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Reserve fight over

Government to reclassify block

By Mark Sawa

FEARS the ACT government might back away from a commitment to return a block of land to nature reserve appear to be unfounded.

More than 1500 north Canberra residents have rushed to sign a petition in recent weeks ahead of a what has been described as a last-ditch effort to pressure the government.

The contentious block of land in Watson was reclassified from nature reserve to special use in 2002. That never happened and instead it triggered the creation of the Friends of Mount Majura.

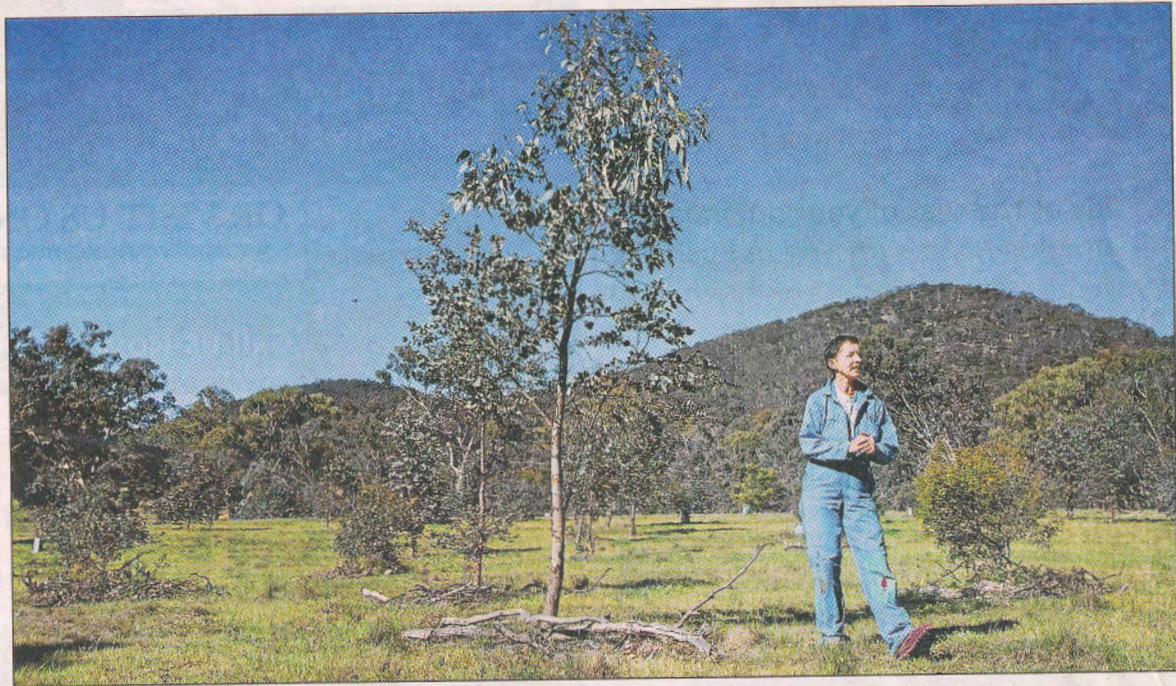
For the past decade they have been working with the community, schools and even politicians to regenerate the area after it had been decimated by grazing.

And for years commitments have been made by politicians and relevant agencies that plans were under way to return the block to nature reserve.

But when Friends of Mount Majura co-ordinator Waltraud Pix, who was recognised as the ACT Volunteer of the Year in the Environment in 2009, was told this year the process to move the block back into nature reserve had stopped she was furious.

She said more than 40 truckloads of horehound had been removed from the block over the years, about 400 trees had been planted and thousands of hours of work had been put in.

"Considering all the work and all the years and all the meetings and



Mt Majura was promised to be turned back into a nature reserve and Friends of Mt Majura Park Care Group co-ordinator Waltraud Pix was furious when she thought that process had been stopped. Picture: Elesia Kurtz

everyone agreed that it should not have been moved into horse holding paddocks, and the promise by the government, and the letter from the Conservator and the letter from the ACT [Planning and Land Authority]; I just could not believe it," Ms Pix said.

"I was absolutely devastated, disappointed, demotivated, furious and angry."

She steeled herself for one last battle on the issue.

But just as support begins to swell for the cause the government has revealed it still intends to return the Majura block to nature reserve in

"the near future".

Minister for Territory and Municipal Services Shane Rattenbury has even offered to launch the petition prepared by Ms Pix.

Mr Rattenbury explained the ACT government was required to find biodiversity offsets for developments which impact on nationally threatened species.

"All additions to the nature reserve system were being considered as potential offsets for future development," he said.

"The process was stopped to allow

further development of offset arrangements."

He said the block had been removed from the horse paddock complex for several years.

"Work has already begun to officially recognise this site as part of Mount Majura Nature Reserve and will be finalised in the coming months."

If that occurs the wish of hundreds of school children and community volunteers who have transformed a "purple-ocean" of Patterson's Curse back into a valuable piece of grassy woodland could be realised.