

ground cover



NORTH CENTRAL
Catchment Management Authority
Connecting Rivers, Landscapes, People

www.nccma.vic.gov.au

December 09

*Keeping
you up-to-
date with all
the Landcare
news*

A message from the Acting Regional Landcare Coordinator

Hi everyone,

Well with Christmas bearing down upon us all, I hope you have time to sit down with a cuppa and have a read of the December newsletter. In this issue you'll find the usual news and updates from across the region, as well as the latest information on funding opportunities available for community groups.

We're pleased to be able to tell you that our new Community Grants Guide has finally been completed and is being mailed out to all groups this week. The Landcare team at North Central CMA has been working hard on the new grants guide, delving into every government and corporate nook and cranny to bring you a comprehensive list of all sources of grants and incentives. The guide also includes some great information on tax, insurance and incorporation, and tips for successful applications. Just the thing for some quiet holiday reading!

As the funding scene is constantly evolving, regular funding opportunities will be posted on the North Central CMA web site and listed in Ground Cover. Please let us know about any sources we have not included or any changes you think need to be made. The guide also contains a map of the region with all of the Landcare groups marked on it, or listed. If we have your details wrong, or you're missing from the page, then please let us know by either emailing us at landcare@nccma.vic.gov.au or calling us on 03 5448 7124.

In other news, I'd like to introduce our new Landcare Project Officer, Robyn McKay, who started with us on the 14 December. Robyn has a long history of working in Landcare, is part of the Bendigo Creek Floodplain Group and the Northern United Forestry Group and is on a 5th generation farm family farm at Drummartin. Robyn will be working on our 'Community Delivering Sustainable NRM' project; helping to protect White Box, Yellow Box, Blakely's Red Gum woodlands on private land, and will also be assisting in the development and support of Landcare networks in our region. We will keep you posted with more information on the 'Community Delivering Sustainable NRM' project in the New Year.

The Second Generation Landcare Grants have all been assessed and successful grants approved by our Board. We are busy preparing letters and information to go out to groups by the week ending Friday 18 December – the wait will soon be over.

Finally, I'd like to extend a big thank you to all of our groups for their continued efforts throughout the year. Whether your group has been undertaking revegetation projects, controlling weeds or rabbits, organising events and activities, seeking funds or just getting together for a chat, we acknowledge your great work and commitment.

We are certainly in a difficult climate, regarding both Landcare and the weather. So the fact that you are still out there, caring for your properties and your landscapes, and bringing communities together, is a great achievement in itself. Well done! The combined contribution of group activity to the health of our catchment should not be underestimated and is much appreciated by us here at North Central CMA.

The Landcare team wishes you a festive Christmas season and a safe and happy New Year (hopefully with some rest in there too!). We'll be back in January, and the next edition of Groundcover will be out in February 2010.

Until then,
Best Wishes,

Melanie Taube

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FUNDING NEWS

BushTender now open

In good news for landholders, the Department of Sustainability and Environment's BushTender program is being offered in our region for the first time since a pilot in 2001. But you need to act soon, as places are limited.

Under this innovative scheme, landholders (not groups) put in competitive bids for the cost of protecting, managing and improving native vegetation remnants (not revegetation projects) on their properties. Successful bids generally offer the best value for money in terms of improved outcomes for native vegetation.

Successful bidders receive regular payments over five years, providing a useful additional income stream for farmers.

About \$1 million is available in this current round, which is open to all landholders, regardless of size, in the shires of Loddon, Central Goldfields, Hepburn and Mount Alexander, those in the City of Greater Bendigo west of Heathcote, and those in the western half of Macedon Ranges Shire, including Kyneton and Woodend districts.

Unlike other grants and incentives, the BushTender scheme allows landholders to nominate their own price and to choose management commitments that suit their individual circumstances. For example, you might agree to fence native vegetation to exclude stock, control weeds and/or enhance existing native vegetation with understorey plantings.

All bids are assessed on the basis of the current conservation significance of the site, the estimated improvement in vegetation condition, and security resulting from the agreed landholder actions and the cost.

After you make an expression of interest, a DSE officer makes a no-obligation site visit. The officer and the landholder jointly prepare a management plan for the site, which forms the basis of the sealed bid.

