



Government of South Australia  
Northern and Yorke Natural  
Resources Management Board



## The Northern and Yorke Natural Resources Management Board Interactive Projects Map



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The Northern and Yorke Natural Resources Management Board  
**Interactive Projects Map**

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*Water*

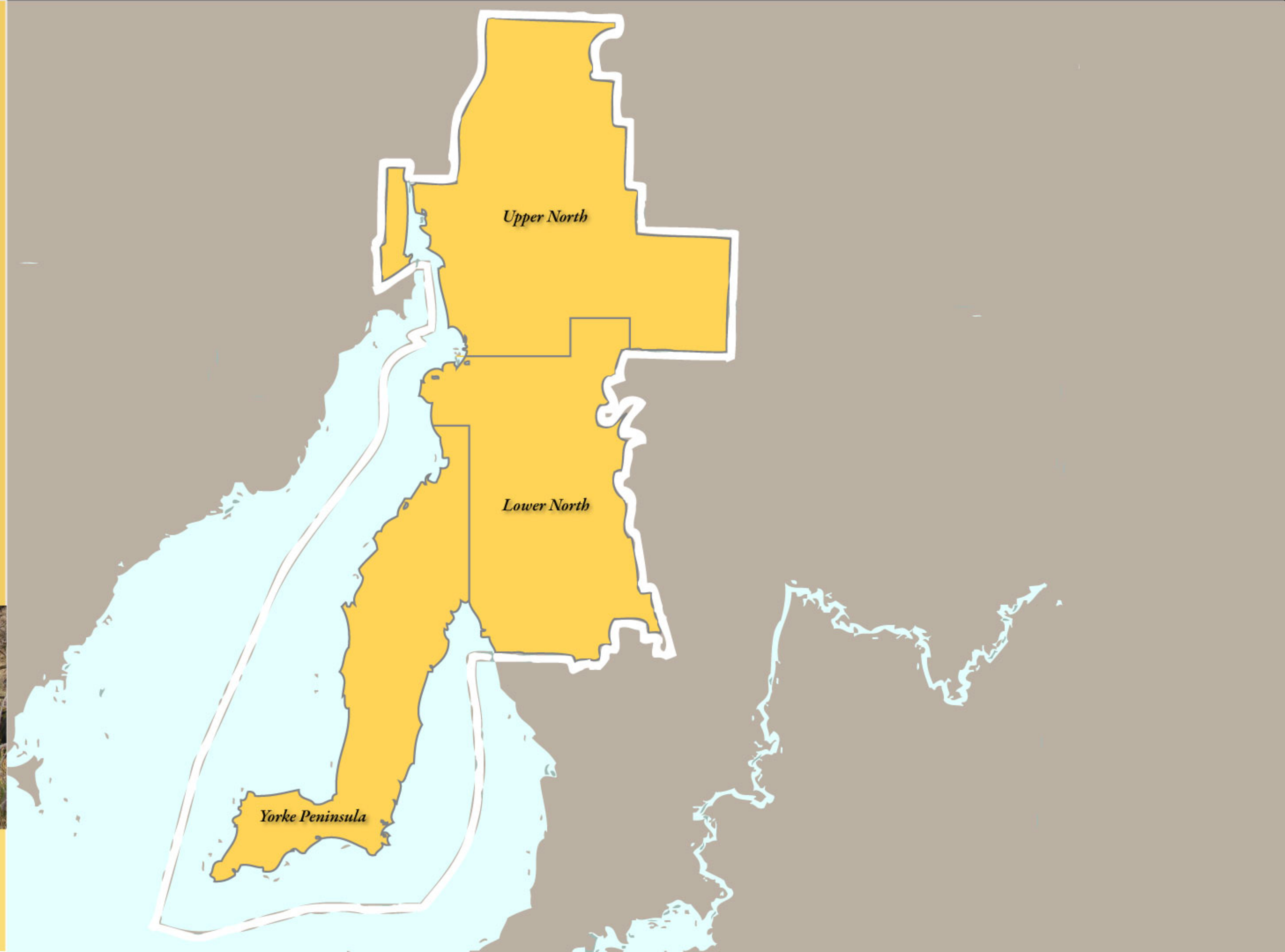
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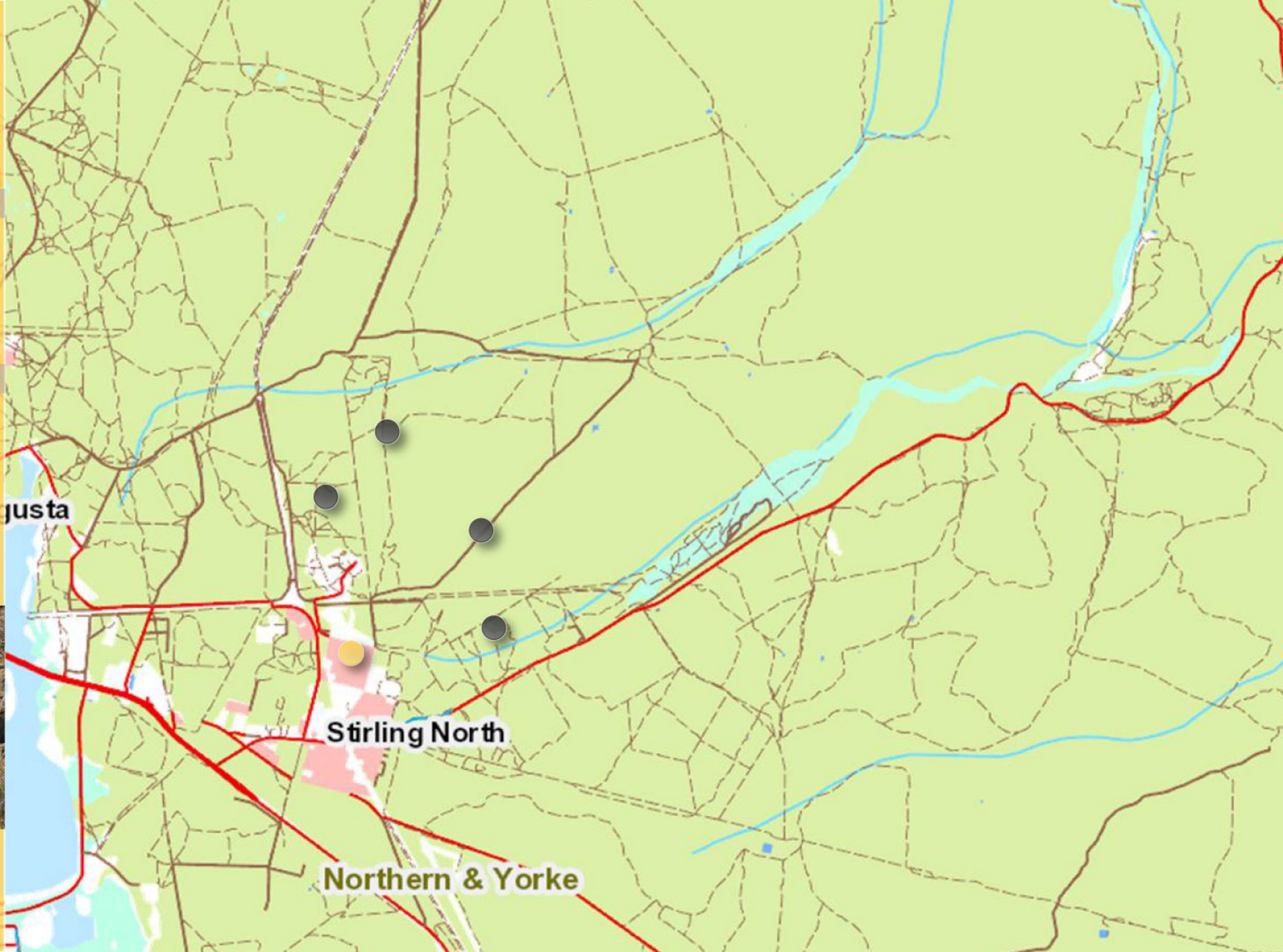
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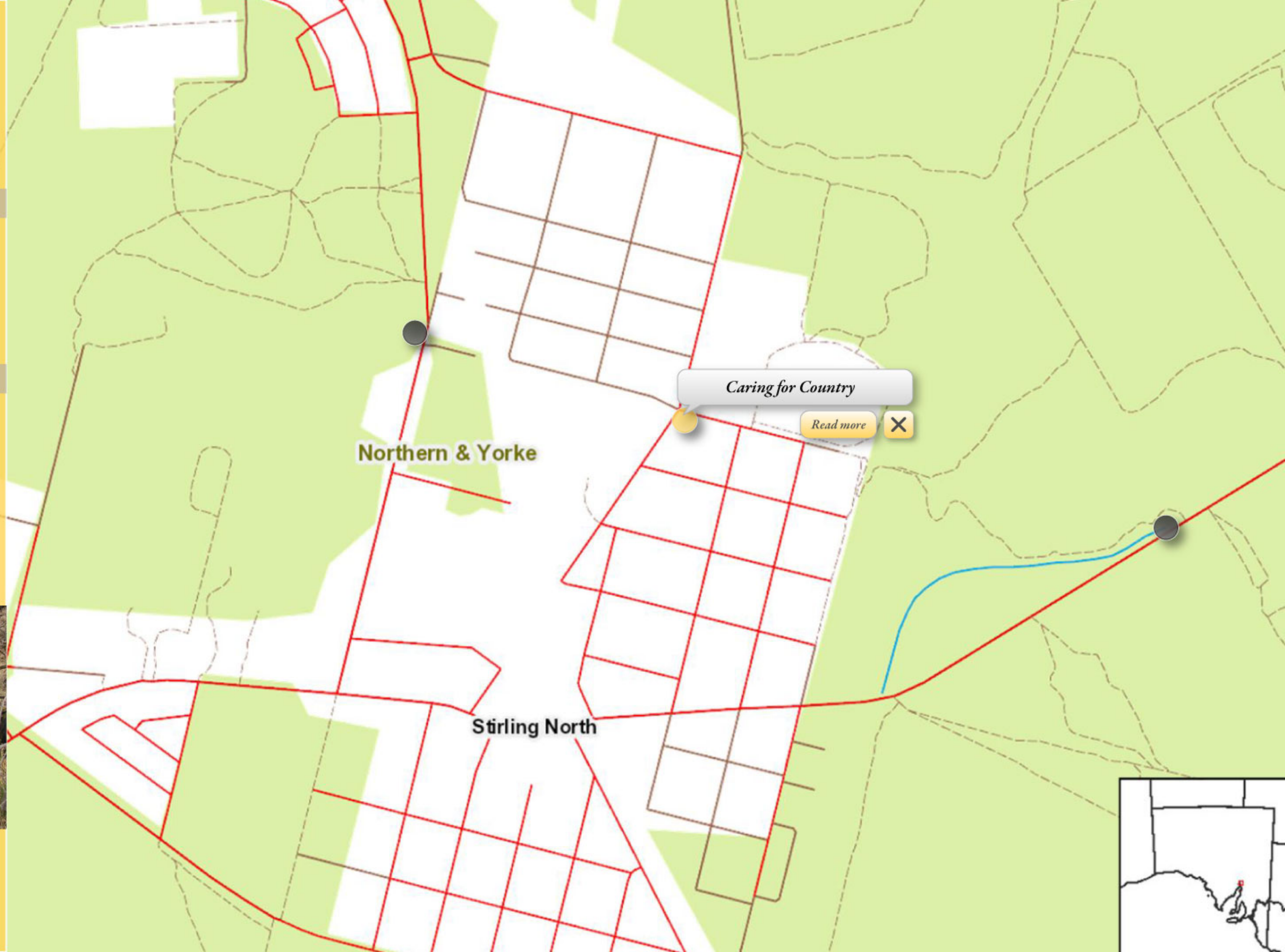
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## Caring for Country



