

Aussie northern savanna 'largest, most intact on Earth

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A new book on Northern Australia by four of the country's leading scientists reveals the region has the largest and least damaged tropical savanna in the world, and calls for a new approach to development and conservation to ensure it remains one of the last great natural places.

The Nature of Northern Australia is the result of almost three years of exhaustive research. Authors Dr John Woinarski, Professor Brendan Mackey, Professor Henry Nix and Dr Barry Traill detail 'how the country works', and provide a roadmap for planning future economic growth and conservation of the North's irreplaceable ecological systems.

The study used latest satellite imagery to identify that the more than 1.5 million square kilometre area of Northern Australia – stretching from Cape York Peninsula and Gulf Country in Far North Queensland, across the Northern Territory Top End to the Kimberley in North West Western Australia – is one of the last remaining great natural areas on Earth alongside the Amazon rainforests and polar wilderness of Antarctica.

“Only an hour west of Cairns a great ‘sea’ of savanna stretches across the top of Australia west to the Indian Ocean. In other parts of the world, tropical savanna is in decline due to land clearing, unsustainable grazing regimes and over population, but this vast area of Northern Australia is remarkably intact,” co-author Professor Brendan Mackey from The Australian National University said.

The North is a place where natural ecological processes continue to function well, maintaining a healthy landscape, Professor Mackey said. “This healthy landscape is necessary to sustain people and industries in Northern Australia. Elsewhere in the tropics and the rest of Australia, we have impaired the health and functioning of our lands and waters.”

The Nature of Northern Australia calls for investments in the management of the North; using the emerging carbon economy associated with extensive natural vegetation to provide investment and employment; and recognising management skills of all land managers, including Indigenous Australians.

Source: ASU

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