

North Central Waterwatch Story of Change

Nicole Howie 2019



North Central Waterwatch and the City of Greater Bendigo are working together to improve the health of, and community connection to, Bendigo Creek.

The Bendigo Creek Citizen Science project launched in 2018, with dedicated volunteers collecting and reporting important information about waterway health to allow for a better understanding of the impacts of improvement projects over time.

Citizen Scientist Nicole Howie has a strong connection to the Bendigo Creek. Growing up in Huntly, she spent a lot of time on the banks of the creek as a child and recalls it fondly.

"We would have really fun times, taking the dog down there, watching him chase rabbits, and just mucking around. I have great memories of playing down at the creek."

"Moving back to the area in 2007 with a new baby, I joined the newly formed (Northern Bendigo) Landcare Group and by 2010 we were wanting to sink our teeth into a big on ground project, someone suggested the Bendigo Creek."

"It's a real focus for us now, it's like a spine through our Landcare area. We see it as an undervalued resource and a misunderstood waterway. The connotations of it through Bendigo are as 'just a drain' – but out our way we see it having this amazing potential, for connectivity, for flora and fauna, for education, recreation. We really want to shine a light on it and to show that it's really valuable. The Landcare Group have been doing lots of things to restore it since 2010 and we are committed to more work into the future to make it a really great place."

Nicole has been a Waterwatch volunteer for three years and is now more connected to the creek than ever before.

"It's a more intimate knowledge I suppose. Although we have done a lot of restoration work,

the Waterwatch data, which we share with Landcare, gives us a more intimate knowledge of the water, the issues and the things that effect the water quality.

"I also help the Huntly Primary School with the River Detectives program. We monitor a site further upstream, so it's interesting to have a comparison between the two sites."

Being involved in Waterwatch has increased Nicole's knowledge of waterway health.

"I'm not trained in the field at all, it's more of a hobby, but I've learned heaps through being involved. The training opportunities, such as the waterbug workshops, are great. I knew nothing about waterbugs before. It's been a big learning curve but something I can apply to other areas of my life. I like to share my knowledge."

Nicole is thrilled about the Reimagining Bendigo Creek project and being a part of it through the Citizen Science program.

"It's awesome. We don't feel like we are alone in valuing the creek. We feel like there is this shared vision and discussion now about the potential of the creek."

"To have that backing from a broad range of passionate and influential people is awesome. It shows there could be a great future for the Creek."

"And it's nice to know we are part of something bigger. We are a peri-urban group and aren't part of a Landcare network, so it's good to have something bigger to be a part of. For the Landcare group, it's good to know that there is uptake and custodianship further upstream."

Nicole enjoys being part of a Citizen Science group.

"The Citizen Science program has been a great

networking opportunity and will be interesting to see how our results compare over time between sites.

“There is a lot of information sharing, especially at the events and get togethers. I have jotted down who is testing where in case I need to talk to them about something in the future.

“It’s nice to know you’re collecting data along with a whole group of people, we all have a shared vision and shared focus. You can tell the story of the whole waterway, not just at one spot.

The Citizen Science project also involves primary schools along the creek.

“Being involved in this project has also reignited the Huntly Primary School and Epsom Primary School in the River Detectives program, whose membership had previously lapsed. It’s been lovely to reconnect with them.

“The Huntly Primary School’s Sustainability Leaders, who do the River Detectives testing, are planning their next annual Backyard Learning Day, which will be held down at the creek. It will tie it all together. It will be great to look at the creek and discuss things like cause and effect and to be able to share results with the rest of the school.

When asked about her hopes for the future of the creek, Nicole has some great aspirations.

“I’d love to see the creek connected all the way through from Crusoe Reservoir to Huntly. Somewhere for people to spend time together or commute to work, having that access right through to Huntly is a real dream for me personally, and for the Landcare group.

“There’s real value in people visiting the creek, especially out this way where it’s still highly modified, but much more natural than probably anywhere else. I can see it as a place where people can get together.

“And also a place where people can learn, with signage and brochures. It could be a lovely place for school groups or kindergartens to come and learn about the environment. Improved connectivity would be great for us, and a real bonus for native flora and fauna as well.

“There’s a great story to tell, too, it’s got an amazing history. It would be great to have some signage or an app or something. It’s got the Indigenous story and the gold rush story. There are some wonderful quotes from early explorers on what the creek looked like before the gold rush, it would be great to be able to share some of these

with the broader community.

“We are lucky that we are a city surrounded by a forest, but we also need to look inward and realise that we are a city around a creek. I’m pleased it’s getting more attention now. If it were loved and cared for, I see it as an opportunity to become a real jewel in the crown for Bendigo”.

The Bendigo Creek Citizen Science Project is proudly supported by the City of Greater Bendigo.

The Victorian Government is supporting community partnerships through Waterwatch and other Citizen Science initiatives to address local waterway priorities.

These priorities are being addressed as part of the government’s \$222 million investment to improve catchment and waterway health across regional Victoria. This investment is a key component of Water for Victoria - the government’s plan for management of our water resources now and into the future.



Nicole collecting a water sample at her site on Bendigo Creek

For more information

Telephone 03 5448 7124 or visit www.nccma.vic.gov.au

