

## Monitoring Update

### The tale of the turtle, fox and a volunteer group

A partnership between Turtles Australia Inc. and the North Central CMA is working to protect the freshwater turtle populations of Gunbower Island.

Three freshwater turtle species – the Broad-shelled Turtle, Eastern Longneck Turtle and the Murray River Turtle can be found on the Gunbower Island floodplain. The turtle nests are usually built near water and are readily exposed to predation from native and introduced species, particularly foxes.

“Evidence collected by Turtles Australia volunteers suggests that a significant number of turtle nests are destroyed within the first few days of the eggs being laid,” explains North Central CMA project officer, Heidi Kleinert.

“North Central CMA has been working with Turtles Australia Inc. since 2011 on an integrated turtle monitoring and fox baiting program aimed at protecting these precious turtle eggs from predation by foxes.”

Protecting turtle nests is very effective and simple. It involves detecting the turtle in the process of nesting, and then once the female has completed laying her eggs and left the nest, a piece of plastic mesh is placed over the nest and pegged securely in place.

“The volunteers have revisited Gunbower Island several times since 2011 to monitor the Broad-shelled Turtle protection sites,” Heidi said.

“Results show that protected nests have not

been raided by foxes, and successful hatching has occurred at a large number of sites, which is excellent.”

Heidi said a surprising and very welcome outcome of the project was the discovery of two live turtles in a nest almost 600 days after the female turtle had been observed laying eggs at the same site.

“Thinking that the nest had failed, we carefully excavated the site to see what had happened. However, to everyone’s delight, two live turtles were found and a third egg was in the process of hatching, possibly stimulated by the small amount of water used to soften the earth.”

“With lack of rain and the clay soil profile being extremely hard, we think that without intervention these new hatchlings may not have been able to dig themselves out of the nest and may not have survived.”

“It really was a once-in-a-life experience for us all,” concluded Heidi.



A new-born Broad-shelled turtle. Photo: D. Kleinert



## COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Edition 2 March 2013

Welcome to the second ‘Flooding for Life’ community newsletter!

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

Newsletters will be sent to households around Gunbower Forest. We hope you enjoy it!

### Gunbower construction project underway

Construction has started at Hipwell Road where new engineering structures will enable the delivery of large volumes of environmental water to Gunbower Forest.

Goulburn-Murray Water (G-MW) moved onto the site in December 2012 and has begun work on the Offtake Regulator.

The Offtake Regulator will control the amount of environmental water delivered to Gunbower Forest through the new Hipwell Road channel.

According to the North Central CMA’s Gunbower Forest project manager, Anna Chatfield, the start of construction is the culmination of ten years of work by the agencies involved, including intensive scientific investigations, hydraulic modelling, community consultation and a range of statutory approvals.

G-MW construction manager, Greg Watkins, said construction is progressing well.

“One of the first tasks in building the new regulator is to install a wall of sheet piles. The sheet piles form a water tight wall for the new regulator,” Greg said.

With the sheet pile driving now finished G-MW has begun working on installation of the concrete walls of the new regulator.

Excavation of the one kilometer long channel will commence in March 2013.

Regular updates and photos of construction activities can be found on the North Central CMA website [www.nccma.vic.gov.au](http://www.nccma.vic.gov.au).



Work starts on the Offtake Regulator at Hipwell Road. Photo: A. Chatfield

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### Upcoming event: Gunbower Island Week 18 – 23 March 2013

Gunbower Island Week is a milestone event, bringing together North Central CMA staff and the local community to celebrate the unique values of the local area.

A brochure detailing the events being run throughout the week has been included with this newsletter. If you wish to attend an event you need to **RSVP by Thursday 14 March 2013**.

This newsletter is made possible by funding provided by The Living Murray initiative of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority.

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## Environmental Watering Update

### Water planning for forest and creek underway

The North Central CMA is in the process of developing a seasonal watering proposal (SWP) to plan for environmental watering in Gunbower Forest and Gunbower Creek during 2013-14.

