

Autumn ecological monitoring underway

Autumn is a key time for ecological monitoring in Gunbower Forest, so if you've seen some people with tape measures, cameras and notepads out on a boat or in the field, you may have seen one of our specialist ecologists in action.

Annual monitoring of vegetation has taken place since 2006 between March and April to collect information about tree, understorey and wetland vegetation health. The same transects (or lines) through wetlands, and quadrats (or defined square areas) through the forest are surveyed each year so that we can determine how vegetation health is tracking over time.

Fish are also surveyed annually in Gunbower Creek and its lagoons, in wetlands in the forest, and also in the Murray River. A combination of fyke netting and electrofishing is used to capture small and large fish.

Monitoring results this year are looking more positive than previous years. Golden Perch and Murray Cod have been found in Gunbower Creek, as well as native small bodied fish including Carp Gudgeons and Australian Smelt. Unfortunately, European carp are still being seen in large numbers throughout the system, including in the forest wetlands where they are having an impact on water plant establishment.

Community spotlight

Name: Blake Dye
Age: 13
From: Cohuna

Where do you go fishing? We live right across the road from Gunbower Creek - it's about 100 metres from my house.

How often do you go fishing? Whenever I can, especially on weekends.

How did you feel when you pulled out the large Murray Cod you're photographed with? Extremely excited - we don't seem to catch many large fish like it anymore, they're a great fish.

What other types of fish do you catch? Mainly carp, but also bream as well.



The North Central CMA welcomes information from the community about the fish they are catching in Gunbower Creek. Blake's mention of catching bream is of particular interest, as our annual monitoring has not picked up many of this species. Photographs of the fish you catch, as well as details of the location where you caught them will provide us with valuable information to improve our understanding of the fish communities in Gunbower Creek. In turn, this will help us to manage flows in Gunbower Creek to support fish populations.

Newsletter authors: Anna Chatfield, Melanie Tranter and Kathryn Stanislowski.
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Welcome to the third 'Flooding for Life' community newsletter!

This quarterly newsletter will be used to 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!

Hipwell Road construction project on track

Construction of the Hipwell Road Channel package of works continues to make good progress. The completed works will enable delivery of environmental water to Gunbower Forest.

The Hipwell Road Channel package of works will enable regular flooding to be restored to Gunbower Forest, ensuring the future health of this important floodplain and the plants and animals that depend on it for survival.

"The offtake regulator is mostly completed with the gates to be fitted to the structure in August," said Gunbower Forest project manager, Anna Chatfield.

"Excavation of the Hipwell Road Channel, which will deliver water to the forest via Spur Creek, has also commenced."

To allow for construction of the new weir in Gunbower Creek clearing of trees along Gunbower Creek and Spur Creek was also conducted in May.

"Some of the red gum timber removed from the construction site has been donated to the

Cohuna Lions Club. The timber will be donated to local residents or used to raise funds for the club," said Anna.

Work crews have commenced preparing the creek to allow the new weir to be constructed during the irrigation shut down period.

A detour on Island Road has been put in place to allow construction of the new weir and bridge over the next few months.



The newly constructed Hipwell Road channel containing rainfall runoff. Photo: Anna Chatfield.



Work has commenced preparing Gunbower Creek for the construction of the new Hipwell Road Weir. Photo: Anna Chatfield.

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Environmental Watering Update

Environmental watering plan for 2013-14

The seasonal watering proposal, which outlines the proposed environmental watering activities in Gunbower Forest during 2013-14, is now complete. The proposal was presented to the Gunbower Community Reference Group in February and included a visit to Gunbower Forest with our fish and vegetation ecologists. The proposal was submitted to the Victorian Environmental Water Holder in May.

During 2013-14, the plan is for the forest to undergo a drying phase, with environmental water only being used to support a large bird breeding event if it is triggered by natural flooding. Just as regular flooding is important for the ongoing health of Gunbower Forest, drying phases are also important to mineralise nutrients and allow oxygen to enter the soil, enabling seeds to germinate on re-flooding.

In Gunbower Creek, some low flows will be maintained during the winter irrigation shutdown period, and while the Hipwell Road infrastructure is still under construction.

"We will use the No. 1 channel to deliver environmental water to Gunbower Creek during winter. The No. 1 channel allows a low flow to be

delivered to the lower reaches of the creek to maintain water quality and fish habitat while bypassing construction at Hipwell Road," said environmental flows officer, Kathryn Stanislawski.

From August, environmental water will be used to build on irrigation supply to provide flows that target the key life stages of large bodied fish such as Murray Cod and Golden Perch. This will include flows to encourage movement, spawning hatching and larval dispersal.



Measuring a large Murray Cod captured during annual fish monitoring in Gunbower Creek. Photo: Kathryn Stanislawski

Meet the 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.

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.

Community Reference Group members are: Christine Brooke, Paul Madden, Ian Keely, John Cleave, Dick Tresize, Ross Gordon, Stan Archard, Neville Goulding, Glen Wilson, Andrew Brown and Di Bowles.

In each edition, we will meet one of the CRG members.....

