

Spring wetland top-up planned for 2015

The North Central CMA is currently preparing the 2015/16 Seasonal Watering Proposal for the Gunbower Forest and Gunbower Creek.

The Seasonal Watering Proposal sets out the volume of environmental water required to maintain or improve the health of the forest and creek.

The North Central CMA has been working with the Gunbower Operations and Advisory group, other stakeholders and scientists to determine how much environmental water is required and how it is to be delivered in 2015.

Gunbower Forest project manager Anna Chatfield explains "For the forest we consider the current condition of the forest, such as the red gums, wetlands, fish and bird populations, which we gather through our monitoring data. We also discuss the forests water needs with ecologists and other stakeholders that work in or manage the forest."

Following the large environmental watering last year the proposal is to deliver a smaller flood to Gunbower Forest this spring.

It is proposed that environmental water will be delivered through the Hipwell Road Channel during September and October for about 6 weeks. This will flood about 3,000 ha of the forest, filling the creeks and wetlands.

The flood will be a lot shorter and shallower this year compared to last year. Access tracks will be flooded, but not for as long.

The spring flood is aimed at enhancing the resilience of the wetland plant community and enabling the succession of the small bodied fish community in the wetlands.

"The wetland plant community is still recovering from the decade long drought. Our monitoring has shown a decline in the health of the vegetation since 2006. The wetland plants responded well in 2014, but require a follow-up flood to continue their recovery."

"A follow-up flood will replenish wetland plant storages, such as tubers which store moisture and nutrients for plants underground."

During the 2014 flood event there was a huge boom in the number of small bodied native fish, however this consisted of only two native species, Australian Smelt and Carp gudgeon.

"Topping up the wetlands will stimulate the small fish to breed again, allowing some of the other species to also increase their numbers. These fish are an important part of the food chain, being food for birds and larger fish."

A large component of the planning process is determining the best timing for flooding the forest.

"We consider what the best time for the fish, birds and vegetation, but also how this might impact upon other forest users, such as campers, firewood collection and forestry activities."

"Getting input from the Gunbower Island Community Reference Group members throughout the planning process is an important part of planning for environmental watering events" said Anna.

Should community members wish to find out more about the 2015 environmental water planning for Gunbower Forest and Creek contact Anna Chatfield at the North Central CMA on (03) 5448 7124.



Follow-up flooding is important for threatened species like the Wavy marshwort.

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NORTH CENTRAL

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COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Edition 9: Autumn 2015

Welcome to the 9th edition of the 'Flooding for Life' community newsletter.

The benefits of the environmental water delivered to Gunbower Forest last year can still be seen. We hope that you are taking advantage of the tracks opening up and the lovely weather to get out there and enjoy all that Gunbower Forest has to offer.

300 km journey of a Gunbower Yellow belly

Thirty Yellow belly (Golden perch) were tagged with acoustic transmitters and released into Gunbower Forest as part of the North Central Catchment Management Authority's (CMA) 2014/15 fish monitoring program.

Project officer Kathryn Stanislowski explains "One of the Yellow belly tagged in Gunbower has turned up in Chalka Creek at Hattah Lakes! This fish was detected leaving the forest through Shillinglaws Regulator in early November, travelling over 300 kilometres in six days to reach the Hattah Lakes. Based on the time recorded on the two loggers, we calculated that the fish was moving downstream at 3.1km/hr.

"November is the common time for fish movement. They often travel large distances in the search for a food source and suitable habitat."

A network of data loggers was deployed throughout the waterways and wetlands of Gunbower Forest during last year's large environmental watering event. The tagged fish are scanned, just like an item in the supermarket, when they swim past a logger.

Information from the loggers is compared against information on flow rates and changes in water level.

"The results of the fish tagging project will give us an insight into how Golden perch move through the forest during an environmental watering event. This will help us to fine tune our future environmental watering operations to ensure we maximize the benefits for native fish."

"We were extremely pleased to see that the timing of this fish's exit at Shillinglaws Regulator (connects Yarran Creek to the Murray River) coincides with the implementation of our fish exit strategy, which is deliberately designed to cue fish to exit the floodplain." said Kathryn.

The tags used in the fish will send an acoustic signal for up to three years, and the loggers will continue to record fish movements.

"Finding out that our fish was scanned by a receiver at another Living Murray Icon Site where environmental water is also being used is extremely exciting. I wonder where the fish will end up next year?" said Kathryn.



Loggers were placed at key entrance and exit pathways throughout Gunbower Forest to detect fish movement.



Fish ecologists Ivor Stuart and Clayton Sharpe implanting an acoustic tag into a Yellow belly.

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Barapa culture team mapping continues

Barapa Barapa People made a living on the woodlands, wetlands and floodplain of the Gunbower Forest.

Much of the forests cultural heritage is irreplaceable yet unrecorded and unprotected.

The Barapa Culture team will be out walking the Forest again this April, recording cultural values and maintaining or reviving cultural associations with the area.

Supported by North Central CMA and assisted by an archaeologist and an ecologist, the team will follow up on field work completed last February by 15 people, sharing knowledge and gaining insight into how their ancestors lived, the tools they used and the ways they understood and responded to their changing environment.

