



The damage from last summer's bushfires remains etched in the Kosciuszko National Park landscape.

Poland gives KNP a helping hand

Bushfire recovery in the high country has received assistance from an unlikely source, with volunteer firefighters in Poland joining with Australia's Polish community to raise more than \$150,000.

The money will be spent helping species threatened with extinction, including the restoration of their habitat destroyed by fire.

On the initiative of volunteer firefighters from Porba Spytkowa in southern Poland, 420,000PLN (\$144,000) was collected for the restoration of the park, 33 per cent of which was burned last summer, threatening many unique and previously endangered species with extinction.

The funds were symbolically handed over to the Australian Ambassador to Poland, Lloyd Brodrick, at a ceremony on February 13 in the presence of the President of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Duda. Additional funds for the restoration of Kosciuszko Park were also transferred by the Polish community in Australia.

Last Friday, a joint field trip to the Kosciuszko National Park took place with the participation of Michał Kołodziejcki - Ambassador of Poland to Australia, Mick Pettit - Director of Southern Ranges Branch, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and David Pumphrey - Director of the National Parks and Wildlife Foundation and Chair of the Projects Committee.

They visited the areas where the ongoing recovery works are funded by Polish donations. In a letter thanking

Poland's firefighting volunteers, director of the Southern Ranges Branch of NPWS Mick Pettit noted some of the restoration projects are being completed by NPWS staff that had fought last summer's fires.

"Working on such projects is an important part of the healing process - not only for the environment, but also for our mental wellbeing," he wrote.

"Knowing that we are being helped by a gift from the heart of Polish firefighters touches and connects us all."

Mr Pettit noted that the KNP is one of the country's most important natural areas and that more than 220,000 hectares was burned in last year's fire.

Areas of eucalypt woodlands, montane forests, treeless plains and wetlands were hit hard, while various huts and heritage buildings, like the Kiandra Courthouse, were destroyed - "places that told the story of how people adapted to remote locations and demonstrated bushcraft skills", he wrote.

He said the money would be used surveying damage to montane peatlands, preventing soil erosion to burnt slopes and planting flora only found in the Australian alps, an important food source for animals such as the Mountain Pygmy Possum.

The Polish funds helped recovery operations begin quickly, with the assistance in transferring the money offered by the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife (FNPW).

But the full recovery process will have many distinctive phases stretched over decades.



Above: Replanting unique flora.

Below: Representatives of the Polish embassy with National Parks and Wildlife staff.



The dominant trees found in Kosciuszko National Park are Eucalyptus pauciflora (Snow Gum tree) which, compared to other lowland subspecies, do not regenerate after being caught by fire. Until new trees have grown, the situation of the animals inhabiting the area remains uncertain.

Kosciuszko National Park with Mount Kosciuszko, the tallest mountain peak in mainland Australia, is of particular importance to Poles and the Polish community in Australia, and has a symbolic role in the history of Polish-Australian relations.

181 years ago, Polish explorer and traveller Paweł Strzelecki climbed the mountain and named it after the Polish national hero.



Left: Polish volunteer firefighters raised more than \$140,000 to help with the recovery of Kosciuszko National Park. The funds were symbolically handed over to the Australian Ambassador to Poland, Lloyd Brodrick at a ceremony on February 13 in the presence of the President of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Duda.