

VICTORIAN

LANDCARE

Autumn 2015 Issue 63

& CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT



ABORIGINAL LANDCARE AND
COMMUNITY ARTS FEATURE

Sharing stories of the Avon

Reconnecting the song lines of Nillumbik

Sharing ancient fire knowledge



Landcare
Victoria



Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management

AUTUMN 2015 ISSUE 63

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On an autumn day of soft rain this Golden Whistler flitted around my veranda singing the most exquisite song.

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Cover photograph

Kristy Atkinson, a Dja Dja Warrung woman from Shepparton dancing at Federation Square in Melbourne. Photograph by Sandy Scheltema.



From the Minister

Dear Landcarers

In the previous edition of the *Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management* magazine I talked about the need for a new approach to strengthen our network of dedicated local community groups across Victoria.

I think Landcare is a great example of how the best environmental outcomes are achieved through close relationships formed on the ground in our regional and rural communities. Landcare has a long and proud history working at a community level to improve local environments, and it is my role as Minister to ensure the work we do in the Andrews Labor Government supports your valuable work.

Facilitators perform the vital role of building community capacity, assisting communities to deliver local on-ground action, facilitate effective participation in Landcare activities, and enable groups to become self-supporting.

As such, I was delighted to announce that the Andrews Labor Government has committed \$3.2 million to ensure the funding of Victoria's 68 Landcare facilitators for another four years. Over the next 12 months we will work with the

Landcare community and the peak bodies to develop the best possible long-term arrangements for the coming years, and to find opportunities to strengthen the roles and scope of these positions to ensure more groups receive their support.

To make sure we do this effectively, and deliver on community needs, we will soon be asking you to provide your experiences and thoughts on the Facilitator Program and other aspects of the Victorian Government's Landcare Support Program.

I am proud to support a movement such as Landcare that recognises and respects the knowledge Aboriginal people have in managing Australia's land, fresh water and sea, and in conserving biodiversity.

It has been wonderful to see such a strong response to the call for stories about Aboriginal Landcare in Victoria. You will find this issue packed with innovative and inspiring stories, such as the revival of traditional fire knowledge in north east Victoria, where Traditional Owners are working in partnership with the Kiewa Landcare Group to trial the use of fire to reduce fuel loads, rejuvenate native grasses and regenerate ecosystems.

In south west Victoria the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation has partnered with the Glenelg Hopkins CMA on an information sharing program called Yarns on Farms, which highlights how Landcare can help to break down cultural barriers and facilitate the sharing of knowledge.

Also not to be missed are the stunning photographs captured by one of our passionate Landcare facilitators, Sandy Scheltema.

All of this fantastic work being done by the groups, networks and many thousands of volunteers deserves to be recognised. I encourage anyone involved in Landcare to put in a nomination for the 2015 Victorian Landcare Awards, which is open for entries on the Victorian Landcare Gateway website, www.landcarevic.net.au.

This year promises to be a rewarding year putting the care and protection of our environment back on the agenda. With our renewed focus and through your hard work and commitment the nation's environment will be enjoyed for generations to come.

Hon. Lisa Neville MP
Minister for Environment,
Climate Change and Water

**2015 VICTORIAN
LANDCARE AWARDS**

NOMINATIONS OPEN

[WWW.LANDCAREONLINE.COM.AU/
LANDCAREAWARDS](http://WWW.LANDCAREONLINE.COM.AU/LANDCAREAWARDS)

NOMINATIONS CLOSE ON 21 JUNE 2015

“

The partners are using fire as a land management tool to reduce fuel loads and are conducting field trials to rejuvenate native grasses, train young Indigenous men and regenerate healthy ecosystems.

”



Cape York Traditional Owners (left to right) Peta-Marie Standly, Dorothy Pootchemunka, Dawn Koondumbin and in the foreground Joel Ngallametta, inspect native grass species at Bonegilla as part of a traditional fire knowledge exchange program.

New approaches to sharing ancient

Landcare groups in parts of north east Victoria are partnering with Traditional Owners to revive the use of traditional fire knowledge. The partners are using fire as a land management tool to reduce fuel loads and are conducting field trials to rejuvenate native grasses, train young Indigenous men and regenerate healthy ecosystems.

News of this innovative work is spreading through trial burns, public forums and the production of films that capture and share experiences. As a result farmers, natural resource management agencies and the Country Fire Authority (CFA) are now involved.

Responding to the 2006 fires

Traditional Owners became involved in the revival of traditional fire knowledge in the north east following devastating fires in the region in 2006.

Traditional Owners from Cape York in far north Queensland were saddened by the tragic events and offered to share their knowledge with countrymen in the south.

Traditional Fire Revival coordinator Peta-Marie Standley said “It hurt our

hearts up here (Cape York) when you guys had those horrible fires because it doesn't need to happen.”

Over the next four years Cape York Traditional Owners visited the north east, talking at Landcare events, participating in an Indigenous fire forum in 2013 and talking to the local Aboriginal community. As a further sign of support, the group invited local people to attend workshops in the Cape where traditional burning is an annual event.

Over this period, Landcare networks in the north east identified that local landholders were interested in learning how to better manage and preserve threatened Grassy Box Gum Woodlands ecosystems on their properties, particularly

where fuel loads were increasing and creating a potential fire risk.

Previous attempts at fuel reduction burns were considered risky and a promoter of weeds.