Kathryn Stanislowski, environmental water project officer explains that each year the North Central CMA submits an environmental watering proposal to the Victorian Environmental Water Holder (VEWH), which holds and manages environmental water entitlements in Victoria.

"The watering proposal helps the VEWH to make decisions about how, when and where to use environmental water across Victoria each year," Kathryn explains.

"The SWP for Gunbower Forest sets out our priority environmental watering activities for the year and how much water we would need. It is developed in consultation with key stakeholders including Goulburn-Murray Water, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Department of Primary Industries, and Parks Victoria with the advice of ecological experts in the fields of plants, fish and birds. A draft of the seasonal watering proposal was presented to the Community Reference Group in February."

"When we consider what environmental water is needed a number of factors are taken into account such as the time since last flood, size of the last flood, condition of the forest, such as the health of

wetland vegetation and River Red Gums and status of the native fish population."

"Although we are still finalising the watering proposal we are talking about allowing the forest wetlands to dry out. This is because these wetlands have received natural flooding for the past three years and there has been a significant build up of carp in the wetlands which are impacting on the wetland vegetation."

"However, we also need to plan for if the forest receives natural flooding from the Murray River during winter and spring. Natural over bank flooding may trigger threatened waterbird species to breed. Environmental water may be needed to ensure the birds can successfully complete their breeding by fledging their young."

The Seasonal Watering Proposal is due to be finalised in May 2013.



Adult Golden Perch caught in Gunbower Creek during monitoring surveys. Photo: Ivor Stuart



Edge vegetation at Reedy Lagoon in March 2012 showing a carpet of native plants and reinvigorated rushes. Photo: A.Chatfield

### Work crews gain a unique insight into cultural heritage

Work crews on the Gunbower Forest construction project at Hipwell Road received a unique insight into the Aboriginal cultural heritage of Gunbower Forest.

As part of the Cultural Heritage Management Plan for the project all contractors involved in the works undertakes a cultural heritage induction. The inductions are conducted by the project's cultural heritage advisor, and representatives from Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation. Yorta Yorta is the Registered Aboriginal Party for the Hipwell Road construction area.

North Central CMA Indigenous Facilitator, Bambi Lees said while the inductions are necessary to fulfill statutory requirements, they are also a way for those

working on the project to learn something new from the area's Traditional Owners.

"During inductions Traditional Owners share their connection to *country* and why it is special to them," Bambi said.

Bambi said the types of cultural heritage that are common in the Gunbower Forest area include scarred trees and earthen mounds.

"The inductions educate the work crew members on what cultural heritage is, how to identify a cultural heritage item, what steps to take to if they find cultural heritage during their work and who to inform when such an item has been identified." Bambi said.



Hipwell Road construction work crew learns about Aboriginal cultural heritage. Photo: A.Chatfield

### Gunbower Community Reference Group

The Gunbower Community Reference Group (CRG), consisting of 11 local landholders and community representatives, meets regularly to discuss all aspects of the Flooding for Life project.

North Central CMA Board member and chair of the group Christine Brooke says, "The purpose of the CRG is to ensure that the project is developed and implemented in balance with local knowledge and issues to meet the desired outcomes of the project."

"The CRG provides an important opportunity for community members and North Central CMA project staff to work collaboratively towards the implementation of the Gunbower Forest Flooding for Life project."

"The CRG meets every two months and has been working through a range of questions the community has had about the project."

Melanie Tranter, North Central CMA Gunbower Forest Manager, explains that the group has covered a range of topics in previous meetings.

"Some of the topics discussed at CRG meetings to date include flooding history of the forest, ecological objectives of the project, how the Hipwell Road channel will be operated and the associated risks and mitigating measures," Melanie said.

"We have had a scientist who specialises in blackwater events and effects present to the group. Representatives from the agencies involved in the environmental water decision making have also attended and explained their role in deciding what environmental water is allocated to Gunbower Forest and Gunbower Creek."

If you have a question that you would like discussed by the CRG contact Melanie Tranter, Gunbower Forest Manager Ph: 5448 7124.