Stan Archard – is a local area community representative on the CRG. He is a retired

irrigation specialist, and a director of the local field and game association.

A Cohuna local, Stan has lived and worked in and around Gunbower Forest for most of his life. "I grew up around it [the forest] and it grew on me," Stan says.

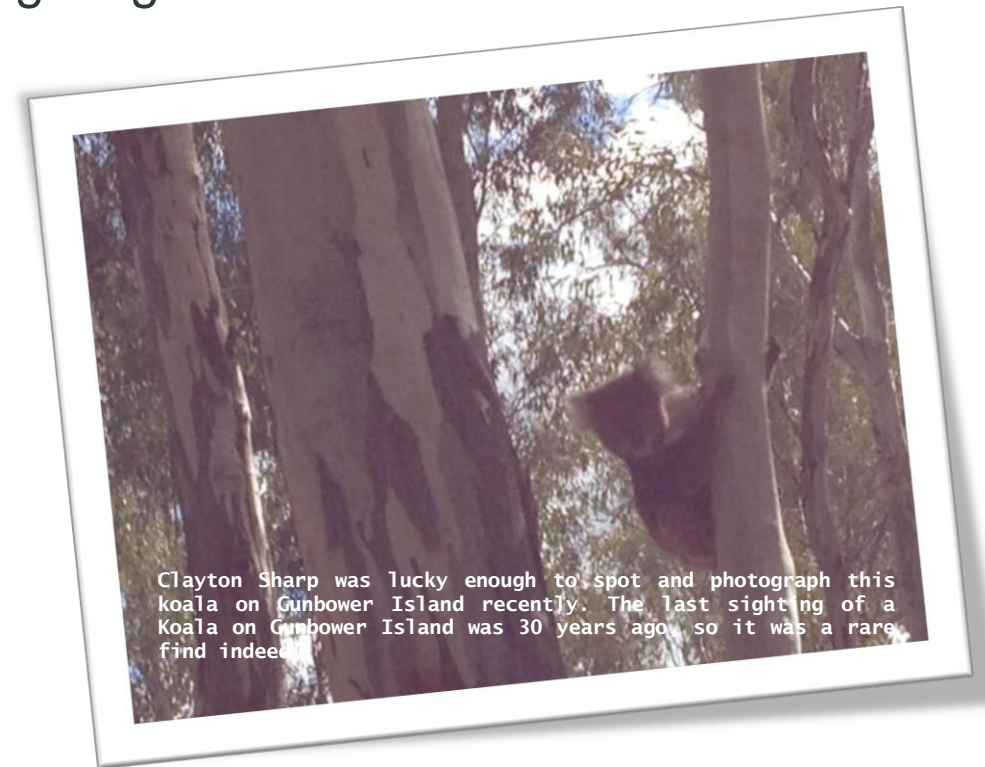
A pioneer of irrigation in Australia, Stan brings his knowledge of how to efficiently and effectively manage water to the CRG.

Stan has been a champion for the delivery of environmental water to improve the health of Gunbower Forest. He is looking forward to seeing the completion of the Hipwell Road works project.

"I've been involved in the project since it started, and I'm looking forward to seeing it through to a good finish," Stan says.

The North Central CMA congratulates Stan on his recent achievement of being made a Member of the Order of Australia.

Koala sighting on Gunbower Island



Clayton Sharp was lucky enough to spot and photograph this koala on Gunbower Island recently. The last sighting of a koala on Gunbower Island was 30 years ago, so it was a rare find indeed.

New home for 1.5 tonne scar tree

An Aboriginal scarred tree has found a new home after a huge relocation effort involving Aboriginal traditional owners and staff from the North Central CMA and Goulburn-Murray Water (G-MW).

The 1.5 tonne tree was lifted from its original home on the boundary of Gunbower National Park and transported to Yorta Yorta's Yenbena Indigenous Training Centre, in Barmah.

North Central CMA Indigenous Facilitator, Bambi Lees said relocation of the scar tree is a management recommendation negotiated between G-MW and Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation as part of the Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP) for the Hipwell Road Channel project. A shelter will be built at Yenbena to protect and preserve the tree so that it can be used as an educational tool by Yorta Yorta.

As the Traditional Owners of Gunbower Forest, Yorta Yorta recognise that allowing the channel to be constructed will enable environmental water to be delivered to the forest preserving the cultural values of the forest, including other scarred trees in the forest.

Yorta Yorta senior cultural heritage officer Gary Nelson said "the CHMP process has allowed this scar tree to have a second role in life."

A number of other scarred trees at the site have also been pruned and barricaded to allow machinery access, and to protect them from potential damage. Representatives of Yorta Yorta have worked closely with G-MW to ensure harm is minimised to cultural heritage sites at Hipwell Road.

"It is preferred that cultural heritage is not disturbed and is left where it is, but in this instance the dead fallen tree needed to be removed to enable the new Hipwell Road channel to be constructed," said Gary.



Arborists working to remove the 1.5 tonne scar tree from Gunbower Forest. Photos: Anna Chatfield.