

Your Molonglo Catchment

December 2010

Newsletter of the Molonglo Catchment Group

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Sustainability on Small Farms

by Ange Calliess

Sustainability on Small Farms is a partnership project between the Molonglo Catchment Group and Greening Australia, funded by the Australian Government's Caring For Our Country initiative. Sustainability on Small Farms focuses on enhancing and connecting remnant Grassy Box Woodland on small properties across the catchment and has helped landowners undertake projects such as: revegetation through tubestock planting or direct seeding to create habitat corridors and provide connectivity; fencing remnant woodland; and Serrated Tussock control. The project has also provided advice and resources to landowners through site visits, field days, workshops and training. A highlight of the training made available to landowners was the series of 'Managing Horses on Small Properties' workshops delivered by Jane and Stuart Myers on behalf of the Ginninderra and Molonglo Catchment Groups.

The interest from landowners within the catchment has been excellent, with more than 40 enquiries leading to 22 landowners taking up the offer of funding assistance. Collectively, these landowners are undertaking almost 50ha of revegetation across the catchment, which is an excellent result when you consider many of these landowners' properties range in size from just 10ha to 40ha!



Photo: Lisa Whitty

This funding program has now been fully subscribed, however we look forward to jointly sourcing more funding to enable us to deliver similar projects, as interest from Molonglo landowners wanting to undertake revegetation projects appears to be increasing.

Friends of the Pinnacle - A Whirlwind Year by Vaughn Cox

“.....A kind of willy willy zipped past us and sucked MILLIONS of flatweed seeds into a swirling cloud the size of three large houses stacked on top of each other. This swirling mass was lifted up into the sky 100s of metres and wafted off over the city”.¹

Fotpin, the Friends of the Pinnacle, is a dynamic active Parkcare group working long hours in aid of the restoration and renewal of the Pinnacle Nature Reserve, part of the Canberra Nature Park abutting the suburbs of



Hawker and Weetangera . We have been alive in this form for about 6 months emerging from members of the Pinnacle Environmental Group, an organisation which receded a decade ago, and new strongly motivated members.

Our frenetic activities this year have included the public launching of our Draft Weed Management Plan (open for comment and feedback), regular weeding sessions, the building and launching of our website, publishing a quarterly newsletter, the beginnings of land and water erosion monitoring, supporting PCL with Rabbit burrow monitoring, conducting monthly and seasonal guided walks, letterbox dropping, networking at a local school fete, and engaging with community groups such as the local scouts.

The focus activity of the moment is, however, our Native Grass Restoration Project, lead by Dr Don Driscoll. This major project essentially examines methods for reducing soil nutrients, and the effects of nutrient reduction on weed control and native plant recovery. Don writes “We can be pretty sure that nearly every bit of land has a regular shower of [exotics] seeds. Our fight is therefore against the conditions in which they germinate.”¹ Fotpin acknowledges funding for the project through an Environment ACT Grant, Caring for our Country Community Action Grant and support from the Canberra Labor Club.

If you wish to find out more about our group please check out our website www.fotpin.org.au. It’s got everything from walkers’ blogs to calculated feedback on our weeding effort. Join up and come and help out, you will be welcome.

¹ *Dr Don Driscoll, Fellow, Fenner School of Environment and Society, fotpin member, in email correspondence November 2010*