Landholders have the option of a five-year fixed term management agreement or a five-year fixed term management agreement with an on-title permanent agreement.

If you are interested in applying, the DSE strongly advises you to register your interest as soon as possible. Phone 136 186 between 8am and 6pm, or email customer.service@dse.vic.gov.au. Check your local paper for advertisements, too.

Please circulate this information to neighbours, friends and others who might be interested.

Victorian Volunteer Small Grants

This small grants program is run by the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD), with groups being able to apply at any time of the year.

The purpose of the grants program is to 'help community organisations develop a vibrant volunteer culture where everyone can participate'.

Volunteer groups can apply for up to \$5,000 to assist in the following areas:

- Attract new volunteers from diverse backgrounds
- Create new volunteering opportunities and
- Strengthen existing volunteering programs as a way of engaging new volunteers

Some examples of activities or projects which could be funded include:

- A mentoring and awareness-raising program to involve people who may not usually participate to get involved eg. people with disabilities
- A recruitment plan and advertising campaign to attract new volunteers
- Providing essential equipment as part of a campaign to recruit and train more volunteers
- Developing accessible signage, website and training resources to increase the participation of people with disabilities as volunteers

Priority will be given to groups with relatively small operating budgets which rely on volunteers. Community not-for-profit groups must be an incorporated body, co-operative or association and preferably have an Australian Business Number (ABN). Groups that are not incorporated should investigate the possibility of having their projects under the auspices of an incorporated community organisation.

Applications can be received by mail or email. For further information, visit www.grants.dvc.vic.gov.au and use the 'grants finder' tab on the left hand side of the page. Application forms and guidelines can be downloaded from this website, or alternatively you can call 1300 366 356 to obtain further information.

Funding information web sites

Australian Government's Water for the Future funding.
<http://www.environment.gov.au/water/programs/index.html>

Landcare Australia Ltd grants and special offers.
www.Landcareonline.com

Grantslink
www.grantslink.gov.au

DAFF grants and assistance.
www.daffa.gov.au/about/grants_and_assistance

DEWHA grants and funding.
www.environment.gov.au/about/programs/index.html

FRRR grants.
www.frrr.org.au/currentprojects.asp



NEWS

One for the birds

And now for some good news - a colony of Little Pied Cormorants in the Little Gunbower wetland complex has continued breeding, with some chicks ready to leave their nests, thanks to the delivery of an additional 500 million litres of environmental water to the complex in the Gunbower Forest in October.

The environmental water was released to help keep the baby birds alive after the colony started breeding in August. If water levels had continued to drop, the birds would have abandoned their nests.

The North Central CMA in partnership with Goulburn-Murray Water has managed the environmental watering in Gunbower Forest.

North Central CMA Gunbower Forest Project Officer Kathryn Stanislawski and her team have recorded about 100 active nests. As well, Little Black Cormorants in the area have had young chicks, Australian White Ibis have initiated nest construction and some egg laying, threatened species Great Egrets are nesting and a pair of Peregrine Falcons that successfully raised young last year also remain at the site.

Ms Stanislawski said the additional water had maintained levels so birds were confident to initiate or continue nesting and raising their young. Aquatic vegetation has responded to the additional water, with rushes seeding and Nardoo emerging.

Environmental water is legally set aside for protecting important environmental sites. It does not affect farmers' water allocations or town supplies.

Slasher mods on trial

A Department of Primary Industries (DPI) project, in partnership with Hume City Council and Macedon Ranges Shire Council, has found that modifications to tractor linkage slashers can greatly reduce the spread of weed seeds.

The researchers found that the addition of a canvas slasher cover or installation of a hydraulically operated slasher deck fan effectively prevented Serrated Tussock and Chilean Needle Grass seed heads settling on the implement, where they can be spread along roadsides or carried to clean pastures and native vegetation.

The modifications would also be effective in preventing the spread of seeds of other weed species.

Modifications were made by MORFAB Engineering to two seven-foot Howard three point linkage slashers (one from Hume City Council and one from Macedon Ranges Shire Council, care of Hume Turf).

The slasher cover was constructed of canvas over a steel frame, which was welded to the slasher deck. Potential

practical considerations included tearing of cover, UV damage, longevity of mounts, and longevity and possible damage from vibration. Other potential issues included gearbox access, gearbox temperature and reduced rear vision for the operator.

