

Shirtsleeves

Hunter Region Landcare Network

Network News

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LIFE IN THE GULF

As a country and community we have been witnessing natural disasters of late. Do Landcare and NRM groups have a role to play?

In 2009 the Gulf of Carpentaria had unprecedented floods on over 10 million hectares, some 3 million under water for up to 3 months. The grassy layer in the northern savannahs is the powerhouse of the ecosystem. Native grasses are primary habitat for biodiversity and fodder for extensive grazing Brahman herds. Long term inundation obliterated the grassy layer, mature grassy tussocks, seed bank etc. and in some areas, the entire savannah ecosystem (normally carries 35,000kg. of grass a hectare).

I remember looking at the landscape and thinking "What's the good of 'caring' for country when along comes nature and just kills the lot anyway?" But caring for our country before the floods meant that country had an inherent resilience to be able to 'heal' itself and restore itself more quickly. Healthy landscapes surrounding flooded areas basically re-seeded and restarted lost ecosystems and careful management post flood allowed time for seed to germinate and establish good root systems.

I take my hat off to graziers who, at a very low point in their lives and businesses, had the strength to manage starving cattle off damaged landscapes for the sake of long term viability. They just got on with the job of rebuilding lives, living and environment.

Rural people in the Gulf pump drinking and household water straight from rivers or dams. Lost vegetation, stock and wildlife contributed to decaying organic debris which drew oxygen from the water supplies. Retreating to our water holes, wetlands and dams this nutrient rich water deoxygenated, killing fish and water purity. Blue green algae outbreaks at over 300 times above acceptable levels meant no viable drinking water, or cleaning your teeth and more stock losses.

Want someone to test the water? That's a challenge! Councils look after town water, State agencies aren't mandated to help manage rural water for human or stock health.

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Post flood landscape

HRLN PROJECTS

- HRLN Hunter Indigenous Aquatic Plants Nursery - young plants being grown
- Field Day late March at Liddell - improving degraded soils using Organic Recycled Waste
- HRLN Website upgrade incl. Sustainable Farming & Composting data
- Research into climate change in the Hunter for Sustainable Farming initiatives - started March 2011
- River Redgum project—local provenance plantings along the Hunter River
- Regional Landcare Facilitators—Hunter/Lower North Coast staff employed
- Landcare Assistance Funds to local Landcare Groups in the Hunter Water Corporation catchment
- Educational resources for schools - incl. Lorax Puppet Theatre
- Workshops - Wildlife Corridors, Sustainable Agriculture, Weed Control - March to June 2011
- Landcare facilitation at a regional & state level - representation on Landcare NSW
- Local Council partnerships to address land and water conservation and rehabilitation needs
- Resource "Toolkit" for Landcare Groups - now available

CHAMPIONS OF THE CATCHMENT REGIONAL AWARDS

Landcare volunteers work throughout the region to sustain and improve ecological outcomes for land and water resources.

These bi-annual Landcare Awards covering the Hunter, Central Coast and Lower North Coast are a great opportunity to acknowledge individual and group achievements and to inspire others, young and old, to care for their environment.

Categories for the 2011 Awards are Landcare Legend (over 18 years); Coastcare; Community Group; Urban Landcare; Junior Landcare (under 18); Education; Indigenous; Primary Producer; Innovation in Sustainable Farm Practices and Local Government Landcare.

Applications close on Monday 11th of April.

Download the Application Form/Guidelines at: hcr@cma.nsw.gov.au or Tel: Liane Corocher or John Wilson on 4930 1030.

Note: Landcare Groups can also apply for the State Awards later this year.

TOTAL FIELD DAYS

Every year HRLN is part of Tocal Field Days, a major event for agricultural and Landcare communities in the Hunter.

HRLN volunteers provide Landcare knowledge and information to the general public through static displays, written information from our HRLN stall, direct discussion with Field Day visitors, farmers and business, find time to network with other community organisations and provide follow-up answers to questions after the event.