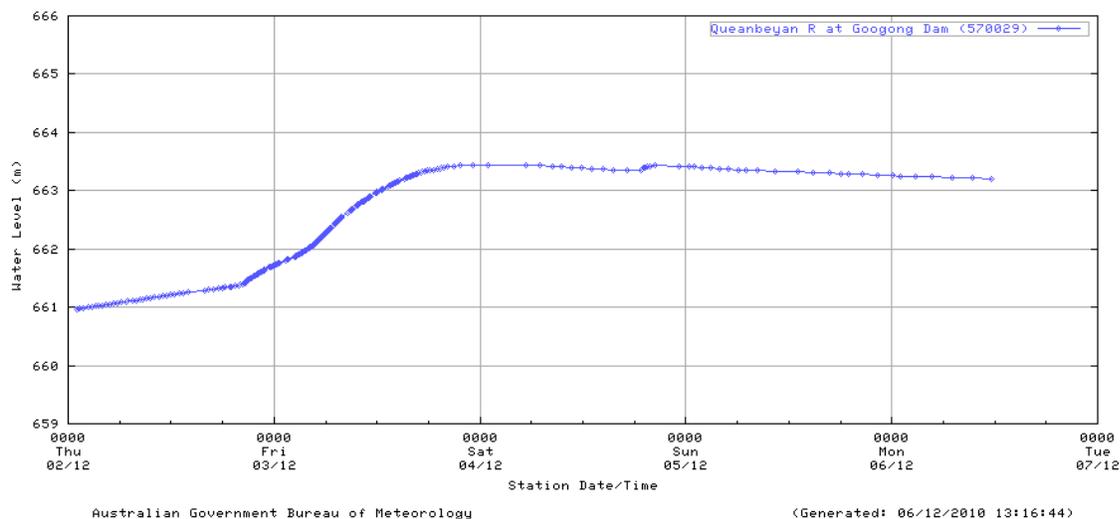
River Heights!

By Stephen Skinner

Note: This article refers to a number of river height charts from The Bureau of Meteorology; it is best to read the article with the charts close by. To view the charts visit:

[www.molonglocatchment.com.au/news_&_events.htm#Recent Storm Events in the Molonglo Catchment](http://www.molonglocatchment.com.au/news_&_events.htm#Recent_Storm_Events_in_the_Molonglo_Catchment)

There is much to be gleaned from river flow charts. If you start with the Googong Reservoir, see chart below, you can just watch the water rise until it rides over the new spillway on Friday afternoon. But wait, there's more ... once that storm on Saturday afternoon hit, the water level in the reservoir is even higher!



Queanbeyan River at Googong Dam from Bureau of Meteorology

The whole region had substantial rain on Thursday 2nd, Friday 3rd and early in the morning of Saturday 4th December which is clear from the first hump on all the charts. Then Queanbeyan and North Canberra got Saturday's storm.

When I drove out of Queanbeyan on Friday morning the Morisset St low-level bridge was well under water and the lower weir nowhere to be seen. On Sunday evening, the water was still cascading down to the flood below, but the bridge was open. Somewhere in between there was the downpour!

The downpour (officially only 18mm at Wickerslack Lane but 30mm at the Canberra Weather Station) can be very clearly seen on the Wickerslack Lane (Chart E), Queanbeyan at the ACT border and Jerrabomberra Creek at Hindmarsh Drive (Charts F and I). As we drove up Canberra Avenue at 6pm there was the most magnificent thunderhead over Queanbeyan and the rain started. By the time we got to my drive it was running with water. The dash to the porch included a drenching!

The most dramatic charts are those for Sullivans Creek (Chart J). The Southwell gauge is in the parklands northeast of Mouat St and may have been above the main pathway of the storm. The Barry Drive gauge is on the boundary of the ANU and Turner, and so measures the run-off from Watson, Dickson, Lyneham O'Connor and Turner. Just given the charts, you can almost reconstruct the events of that week!

Note: This article was written before the major flood event in Queanbeyan on Thursday 9th December. We have included the river flow charts from the flood event at the bottom of the link, they dwarf the charts discussed in this story and are well worth a look!

Seeing grasslands with camera

By David Wong

Thirteen people armed with cameras met at Mulligans Flat to take part in the first *Seeing Grasslands* photography workshop. The aim of this workshop was to encourage people to enjoy both the grasslands and their photography and hopefully learn something along the way.

To kick the workshop off John Fitz Gerald gave an introduction on Friends of Grassland and Chris Holly set the creative challenge for the participants. Participants were asked to imagine that the grassland would no longer be here fifty years from now. How then, would they use photography to document this grassland? Participants were then invited to share the results with the group and the broader community through the *Seeing Grasslands* Flickr group. It was interesting to see the different ways in which people captured what was there.



We were in luck with the weather and also with the great season we have been having. The grasslands look great after all the rain and seemed to be teeming with flowers and insect life.

