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ISSUE 28

L *Victorian* **Landcare** & CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

Bushfire recovery

Weed spotters wanted

**Grazing success
with native pastures**

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Merino ewes in their winter woollies at
Rokewood. By Paul Crock

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CONTENTS



Landcare Network
Q & A
◀ 8-9



Weed Alert!
◀ 12-13



Grazing success
with native
pastures
◀ 14-15



Greenfleet –
the Landcare angle
◀ 20-21

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A farm wetland in the Glenelg Hopkins CMA region.

Are we draining our wetlands?



Dear editors,

The article on draining saline land at Rokewood in the last issue (No 27, Autumn 2003 pages 10-11) raises lots of questions and I thought I would drop you a line and ask some of them.

The article describes drainage in a paddock with salt and waterlogging problems. In situations like this where does the salt go? Are private drainage solutions creating public problems in the nearest creek? If this is the case how should the community respond?

How does the drainage of farmland fit with regional water quality and river health plans? Monitoring drainage at farm boundaries is the best way I know to fine-tune farming to minimise its

environmental impact, but perhaps there's a better way?

I also wonder how many of the waterlogged areas that I read about are really just wetlands in disguise. Could a healthy, productive wetland bring more long-term productivity to a farm compared to the public and private costs of extensive land reclamation? Perhaps helping landholders to grow wetlands would be a useful role for a land stewardship program?

I look forward to hearing the ideas and suggestions of other readers on these issues.

Yours in search of good Landcare,

Ian Morgans
Mordialloc

From the editors

Around 70 Victorians attended the National Landcare Conference in Darwin in early May. From all reports it was a stimulating event. The opportunity to meet with Landcarers from remote pastoral and indigenous lands and the hospitality of the Top Enders were highlights.

We hope to publish some reports from the conference in the next issue. If you have any conference notes, reflections or photographs you'd like to share please send them in.

Judging for the 2003 Victorian Landcare Awards is now underway. Early reports from the judges point to large numbers of high quality entries. We hope to reveal the results in our next issue.

Thanks to Lyall Grey

Owing to staff changes at the VFF we say farewell to one of our editors, Lyall Grey. Lyall has been involved in the magazine for several years and we thank him for his hard work and commitment.

The new VFF editor is Matthew Guy. Matthew has a marketing background and we are excited by the new skills he will bring to the team.

We are always interested in hearing from our readers. If you have a story, a letter, a comment or a suggestion please don't hesitate to get in touch. Our readers suggested most of the stories in this issue.

Mike Gooley,
Matthew Guy and
Carrie Tiffany



By Mal Brown

Farm forestry in the northern

Integrating trees into the agricultural landscape remains a significant challenge for Australia's landholders. In Victoria's northern irrigation region tree plantations are on the increase. Trees are providing diversification, bringing environmental benefits and generating valuable commercial wood products for these forward-thinking farmers.

Finding the right species at Tatura

When Tatura lucerne grower Tom Dumaresq first planted trees on his farm in 1990 in response to a shallow watertable problem farm forestry was not part of the equation.

"At the time there was no mention of pursuing an end product from the trees. We were looking for the hydrologic and environmental benefits the trees would bring so we planted species such as *Eucalyptus grandis* and *Eucalyptus globulus*, which turned out to be quite inappropriate."

Now that farm forestry is an integral part of Tom's farming operation, Spotted Gum (*Corymbia maculata*) and Ironbark (*Eucalyptus tricarpa*) dominate the landscape and are performing very well.

Approximately 30% of the 128-hectare farm is now under trees. This includes check-bank as well as block plantings.

Tom is a member of the North-West Mooroopna Landcare Group. He is also part of a co-operative of nine growers in the Shepparton Irrigation Region who have received funding under the Federal Government's Farm Innovation Program to manage hardwood trees for higher value end products.

"Both the financial support and the information are readily available for people wanting to get into trees in our area," Tom said.

The co-operative of growers have pooled more than 30 hectares of trees which will be thinned from 1000 stems per hectare down to around 200 stems per hectare, with the ultimate aim of producing sawlogs.

Despite the dry years, Tom is confident that his trees will continue to use groundwater and keep the watertable down. He also installed a groundwater pump in the mid-1990s. The trees are still being irrigated, except for the largest block, which is due for mechanical pruning during 2003.

Experimenting on the Patho Plains

John Toll and his brother Greg run Wiltshire Horn Stud on the Patho Plains near Gunbower in northern Victoria. Both are members of Gunbower Landcare Group and have been experimenting with trees for many years as part of their hay making, cropping and agistment operation.

In 1997 John visited a trial irrigated farm forestry plantation at nearby Yarrowalla South and was astounded at the growth of the trees. That year John and Greg planted their first blocks of farm forestry species. They now have 20,000 native plants in the ground with the aim of getting up to 100,000 or 10% of the farm.

According to John, autumn preparation is essential to successful establishment on ground that ranges from tight red soils to black cracking clays.

"We deep rip with a three-tyne ripper and because the Patho Plains is lacking in nutrients we add pig manure and gypsum, or lime, depending on the soil type. With our newer plantings we are following the lines of the natural watercourses and planting 50-metre wide corridors."

John and Greg's best performing species are Eumong (*Acacia stenophylla*), Swamp Yate (*Eucalyptus occidentalis*), Ironbark (*Eucalyptus tricarpa*), River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), Cooba (*Acacia salicina*) River Sheoak (*Casuarina cunninghamiana*), Black Box (*Eucalyptus largiflorens*), Sugar Gum (*Eucalyptus cladocalyx*) and Booree (*Acacia pendula*).