Our Publicity Officer, Helen McClelland, has been busy planning and designing new information brochures, new media material, stall backdrops, organising stall staffing rosters and ordering new tables and other stall equipment to replace our rather ageing current equipment.

Helen has been honing up her knowledge and skill on Worm Menus for Tocal. No, we're not asking you to eat worms!

Worm Cafe is a resource tool for children, teaching them about recycling and caring for their environment. It is just one of the resources that the HRLN Education section use for environmental education to young children.

We will also have an adjoining stall for the new Regional Landcare Facilitator project with RLF staff being an integral part of planning and media output for this. This project focuses on working with Landcare and production groups to address sustainable agriculture for food security, climate change aspects and landscape conservation.

As a partner with the CMA in the Champions of the Catchments Regional Awards HRLN will also participate in the Awards ceremony on the Saturday afternoon.

Ruth Hardy



Friends of Tumblebee

Protecting and enhancing biodiversity in the Kurri Kurri area is the major focus for the members of Friends of Tumblebee which takes its name from a local mountain, Tumblebee.

We provide input into environmental issues and aspects related to development applications to Cessnock Council and encourage policy development for our local environment e.g. a Biodiversity Plan for the Cessnock LGA.

Our group also organize and undertake local clean-ups through the Adopt-A-Road scheme

Kurri Sands Swamp Woodlands is a unique ecological community only found right here in Kurri! It features *Eucalyptus Parramattensis* and *Angophera Bakerei* as its dominant tree species. Its lovely heath under storey contains isopogons, Mountain Devils, *Banksia spinulosa*, *Grevillea montana* and *Grevillea parviflora ssp parviflora*. A real treat in springtime!

A main concern is how to protect the only known breeding habitat east of the dividing range of the Critically endangered Regent Honeyeater. The breeding habitat occurs on part of the industrial land at the Hunter Employment Zone near Kurri Kurri. This site is now in receivership and we have great hopes of saving this habitat for future generations.

We work with the Department of Lands to minimize environmental damage in the Woodlands, including fencing of primary sites, clean-ups and general restoration.

Whilst it can be hard work at times we get lots of pleasure from protecting and restoring our local environment.

James Ryan

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

No new members

RIVER REDGUMS EXPANSION

Since it began, the HRLN River Redgums project has focused on planting *Eucalyptus Camaldulensis* on public and private land within a 50km. stretch of the Hunter River between Singleton and Greta.

Good news! We are going Hunter wide!

Landholders throughout the Hunter, who have Hunter River frontage, or creek frontage adjoining the river, are now eligible to be part of this important project to plant and re-introduce this indigenous, iconic tree throughout the Valley. River Redgum tube stock can be planted on the top part of your Hunter riverbank or land close to the river.

River Redgums can grow to 30 meters if given enough space and the right soil and environment conditions. Spacing them 8 to 10 metres apart is best if you want to achieve this height. Or you may want smaller trees grown closer together. Creating a denser Wildlife Corridor of Redgums leading to the river is an option some landholders have already applied around the Singleton area. They respond well to periodic flooding in low lying and water logged areas and to rain runoffs.

River Redgums need topsoil to establish themselves, not heavily eroded areas. If Lomandra, Callistemon or Tea Tree can or do grow on a piece of land, then it should be ideal for River Redgums. They are a versatile tree that tolerate dry and wet conditions.

If you visit Col Fisher Park in Singleton you will also find many young trees planted there over the past 18 months.

It is estimated only half of 1% of pre-European settlement River Redgums still exist in the Hunter Valley. So, if you are an eligible landholder for this project, or know someone who would be eligible please contact me on Tel: 0458 348 110 during office hours or email hln@bigpond.com

Ruth Hardy



INDIGENOUS LAND MANAGEMENT

Five local Indigenous Bush Regeneration Trainees with Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) have recently completed their six month course in Certificate Two, Conservation & Land Management. A previous graduate, Andrew, worked alongside them as a trainee Team Leader for CVA whilst completing his Certificate Four.