The facilitators, Chris Holly and I, assisted with any technical questions from the participants. We were happy to see that people had a lot of fun and seemed to get quite a lot out of the workshop, be it in the form of photography tips, enjoying the surrounds, honing their skills or just being reminded of the little



things we notice when we take a closer look.

The Flickr group is open to the public and we look forward to seeing how more people in the community “see” the grasslands in the future! Further images from participants may be found at www.flickr.com/groups/seeinggrasslands Please feel free to join the group and add your own!

Photos by David Wong. Top photo, Chris Holly sets the scene.

Managing Horses on Small Properties

By Andy Westcott

On the 7th and 27th of November the MCG held field days with Jane Myers of Equiculture and Alison Elvin of Natural Capital on Managing Horses on Small Properties. As some of you will be aware we held a seminar with Jane earlier in the year. These field days involved a refresher from Jane on the principles that underpin good horse management, particularly the key things to consider when designing your property to ensure the welfare of your horse and the environment. Jane had presented this material to the majority of the participants at the seminar we held earlier in the year.

Once we had wrapped up the theory session, the group got down to business planning their properties, Jane and Stuart from Equiculture invited the participants to show them their aerial photos or sketches of their properties to get a rundown of what they could change, or in some cases where to start, to get the best results for their property, their animals and the environment. This session was particularly rewarding for the participants and it was great to hear a lot of them discussing the changes they had already made to their property management after attending our seminar with Jane earlier in the year. Alison Elvin from Natural Capital was also on hand for this session, Alison identified the various native grasses and common pasture weeds brought in by the group and helped them to understand the processes at work on their properties that were leading to the dominance of some weeds or why the native grasses they had are particularly good for horses. The key lesson out of this was that horses require feed with a lower sugar content than present in the improved pastures we associate with other grazing stock. It turns out our native grasses are the ideal grazing grass for horses due to their low sugar content.



Once all the participants had their property planning session or plant identification lesson completed we headed out in the field to look over local horse properties. The destination for the Bungendore field day was Hillary and John Gunn's property in Carwoola, for the Burra day we visited Sarah Gowland and Carol Mierendorff's properties. The property owners took us for a walk over their place with Jane pointing out the ideal places for central stables and how to introduce laneways to minimise the work involved in rotational grazing, or how to encourage certain native grasses that are great for horses. Alison highlighted interesting plants and discussed what these told us about the soil and the property in general. We

discussed everything from the sugar content of hay to the calcium issues in soils with thriving Capeweed. The group went away having learned a lot about not only how to better manage their properties but also how to identify and control a range of pasture weeds and encourage native grass species.

The field days were held with the support of the Australian Government's Caring for our Country and ActewAGL. A big thank you to Hilary and John Gunn, Sarah Gowland and Carole Mierendorff for allowing us to take a walk on their properties.

Queanbeyan Floods

By Andy Westcott

Thursday 9th November was not your average day at the Molonglo Catchment Group office. Overnight heavy rain fell on an already saturated catchment with the field capacity of our soils met long ago. As a result the creeks and rivers of the Molonglo catchment became inundated with runoff, and a large amount of stormwater from our urban areas. With Googong having reached capacity early in the morning of Saturday 4th December, this could mean only one thing: flooding of the Queanbeyan River.



Opening up the office at 8am, I was greeted with a knock on the door from the SES instructing us to lift all valuables and electrical equipment off the floor in case of flooding. This all seemed a little drastic given our office is 300m from the river so I headed down for a look and so, it seemed, had half of Queanbeyan. The sight was amazing: Monaro Street was backed up through both sets of lights and everyone from school children to grandparents were looking over the bridge in amazement; the photo above was taken at 8:30am with the flood water still rising. As I crossed the bridge heading toward Bungendore a trickle of water began to flow across the road, this quickly became a rush and the road was closed meaning the main bridge out of town (Queen Elizabeth Bridge) was closed along with the Yass Road and the low level crossings at Morisset Street and Oaks Estate Road. The only way to get from Queanbeyan to Bungendore was now via Fyshwick and the Federal Highway.

I headed back down for another look at 9:30am to see if there had been a significant rise. You can see by comparing the two pictures on this page that the water had risen dramatically in this time. At this point even the suspension bridge was close though it never went under.

