

Battling the Pale Yellow Water Lily

Spraying is underway to decrease infestations of the Pale Yellow Water Lily (*Nymphaea* spp.) on Gunbower Creek and nearby lagoons.

An introduced species characterised by heavy green foliage and pale yellow flowers, Pale Yellow Water Lily causes problems by blocking waterways, impacting on irrigation and recreational use. It rapidly colonises shallow, nutrient-rich waters, resulting in dense infestations that restrict water movement and contribute to silt build-up in the creek.

"Infestations of the plant have increased dramatically over the past few years in the creek, with several local groups, including the Gunbower Island Community Reference Group, raising this as being of major concern," said North Central CMA Project Manager, Trent Gibson.

Mr Gibson said this year is the first of a five year program to significantly reduce the extent of the lily in Gunbower Creek.

Results of recent trials indicate the best approach to reduce infestations is to spray the lily during the early and late active growth period in November and March.

Infestations in the National Channel will be sprayed first, with crews working downstream to the Cohuna Weir.

The lily will be sprayed in strips along the centre of the waterways first, then pushing outwards towards the shoreline.

Following herbicide application the decaying lily is carefully monitored by water monitoring probes to reduce the risk of a blackwater event.

"The five years of funding allows several years of repeated treatment which will allow us to reduce the area of lily significantly," said Mr Gibson.

Monitoring will occur over the five years to measure our progress and also prevent the re-establishment of infestations.



Spraying of the Pale Yellow Water Lily is underway in Gunbower Creek

Newsletter authors: Anna Chatfield, Kathryn Stanislawski and Amy Russell.
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NORTH CENTRAL
Catchment Management Authority
Connecting Rivers, Landscapes, People

COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

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May already! Hope you are enjoying a beautiful autumn.

This quarterly newsletter will continue to keep you up-to-date with the North Central Catchment Management Authority's Flooding for Life Project at Gunbower Forest.

Hipwell Road Channel opening soon

Gunbower Forest has been allocated 66 gigalitres of environmental water which is critical to ensure the forest continues its recovery following the millennium drought. The newly constructed Hipwell Road Channel will be used to deliver water into the forest for the first time.

The millennium drought was broken in 2010 by the large, prolonged natural flooding which inundated over 9000 hectares (ha) of the forest.

The forest also received natural flooding in 2011 and 2012, resulting in the forest receiving three consecutive years of flooding.

Following the floods, no environmental water was delivered to Gunbower Forest in 2013 to allow a drying event.

"The drying phase has been important to reduce carp numbers in the forest wetlands and prepare the forest for the first operation of the Hipwell Road Channel," said North Central CMA Gunbower Forest Project Manager, Anna Chatfield.

Ms Chatfield said there is now little water remaining in the forest, including in permanent wetlands which have either receded to small residual pools or completely dried.

Delivering environmental water to the forest is important to fill the wetlands and flood the River Red Gums to ensure their water needs are met.

The Hipwell Road Channel enables environmental water to be delivered to the forest on a scale not possible before.

The operation will inundate almost 5000 ha of the forest, filling 80% (over 1000 ha) of the wetlands. Filling the wetlands will allow the wetland plants to germinate, grow and provide habitat and food for birds, fish, frogs and other animals.

"Testing of the Hipwell Road Weir, off-take regulator and channel will also be part of the environmental water delivery, including testing the new fish lock and vertical slot fishway," said Ms Chatfield.



Permanent wetland, Reedy Lagoon, with only a residual pool remaining, Nov 2013.

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Cultural mapping project complete

Gunbower Forest Traditional Owners, Barapa Barapa and North Central CMA staff battled some hot weather over summer to complete three weeks of cultural field surveys within Gunbower Forest.

The team worked with archaeologist Dr. Colin Pardoe and plant ecologists Damien Cook, Doug Froud and Kate Bennetts to identify, record and map important traditional food, fibre and medicine plants and cultural heritage such as scar trees, shell middens and earth mounds.

"The short time on Country was a walk in the footsteps of the Barapa Barapa Traditional Owners," said North Central CMA Project Officer Robyn McKay.

"It's important to record the significant cultural sites in the forest that are evidence of how the forest has been used by Barapa people for generations. It was a great opportunity for everyone to share their knowledge and stories of Gunbower Forest," said Mrs McKay.

