

OUR PROJECTS



NORTH CENTRAL
Catchment Management Authority
Connecting Rivers, Landscapes, People

HIDDEN TREASURES

The York Plains is a connection of eight wetlands along the Avon River in North Central Victoria. These wetlands provide important biodiversity and ecosystem services in a largely depleted agricultural landscape. The wetlands are spread over an area of 3,500ha with 89 per cent of the important vegetation situated on private land.

The community is passionate about the York Plains Wetlands and has been actively working with the North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA) for the past three years to protect these important wetlands.

PROTECTION OF THE YORK PLAINS WETLANDS



Avon River at York Plains
Photo: Courtesy Dom Uljanic, North Central CMA

ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

The wetlands are home to a range of threatened flora and fauna that utilise the wetlands and surrounding remnant vegetation, providing a significant ecological value in a landscape that has been degraded by traditional farming practices.

Threatened flora species include: Spiny Lignum; Buloke; Swamp Buttercup; Turnip Copperburr; Slender Water-ribbons; Marbled Marshwort; and Buloke Mistletoe. Threatened fauna species include: Lace Goanna; Brown treecreeper; Royal Spoonbill; Little Egret; Blue-billed Duck; Australasian Bittern; Australasian Shoveler; Lace Goanna; Musk Duck; Brolga; Great Egret; Glossy Ibis; and Hardhead.

IMPACTS

Since agricultural development in the area, there has been a substantial expansion of salinity. A groundwater system lies beneath the wetlands, which are recharged primarily during episodes of sheet flooding. When the water table approaches the surface, the impacts of salinity threaten these high value biodiversity areas. Keeping the immediate water table level low is vital in the protection of these wetlands.

During these times of climate change, if the wetlands are not protected it is likely this will result in the loss of biodiversity - in an area that has been heavily modified for agriculture. Climate change has significantly increased the threat of wetlands being cropped, as areas once deemed too wet for cropping are no longer so. Overgrazing is also a threat, as the wetland complex has not received a major flood event since 1996, allowing stock to graze the wetland areas intensively. There is a greater urgency to protect these valuable natural assets now - before they are significantly and irreversibly damaged through current agricultural practices.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- **To protect and restore the biodiversity and cultural values of the York Plains Wetlands by mitigating the threats of both rising saline groundwater, and the removal and damage of native habitat.**
- **Engaging the local community to make this happen.**

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

- **Revegetation:** Planting missing or under-represented species ensures plant communities are complete. A diverse range of plants provides the best possible food, shelter and breeding places for the largest variety of wildlife. The wetlands will be enhanced through direct seeding or tube stock, with indigenous species to restore the understory. Understory is the major missing structural component, due to new growth being grazed by stock.
- **Fencing of Wetlands and Remnant Vegetation:** Fences will define areas of remnant native vegetation and revegetation that will be protected through the project. This will restrict access by stock, thus preventing damage to young and regenerating native plants.
- **Perennial Vegetation Establishment:** Increasing the area of native vegetation and perennial pasture will reduce the risk of salinity to the wetlands by influencing groundwater levels. This activity will incorporate the establishment of woodlots, shelterbelts and Lucerne with the landholder's current agricultural practices.
- **Installation of Groundwater Monitoring Bores:** This provides ongoing and up-to-date information about the sub-surface water level and its salt content in the York Plains. It will work toward mitigating the threat of rising groundwater and associated salinity by informing project staff, landholders and the community, ensuring any land management decisions are made on the best available information.
- **Soil Salinity Surveys:** This will use Electro Magnetic surveys to provide baseline information about the current level of soil salinity in the area.

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MAKING IT HAPPEN

"This project is fundamental in the protection of the York Plains Wetlands, by working with the local community we will ensure the long term survival of this special place for future generations to enjoy."
DOM ULJANIC – Project Manager

This project will be implemented by securing *Conservation Stewardship Agreements* with landholders. This will ensure that current land use and management techniques will help alleviate threats to the wetlands, as well as protecting and enhancing them through onground works. A key component to these agreements is an option to place wetland or remnant vegetation areas under a conservation covenant to protect these key environmental areas in perpetuity.

PROJECT FUNDING

The project is funded through the Victorian Government's Land Health and the Natural Resources Investment Program.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

York Plains is situated on the Avon River, which forms the boundary between the traditional Dja Dja Wurrung and Jardwadjali language groups. Significant Indigenous sites, including burial grounds, middens, scarred trees, and the largest stone scatter recorded in the Avon-Richardson catchment, have been found in the area, demonstrating the York Plains' noteworthy Indigenous cultural sensitivity.

WHAT MAKES THESE SPECIAL

The eight wetlands in the Protection of the York Plains Wetlands Project are a priority for funding because:

- These areas are home to threatened animals and birds.
- Many rare and endangered plants survive here.
- There are significant areas of remnant vegetation in a landscape that has been largely cleared for agriculture.
- It is home to many significant Indigenous Cultural Heritage sites.



Sign at David Hines' property, York Plains
Photo: Courtesy Dom Uljanic, North Central CMA

IN OUR COMMUNITY



Andrew Bryce (Red Gum on his property)
Photo: Courtesy Mal Brown, Scarlet Consulting

MEET: LOCAL LANDHOLDERS

"York Plains was settled (I think) in the 1840s. Charles Creswick (dec. 1947) and his brother first settled the area – he didn't live long Charles but (yeah) there's the history there . . . It's something worth keeping, I believe, and something that's worth looking after . . . there's a lot of that history that (well, you know) it should be preserved, it shouldn't just be forgotten about" – **Andrew Bryce**

"I just think it would be nice if it was preserved because there's not many areas like this left" – **David Hines**

"There are Aboriginal Ovens down there on the sand bar where they used to gather their food and cook" – **Leigh Hines**

"It's just a beautiful, nice area to be in – it's lovely, peaceful country down there" – **Andrew Coates**

"I'm excited about it because it's confirming what I've always suspected – that some of the best assets in the state exist on private land and we really should invest in those to get long-term change" – **Lindsay Ezard (Extension Officer)**

Quotes taken from DVD entitled **What it means to me**
To view/download please visit: www.nccma.vic.gov.au



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