Installation of the fan option required a fan blade, hydraulic motor and hoses, and a steel cowling. The components were welded on a frame to the slasher deck. Potential practical considerations included damage to the mount from vibration, minor noise issues, possible damage from objects such as stones, gearbox access and some reduced rear vision for the operator.

Chilean Needle Grass and Serrated Tussock are drought-tolerant grassy weeds that can (and do) have a devastating impact on pastures, open woodlands, native plants and biodiversity. They are unpalatable, seed prolifically, form a huge seed bank in the soil, damage fleece and injure livestock. Both weeds are difficult and expensive to control.

Many people would have seen the extent of the Serrated Tussock problem to the north of Melbourne, and no one wants to see our paddocks going this way! There are already some satellite Serrated Tussock infestations near Bendigo and Kyneton, and according to the DPI, there is very high potential for the weed to spread northwards. The weed has recently shown signs of becoming herbicide resistant.

Chilean Needle grass is a serious emerging weed, which is already found in several locations in the north central region.

We all know that "prevention is better than cure", so don't forget to: purchase livestock from weed-free areas if possible; hold stock in quarantine areas for 10 days after purchase; buy seed that is certified free of weed seeds; ensure machinery, vehicles, grain, hay and other fodder brought into your property or project area are not contaminated; and clean down machinery and equipment and ensure contractors do the same.

For information to help you identify and/or control Chilean Needle Grass or Serrated Tussock, go to DPI Victoria's web site: www.dpi.vic.gov.au, then follow the link to agriculture;crops pastures and weeds; weeds; A to Z of weeds. We don't need to remind you to nip potential disaster in the bud by manually removing or spraying isolated plants/infestations as soon as you find them.

Sorting seeds

Mal Brown reports that local retired carpenter Geoff Dunn has branched out from making outdoor furniture to building native seed sorting boxes in his Rochester workshop.

The seed box uses an air stream created by an everyday vacuum cleaner to quickly separate seed from pods. Landcarers interested in purchasing one of Geoff's seed boxes can contact him on 0458 330 078.



VLN forum

The annual Victorian Landcare Network forum was held at Phillip Island late in October and VLN secretary Kevin Spence reports the event was one of the best ever, helping to "breathe new life into everyone who attended" after what has been a difficult landcare year.

The VLN is the umbrella body for landcare support people (coordinators and facilitators, either paid or unpaid). Landcare volunteers are also welcome at events such as the annual forum. Membership rules are currently being reviewed.

If you would like to be on the VLN distribution list to receive information and updates, send Kevin an email at vln@iinet.net.au

Meanwhile, attendees at the forum put together a draft response to the draft National Landcare Framework being developed by the Australian Government. Parts of the draft response included:

"The unique role of Landcare in the NRM system is to positively influence land management decision-making, particularly by private landholders. Landcare is the best platform for community engagement, learning and action."

"Landcare works because it is bottom-up, community-owned and driven, inclusive and embraces diversity. Landcare has effectively responded to a wide range of land management issues and has facilitated improved sustainable agriculture practices. Landcare plays an important community development and educational role, building human and social capital in local communities."

"Landcare allows for flexibility at the local level. Priorities set at a national, state and regional level indicate what needs attention, but Landcare enables these broad goals to be translated into specific projects at network and group levels. Landcare fits community interest and readiness for change to government priorities. It integrates short-term projects into meaningful long-term change within communities. It enables the action by communities essential to sustained improvement in Australia's landscapes."

"... a basic level of government support is essential to maintain existing Landcare groups and encourage emerging groups ... This investment is additional to and provides the foundation for successful projects and project management. To coordinate activity by Landcare groups, 65 coordinator and facilitator positions across the state (Victoria) are required, distributed in an accessible, equitable and flexible manner. The Framework should recognise the Landcare support role as a profession in its own right."

"Australian Government policy support for Landcare is essential. ... Many community members want to take responsibility for creating sustainable human activity within the places where they live and work. Landcare leads local communities ... as they turn that aspiration into reality for their businesses and their landscapes. It's time for government policy that commits to Landcare as a platform to influence the land management of private landholders."