Bill Nicholas finds there's much more to Wirrabara Forest than the trees.

The most important quality of any farmland has always been access to water. In pioneering days it was even more important.

For a number of reasons there are a number of 'sweet spots' or 'honeypots' – tiny micro-climates that for one reason or another get more than their fair share of rain and underground water.

The pioneers judged the likely rainfall of an area by the size and number of trees growing – lots of big healthy trees – lots of rainfall.

One of the best of these early sweet spots was the Wirrabara Forest on the eastern slopes and foothills of the Southern Flinders Ranges about an hour's drive from Port Pirie.

The thickly wooded forest quickly attracted the attention of timber cutters who from the 1850s logged huge amounts of timber for station buildings, fences, homesteads, shearing sheds, cottages, jetties and mines - Charlton, Moonta, Wallaroo and the Burra. As the railways extended to Silverton, Pichi Richi and the far north, they needed millions of sleepers.

Wirrabara Forest was such a big success, the government kicked off Australia's first forestry operation there in 1877 with

a tree nursery and plantations of pinus radiata and native gums that has been supplying timber ever since.

Besides plenty of rainfall and groundwater, Wirrabara Forest has another big advantage. Tucked in the hills, it is out of the scorching summer north winds that cook apricots on the tree out on the plains. The region is a perfect little micro-climate ideal for growing fruit.

In 1878 some 30 acres of forest land in Wirrabara was leased to four market gardeners, including Alfred Curtis, a 20 year-old from Lyndoch, working as a pit sawyer in the forests. His great great grandson, Peter Curtis, still works the block stocked with thousands of peach and other stone fruits which he sells directly door to door in Port Pirie as well as the big supermarkets.

Noel Curtis is the only fully commercial orchardist operating in the Wirrabara Forest area as a certified biodynamic producer. He has 2,500 peach trees – as well as quinces, persimmons, apricots and plums – after inheriting the 200 acre block from his father who in turn took over from his father who planted the block in 1921.

Noel picks all of the fruit himself and sends the bulk of it to Biodynamic Marketing at the Footscray Markets. Fresh fruit is way more profitable than dried because it takes 10kg of fruit to make 1.5kg of dried peaches.

Noel is about to plant another 500 peach trees. He says the average rainfall in the district has fallen from 28 inches to "more like 20" and instead of getting most of it in winter, it now comes more sporadically. So he is using bore water with