The 'team' developed practical skills in conservation and restoration of sites within the Hunter River Rehabilitation Project area around Singleton; addressing key environmental concerns e.g. soil erosion, increasing invasive weeds (including Weeds of National Significance) and reduction of native habitat. They installed nesting boxes in compensatory habitats; planted over 1,600 native trees; weeded 12,640 square metres of land, fenced sand paved.

Training also included Senior First Aid, OH&S, Chemical and Chainsaw Certificates and Cultural Awareness.

They gained skills, knowledge and qualifications in restoring significant riparian and native habitat, networking and team support, whilst working with diverse organisations and individuals e.g. the CMA, Local Council, HRLN and local landholders.

Along with their supervisor, Peter, they worked with HRLN management and volunteers on a variety of activities e.g. collecting Hunter indigenous riparian seeds, propagating them at the HRLN nursery at Lake Liddell and with various riparian plantings.

This CVA trainee program (funded by Xstrata) provides a pathway for employment for Indigenous Hunter residents.

Most of the Indigenous Team graduates have successfully gained full-time employment in the 'green jobs' industry including three positions with Hunter Land Management.

Leonie Winner



Dates for diary:

HRLN GENERAL MEETING

Wyndham Estate Wines
700 Dalwood Rd, Dalwood
starts 10.00 a.m.
Morning tea & lunch provided

Total Field Days

C.B. Alexander College,
Total Rd, Total
April 29/30 & May 1
9.00—5.00 daily

Champions of the Catchment Regional Awards

Applications close April 11
Awards ceremony Saturday
April 30 at Total Field Days

Earth Day April 22

World Migratory Bird Days

May 8/9

National Volunteer Week

starts May 9

Our NRM group ended up self-funding much of the water monitoring work to prevent illness and more stock loss and Local Councils started trucking in drinking water to cattle stations with severe water quality issues.

No feed came back in the richer black soil country following the flood. Ecosystems were lost and native vegetation and wildlife assemblages changed. The Gulf is primarily grazing country (average property size 80,000ha.) and lack of grass meant that remaining stock faced poor survival rates.

Eventually, after a year, supported by the NRM group, local Gulf communities were able to prove 'Exceptional Circumstances' across properties to help pay bank interest until the country and finances recovered. Mapping debris trails to prove the water that flooded your residence or property came from overland or storm run-off and moved from your property towards the river, was vital for some landholders so they could gain recompense through their existing insurance policies.

The wet season of 2010 helped regrow grass. Light grazing over coming years will help ecosystems with below normal bulk and nutrition to gradually recover. In areas where is still no grass or seed bank, hands on native or non-invasive grass seeding is helping with recovery of the land.

Gulf communities, post 2009 flood, have recorded flood heights, written stories of how the flood unfolded, direction of water flows etc. This will help future generations be better informed and better prepared.

With Bureau of Meteorology assistance, communities have set up river height stations and more rainfall recording sites. Measurements give warning for neighbours downstream. Landholder flood mitigation plans and maps indicate the relationship between a river height reading upstream to the height water will be over various paddocks. Management actions ranging from opening gates to evacuating are linked to upstream river heights, providing better warning for the future.

Cyclone Yasi recently took 10,000kms. of fencing down across the north (due to mainly winds, not water). Recovering vegetation also took a buffeting in some areas. My NRM group is acting as broker between local landholders, government and other organisations in addressing environmental and industry resolutions.

Noeline Ikin

CEO, Northern Gulf Resource Management Group

Editor's note: In her 'spare time' Noeline is a Local Councillor, an active member of her local SES, progress association, pony club etc. She recently took a break from work—to help friends down at Murphies Creek with re-fencing!

Northern Gulf Resource Management Group is a community based organisation (mainly CfoC funded) which hosts and supports local Landcare Groups, provides knowledge, resource funds and activities for landholders and farmers.



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HRLN reserves the right to edit contributions. Due to space limitations some items may be held over to a future issue.

Links

Landcare NSW Inc: <http://www.landcarensw.org.au/>

Communities in Landscapes: integrating production & conservation across Box-Gum Grassy Woodlands: <http://cil.landcarensw.org.au>

Shirtsleeves is supported by