Magazine now on line

Some of us occasionally have a bit of spare time to read about landcare as well as actually landcaring.

After 13 years of publishing the Australian Landcare magazine in paper format, Rural Press will now offer free access to everyone to the quarterly magazine via the internet. New issues will be posted on 1 December, 1 March, 1 June and 1 September. Check it out at www.australianlandcaremagazine.com.au

Editor Pat Francis also invites landcarers to submit articles on landcare farming trials and natural resource improvements. Email francis@ozonline.com.au

ET and agriculture

Australia's new carbon pollution reduction scheme will (sooner or later, given the recent political circus) have important implications for farmers and agribusiness. The Australian Farm Institute has published an easy to understand guide that explains how emissions trading works, and what it means for agriculture. The cost is \$60. Order online at www.farminstitute.org.au

Land and Water DVDs

Until it was abolished recently, Land and Water Australia produced some very useful research reports and publications. A large number of these, produced between 1990 and 2009, are now available on a free DVD. Stocks are limited. To order go to <http://lwa.gov.au/products/pn30333>

Farming with nature

'From the Soil Up' is a great web site to check out, with a wide variety of views and subject matter relating to agricultural sustainability, food production, soil health and even what those multi-national agribusinesses are up to, all under the banner of "farming with nature". You may or may not agree with what is presented, but it certainly makes interesting reading.

Site founder Carolyn Ditchfield summarises a huge range of information from scientific, commercial, anecdotal and live discussion sources. Links and/or contact details are provided so you can explore items of interest in more detail. You can also join in the site-based discussion groups.

The site also offers a wide selection of "hand-picked products" relevant to agriculture and landcare, and direct links to suppliers and consultants. Site access is free, although Carolyn appreciates donations, which help her to continue this great service.

Go to www.fromthesoilup.com.au.

Just a few of the subjects explored recently included extraction of phosphorus from sewage; arguments for the retention of sheep and cattle in the landscape as tools to manage wildfires, and pest plants and animals; how planting trees where none originally grew can shift water flow; and some cons as well as pros of sequestering carbon in soils.

Another item tells how after two decades of paying farmers not to plough and to re-establish native grasses to protect top soils in the so-called US Dust Bowl, the US Government has capped the program, and "millions" of fragile hectares are being cultivated again.

There is even room for a joke or two - after reading an item about CSIRO back-of-the-envelope figures suggesting that bushfires deliver a far worse greenhouse gas outcome than cows, one commentator observed: "... yes, having livestock eat the grass is much better than having the grass sit there waiting for a lightning strike, or a routine burn to 'green' things up again".

Calicivirus 'no silver bullet'

A recent edition of the Department of Primary Industries' AgScene magazine says rabbit numbers are increasing, and that although calicivirus is persisting in the field and recurring at least annually, there is a growing resistance to both calicivirus and myxomatosis.

DPI pest animal research consultant Steve McPhee acknowledges something landcarers and farmers have known for some time – that biological control agents have not been the much hoped for 'silver bullet'.

Mr McPhee says the majority of adult rabbits are survivors of previous exposure to calicivirus, thus protecting them and their offspring from future exposure. However, he says land managers can still win the numbers game with an integrated, coordinated approach, with a focus on ripping warrens wherever possible.

Analysis of the Victorian Government-funded major ripping campaign that followed the arrival of calicivirus showed that ripping 100 per cent of warrens in a year resulted in about 98 per cent fewer rabbits nine to 13 years after ripping. Where a quarter of warrens were ripped annually over four years, rabbit numbers dropped by 80 per cent compared to 1996 levels. The best time for ripping was just before the autumn break.

Other elements of the successful "recipe" for rabbit control were baiting prior to ripping, removing rabbit harbour, destroying warrens, and maintaining ripped warrens through fumigation or re-ripping re-opened entrances. Where some elements cannot be carried out, as many techniques as possible should be utilised.

Mr McPhee also noted something all landcarers know already – that rabbit (and for that matter all PPA) control programs are much more effective when people work together. He said where groups of landholders had worked in a coordinated control program, rabbit populations had been reduced by more than 90 per cent.

As a matter of interest, the article says that for native revegetation to re-establish, rabbit numbers need to be less than one per hectare.