In 2013 the Kiewa Catchment Landcare Groups secured Caring for Our Country funding to start undertaking fire trials in the region.

Establishing trial sites

The group selected three trial sites, two in Talgarno and one in Baranduda, and a project ecologist was appointed to set up the trial design. The aims of the trial were to measure the impact of fire on weed and exotic species, provide local guidelines on how traditional fire knowledge can



Native grass regrowth after fire compared to unburnt dry grass (at right).

fire knowledge

By Belinda Pearce

be incorporated into land management practices and provide opportunities for Indigenous people to undertake cultural practices on country.

Two of the trial sites are located on grazing properties (beef and sheep), so a graze/no graze component was included at these sites. Overall, the four treatments were burn/no burn and grazed/ungrazed. The ungrazed plots were fenced out to prevent grazing.

Each treatment plot was 10 metres by 10 metres in size and treatments were replicated three times to add some robustness to our results. This meant a total of 30 plots were assessed in January 2014 for species diversity and abundance. There were 81 plant species across the sites – 40 native and 41 exotic species. The most common native species were weeping grass and slender wallaby grass and the most common exotic species were flat weed, sheep sorrel and soft brome.

The plan was to undertake burns once the autumn break had arrived. The break came very early in 2014, resulting in considerable soil moisture, damp litter and greening of vegetation.

Early break produces cool burn

In May 2014 the group attempted to burn but found that the conditions were too moist. Only one of the trial sites had enough dry matter for the burn to take hold.

Vegetation assessments undertaken in November 2014 showed that the burn plots had an increased number of native grass species and a reduction in the abundance of exotic cover compared to the no burn plots. It was felt that a more marked response could be obtained had the fire been hotter.

The Landcare groups are aiming to learn from the experience and are looking forward to undertaking burns at the three sites this autumn.

One of the real highlights has been the partnership between landholders, Landcare groups, Traditional Owners, CFA volunteers and the North East CMA. Each component partner has been vital to the success of the project.

To view a short film about native grasses and the fire trials go to

www.youtube.com/northeastcma or visit www.burraja.com/films/ to view a film on traditional burning knowledge.

Belinda Pearce is the Landcare Facilitator with the Kiewa Catchment and Upper Ovens Valley Landcare Groups. For further information email Belinda Pearce at belinda.pearce@landcarevic.net.au



A trial fire plot being burnt in May 2014.

Reconnecting the song lines of Nillumbik

By Brad Tadday

Nillumbik Shire's Pantom Hill Bushland Reserves are part of the living landscape of the Wurundjeri people. The reserves provide an opportunity for people to learn from a culture that lived in harmony with nature for tens of thousands of years.

To acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land the Pantom Hill Bushland Reserves have been given Woi Wurrung names. Woi Wurrung is the language of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. Bunjil is the Wedge-tailed Eagle, a threatened species that lives in the area and is the creator spirit of the people of the Kulin Nation. Other names include Bulwidj (Yellow Box), Yanggai (Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo), Wimbi (Swamp Wallaby), Yirrip (Ironbark), Wurran (Sugar Glider), and Gawa (Echidna).

During the past two years Nillumbik Council has been working on a joint project to rejuvenate the Aboriginal cultural landscape of Nillumbik. Stakeholders have included the Wurundjeri Council, Wandoon Estate (Coranderrk), Nillumbik Reconciliation Group, Friends of Pantom Hill Bushland Reserves, Bend of Islands Community Association, Nillumbik Council's Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Group, St Andrews Market Committee and St Andrews Primary School.

The project's objective is to deepen the recognition and understanding of the rich and diverse local Aboriginal culture and connections to the land through developing and strengthening collaborative



Artwork for Bunjil Reserve signage by Judy Nicholson.

partnerships with the Indigenous community. The partnerships offer mutual benefits through cultural exchange, understanding and reviving Indigenous ecological knowledge for conservation outcomes, developing employment opportunities and supporting Indigenous small businesses.

Cultural events in the reserves have included traditional welcome ceremonies, dancing and crafts such as bark shelter building, weaving and string making. A reconciliation event in Yanggai Reserve in September 2013 saw the planting of Murnong (Yam) Daisy, a traditional staple



Uncle Rod Briggs building a traditional bark shelter at Bunjil Reserve in 2013.

food, with the Wurundjeri Narrap (Land Management) Team. A Spirit of Place Indigenous Festival at St Andrews Market was organised by the market committee. The Bend of Islands has established a partnership with the Wurundjeri Tribe and St Andrews Primary School helped to build a bark shelter at St Andrews Market.

At the core of the project is the development of an Indigenous cultural education trail through the Pantom Hill Bushland Reserve System. The trail is being integrated with other Indigenous cultural programs and sites across the Shire to form a comprehensive Indigenous cultural education tool.

Signage on the trails has been renewed using Indigenous artwork. It is hoped the trails and the special sites being developed throughout the reserves will be a place of ongoing creative exchange between artists, ecologists and the local Indigenous and non-Indigenous community.

Brad Tadday is a Senior Environmental Works Officer with Nillumbik Shire Council. For further information contact Brad Tadday by email at Brad.Tadday@nillumbik.vic.gov.au



Uncle Bill Nicholson, Mandy Nicholson and the Djirri Djirri (Willy Wagtail) Dance Troupe at the St Andrews Market 2014 Spirit of Place Indigenous Festival.