The information collected during the surveys will be used by Barapa Barapa people to document their rich cultural association with Gunbower Forest.



Top: Sharnie and Tom record a site using Differential GPS. Middle: Dr. Pardoe, Sharnie and Shae. Bottom: Part of a grinding stone found in Gunbower Forest.

Five minutes with Betty Waterson

In the February edition we spoke about our new Gunbower Island Community Reference Group (CRG). The group is vital in providing community input on projects in the Gunbower Island area.

Over the coming editions we'll introduce a member of the committee to gain an insight into why they are involved and their aspirations for the environmental future.

Betty Waterson is new to the committee but certainly not to the community, having lived in the area for 70 years.

What do you see your role as on the Gunbower Island CRG?

I see my role as being a bit like old Don Chipp from the Democrats used to say about 'keeping the you-know-whats honest'! I want to know what's going on in my community and make sure I can stand up and speak out against the things I don't agree with or believe in. I want to tell the community about what the CMA is working on. To know why and how things are being done.

Do you think the Gunbower projects are being better understood by the local community?

People are starting to understand the projects a lot more but there are still a lot of locals that do not know who the CMA is and what they do. I believe the CMA is doing the right things to improve this though with meetings and events.

What are your favourite activities in the forest?

Birdwatching, camping and canoeing in Gunbower Creek.

Where do you like to go in the forest?

Gunbower Creek and the lagoons, particularly Reedy Lagoon.

What is your favourite bird species to watch?

Robins and curlews.

Hipwell Road Channel mimics natural flood pattern

Designed to mimic a natural flood pattern, the Hipwell Road channel operation will involve three phases: filling, holding and drawdown.

The operation will be underway by early June, after the irrigation season closes. The first phase, filling involves flow into the forest starting slowly and gradually increasing over 20-30 days. Water levels in the creek will rise, allowing the volume of water entering the forest to gradually increase.

During this first ramp up stage, Goulburn-Murray Water will monitor water levels in the creek to ensure private land and pumps are not at risk of being flooded. If there is any risk, flows will be reduced.

During the holding phase, the maximum inflow into the forest will be held for about 30 days between June and August. Holding the maximum inflow for as long as possible is important to allow water to fill the creeks, floodrunners and wetlands and spread across the forest floor under the river red gums.

The final drawdown phase will commence in mid August to ensure irrigators are not impacted.

Inflows into the forest are slowly reduced.

The rate of drawdown will be dependent upon irrigation demand.

During the drawdown period the forest will be starting to look its best as spring starts. Ducks and frogs will start to breed and plants will start to flower.

Approximately 190 GL will be delivered through the Hipwell Road Channel between May and November. However, as Gunbower Forest is a through-flow system approximately 70% of this volume will return to the Murray River near Koondrook and be available for downstream users.

An environmental water allocation of 66 GL will be used to cover the volume of water not returned to the Murray River and remains in the forest wetlands.

Environmental watering of Gunbower Forest will be made in line with the Victorian Environmental Water Holder *Seasonal Watering Plan 2013-14*.



Hydrograph of how the Hipwell Road Channel will be operated this year.

Access to Gunbower Forest

The flooding of almost 5000 ha means that access within Gunbower Forest will be restricted between June 2014 and January 2015.

If travelling in Gunbower Forest when it is flooded observe track closure signs to ensure you and your companions stay safe. It is an offence to travel on a closed track within the State Forest and National Park. You can be fined if you disregard track closure notices within Gunbower Forest.

The North Central CMA, Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment and Primary Industries will work closely together over the coming months to ensure availability of up to date information about Gunbower Forest access. For access information contact:

- **Gunbower State Forest access** contact DEPI www.depi.vic.gov.au or 136 186
- **Gunbower National Park access** contact Parks Victoria: www.parkweb.vic.gov.au or 13 19 63

The Gateway to Gannawarra Centre (90 King George St, Cohuna) will also have up to date access information, including flood inundation maps.

Despite some tracks being closed, access will still be available to some of the popular camping and fishing areas along the Gunbower Creek and the Murray River. The environmental watering will bring the forest to life making it great time to visit! Locals and visitors to the region are encouraged to make the most of the fishing, camping, canoeing, bush walking and bird watching opportunities.