Smaller hoof print

Research funded by Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) suggests that the water and emissions footprints of red meat production may be a fraction of earlier assumptions.

It appears some of the most-quoted water footprint data comes from the United States, which is heavily dependent on grain finishing, using more "embodied" water than Australia's largely pasture-based beef production systems. Check out more at <http://theland.farmonline.com.au/news/nationalrural/agribusiness-and-general/general/livestocks-dainty-water-usage-footprint/1674734.aspx?storypage=1>

Look out for Mesquite

The Department of Primary Industries is appealing to landholders and community members to help eradicate Mesquite – a weed with thorns so vicious they can puncture car tyres.

Mesquite is a State Prohibited Weed (SPW), the highest ("worst") category, and could become a significant threat to the state's assets and values if allowed to spread. The Victorian Government is responsible for the eradication of SPWs growing on both public and private land.

That means that if you see Mesquite, all you need to do is report it to a DPI weed alert officer.

There are currently a small number of mesquite (*Prosopis* species) infestations known in the north central region, meaning the prospects of complete eradication are good if all plants are reported. We can all appreciate how eradication now is greatly preferable to control later.

Mesquite is native to Central America, South America and southern parts of the US. It was introduced into Australia in the late 1800s, when it was planted as an ornamental, for stock shade and fodder, erosion prevention and around stations and mining areas. It is an aggressive competitor and currently no herbicides are registered for its control.

Mesquite is usually deciduous and varies in height from one metre to 15 metres as a thorny tree or multi-branched shrub. It has creamy coloured seedpods, bi-pinnate leaves, the stems zigzag at the nodes, and the flowers are catkins or lambs tail in shape.

It can invade grazing land, the sharp thorns can injure animals and puncture tyres, and seeds can lay dormant for years, germinating in areas thought to have been previously cleared.

To report Mesquite plants or any other SPWs, contact weed alert contact officer Bronwyn Grass on 03 5430 4426 or your local weed alert officer. For more information on Mesquite (including photos) and a full list of all SPWs in Victoria, go to www.dpi.vic.gov.au/weeds



LandcareLinks update

As mentioned in our October newsletter, all groups will soon be automatically subscribed to North Central CMA's LandcareLinks service.

This means you will automatically receive LandcareLinks emails. These are generally brief alerts about upcoming landcare activities and events. Anyone can receive LandcareLinks – just send an email to info@nccma.vic.gov.au asking to be put on the distribution list.

All groups are also invited to use LandcareLinks to promote local activities and events. It is a great way to reach thousands of like-minded people around the catchment. All you have to do is write a short paragraph or so in plain Word format (no attachments please) and then email it to info@nccma.vic.gov.au with "NCLandcareLinks" in the subject header of the email. We'll do the rest.

Generally speaking, information about local events and activities is distributed via LandcareLinks.

If events and activities are of wider or regional interest, or you have news that would interest landcarers outside your area, please let us know so we can include it in this e-newsletter. You can email any contributions to landcare@nccma.vic.gov.au

NETWORK NEWS

Connecting Country

The Connecting Country project based in Mount Alexander Shire has \$170,000 available (from the Federal Government's Caring for Our Country program via North Central CMA) to support projects led by community groups, including Landcare and Friends' groups.

Project manager Krista Patterson-Majoor says the focus for funding is on improving the management of significant remnants of Yellow-Box Woodlands, to help increase populations of the threatened Brush-tailed Phascogale.

Groups in the Mount Alexander Shire are invited to fill in an expression of interest form. The deadline is 24 December. Krista will then work with successful groups to develop a detailed project plan. Projects will begin in early March 2010.

Go to <http://connectingcountry.org.au/current-projects/on-ground-works/> for full details and to download the expression of interest form. If you have other queries Krista can be contacted on 0466 012 030 or email krista@connectingcountry.org.au

In other Connecting Country news, Castlemaine local Deanna Neville is working on a photo project highlighting the beautiful woodlands of the shire, and she is keen to have your photographs of the special trees, wildlife and landscapes in your neighbourhood. For more information go to <http://connectingcountry.org.au/current-projects/community-education-program/>

Connecting Country is launching a fortnightly e-news bulletin. To automatically receive the bulletin, go to <http://connectingcountry.org.au> and click on the 'join our eNews' link on the home page.