flora

- Eriocaulon carsonii

**So while you are traveling around the region, take notice of the different ecosystems that you see, some are very noticeable as you drive along the Overlander's Way.**