A large amount of woody debris was observed rushing down the river, a great indicator of the velocity with which the floodwaters were moving. Some of this ended up caught at the Morisset Street crossing. Due to the sheer amount of debris deposited, the road only reopened on the evening of 14th December. It should be pointed out that this debris was not a result of work carried out by the Indigenous River Rehabilitation



team between Doeberl Reserve and Dane Street. The team was required to put all trees felled in the restoration works through the wood chipper. This chip was then used to mulch the team's plantings.

The river peaked at 8.4 metres: enough to see the carpark of the Riverside Plaza inundated, mobile homes at the Morisset Street Caravan Park moved to higher ground by cranes, the evacuation of some residents and the closure of the Queen Elizabeth Bridge to traffic and pedestrians! Not your average day at the office for the Molonglo Catchment Group.

Coordinator's Report

By Andy Westcott

Since October's newsletter the Molonglo Catchment Group has been focused on running two field days on Managing Horses on Small properties, as outlined in an earlier story, and various other projects including planting days, workshops and promoting Caring for our Country priorities at community events. We held two planting days in the first week of November, the first with Royalla Landcare and corporate volunteers from Jemena. This planting day was part of an initiative of Landcare Australia to link corporate volunteers with Landcare groups, the planting site was part of Royalla Landcare's Mobile Muster project. The team from Jemena did an outstanding job getting over 300 trees and shrubs in the ground in an afternoon. The following day we were at Captains Flat to help out with the planting of a site on Kerr's Creek. This project was supported by the Murrumbidgee CMA and Molonglo Catchment Group Project Funding. The kids from Captains Flat Primary School came along to lend a hand. They worked with volunteers from Captains Flat Landcare and their teachers, with everyone pitching in to get the site planted out.



Well done to Andrew Clive and Wendy Hodgman of Captains Flat Landcare on the success of the day.

While on the topic of Captains Flat, we also attended our second Captains Flat Environment Market on Saturday 6th November along with Lauren Van Dyke of Kosciuszko to Coast. We were there to promote Captains Flat Landcare and to raise awareness of the Frogwatch program with the aim of increasing the number of census sites in and around Captains Flat. The markets are held on the first Saturday of every month with the Environment Market held once a year. Captains Flat Landcare led a walk to the planting site on Kerr's Creek to discuss Landcare and what they are trying to achieve, the Molonglo Catchment Group's Waterwatch Coordinator, Dr Stephen Skinner, also led a walk-and-talk. Stephen took some interested community members down to the Molonglo River to discuss the hidden world of Macroinvertebrates.

Two workshops were also held with Sarah Sharp in November, one in Carwoola and the second in Hackett. Sarah trained attendees in the use of the new "*Vegetation Monitoring Manual, A Step-by-Step Guide to Monitoring Native Vegetation in the ACT*" by herself and Lori Gould. The manual has been developed to provide a consistent approach to monitoring and surveying vegetation, habitat and environmental condition. Many of the attendees were members of local Landcare and Parkcare groups and hope to utilise the manual to monitor the biodiversity on their sites, to gather data on what impact their work is having. Keep your eyes on the MCG website as we hope to release a report soon on a feasibility study we undertook on the use of the manual for community-based biodiversity monitoring. The study was carried out with the assistance of an ACT Environment Grant.

That's another year gone by with the Molonglo Catchment Group, by my count we ran or were involved with the planning of 28 field days, workshops, walks and talks and public displays on everything from GPS training to Reading the Landscape workshops. Thanks to all the volunteers who have helped out over the year, particularly the MCG committee, and the organisations that support the operation of the MCG. Have a safe and happy festive season. See you all next year.

Support

For more details on events being run in the Molonglo catchment visit www.molonglocatchment.com.au. If you have any questions about events or want to discuss NRM in the catchment please feel free to call me on 6299 2119, email me at coordinator@molonglocatchment.com.au or drop into the office at Unit 13, Cassidy Arcade 72-76 Monaro Street, Queanbeyan between 8am and 4:30pm.

The operation of the Molonglo Catchment Group is supported through the Australian Government's Caring for our Country initiative with the support of the ACT Natural Resource Management Council.