The information gathered will be incorporated into Environmental Water Management Plans to enable the social, cultural and spiritual values of Traditional Owners to be considered when developing annual Seasonal Watering proposals.

By incorporating cultural knowledge, environmental watering plans may be better informed to achieve their aim – mimic a natural flow regime - while reflecting traditional owners' social, cultural and spiritual values.

Barapa Culture Team leader Sharnie Hamilton said "it's important to have water for regeneration of food and medicine plants and for habitat for fish and birds. We need the places to bring the kids and pass on knowledge. Our people used to rely on them to live".

Check out You Tube for the Barapa Barapa Cultural Heritage video of last year's team visit.



Clinton Jones records a site in Gunbower Forest.

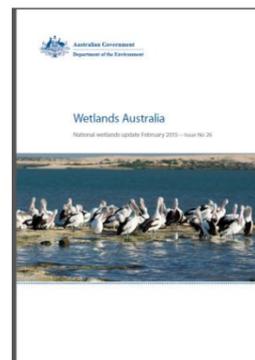
Wetlands Australia magazine

Each year *Wetlands Australia* magazine is published to mark World Wetlands Day. The magazine features articles on Australia's Ramsar wetlands and wetland restoration projects across the country.

The 2015 edition features two articles on Gunbower Forest – Hipwell Road Channel environmental watering and the reintroduction

of threatened species.

The magazine can be accessed online by searching for [Wetlands Australia: National Wetlands update issue no. 26](#)



Five minutes with Lorraine Learmonth

We recently caught up with Lorraine Learmonth, Ganawarra Shire councilor, and asked her why she joined the Gunbower Island Community Reference Group...

"I grew up at Tragowel and spent many hours bird watching in Two Mile Swamp. In 1976 we purchased a dairy farm outside of Cohuna. I have been in the Cohuna area for 39 years."

"Gunbower Island is a great natural asset on our doorstep, many don't appreciate it's diversity and beauty. I saw the committee as an opportunity to learn so I can pass on new knowledge to our community and visitors."

"We need to preserve and improve the health of the area for future generations. I have the opportunity to inform the community of the positive projects and to pass the concerns of the

community back to the NCCMA."

"Some of my favorite places are around Tree Tops and along the Gunbower Creek. As a Girl Guide leader we camped in the area, introducing young girls to camping and building an appreciation of our environment. I also have an interest in the indigenous plants and birds of the area."

"Some concerns I have for the forest at the moment include damage to native vegetation by mechanical diggers looking for bardie grubs, the effects foxes are having on our turtle populations, pale yellow pale water lily and the amount firewood being collected - all have a negative effect on our forest ."



Brazilian film crew visit Gunbower

In early March a documentary film crew requested a tour to observe the environmental watering event at Gunbower Forest.

The crew was from Sao Paulo, the largest city in Brazil. Sao Paulo is currently suffering its worst drought in 80 years. The main water reservoirs are currently operating at their lowest capacity.

The television crew from TV Globo (the largest television station in Latin America) is travelling to various countries to do a special documentary on how water resources are managed across the world.

The Brazilian journalists were interested in how water is shared between the needs of the environment, irrigated agriculture and towns.

The TV crew was given a tour of the Hipwell Road Channel and Gunbower Forest. The crew talked to North

Central CMA and the Department of Environment Water, Land and Planning (DELWP) about the impacts of the Millenium drought on the forest and how environmental water is being used to help the forest recover from such a long dry period.



Brazilian journalist Antonio Ferreira interviewing North Central CMA Project Manager Anna Chatfield in Reedy Lagoon.

Ten year Plan for Gunbower Creek flows

The North Central CMA is bringing together water managers, community members and scientists to develop a long term plan to guide the use of environmental water in Gunbower Creek and lagoons.

The plan, known as an **Environmental Water Management Plan (EWMP)**, is just one of many being developed for waterways and wetlands across Victoria.

North Central CMA project manager Bree Bisset has been working with community members, Goulburn Murray Water (GMW), environmental flow managers and scientific experts to develop the EWMP.

Bree Bisset explains "the aim of the Environmental Water Management Plan is to identify the values of Gunbower Creek and lagoons and what flows are needed to either improve or maintain them."

"There has been a lot of environmental investigations and research done on the creek and lagoons over the past ten years through the Living Murray Program and the GMW Connections Program. We are bringing this information together, along with new information and collating it."

A Community Advisory Group, made up of landholders from along the length of the Gunbower Creek as well as representatives of interest groups such as Field and Game Australia and BirdLife Australia, has met with the scientific team for the project in January and February.

"At the January meeting we discussed what the project was all about and spent time out on the creek and lagoons, getting advice from the local community about what their interests are and their expectations of water management in the creek and lagoons."

"During February the ecological objectives for the creek and lagoons and the scientific panels' recommendations for managing flows were presented to the Community Advisory Group.

"The flow recommendations are designed to operate in conjunction with irrigation deliveries to promote the ecological values of the creek and lagoons and to also complement water management in Gunbower Forest." said Bree.

Stakeholders and the Community Advisory Group will meet again for the final time in May.

For more information on the project, contact the project manager Bree Bisset on (03) 5448 7124 or bree.bisset@nccma.vic.gov.au.



Gunbower Creek near Holmes bridge.