Tom Dumaresq (in the check shirt) discusses the management of irrigated farm forestry plantations at the Northern United Forestry Group Expo in March.

irrigation region

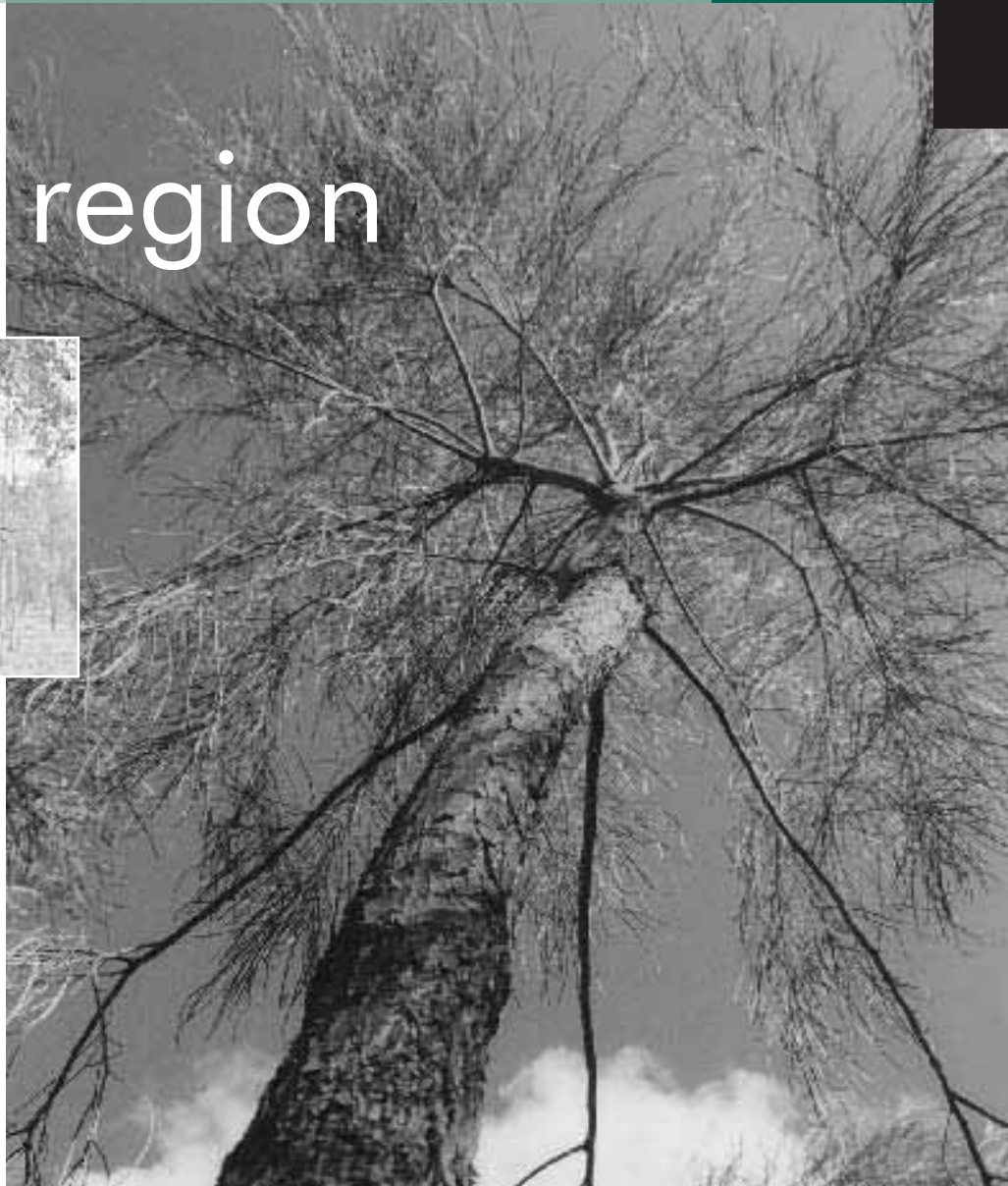


John Toll amongst his trees.

Some of the Eumong are already eight metres high; however, Lightwood (*Acacia implexa*) is struggling and a plantation of Spotted Gum (*Corymbia maculata*) was so severely frost-affected that John hoed them in.

According to John financial assistance through the Loddon Murray Land and Water Management Strategy has been essential to getting the trees in the ground.

A Eumong (*Acacia stenophylla*) on John and Greg Toll's Patho Plains property.



New research on irrigated plantations

In January 2003 the Joint Venture Agroforestry Program published a research report on the demonstration and development of fast growing irrigated eucalypt plantations.

The report presents information from a series of irrigated eucalypt trials conducted in northern Victoria. It contains an analysis of groundwater, irrigation water, foliage, surface soil and tree growth at ages three, six and eight years from trial plantations established at Undera, Mangalore, Cobram, Nathalia, Shepparton,

Tatura, Timmering, Appin South and Yarrawalla South.

Four species were planted at each site: *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, *Eucalyptus globulus*, *Eucalyptus grandis* and *Eucalyptus saligna*. The sites are flood irrigated and represent a range of water sources and qualities available in northern Victoria from low salinity channel water, to high salinity groundwater, to nutrient-rich municipal effluent.

The study shows a correlation between the salinity level in irrigation water and

the salinity and sodicity of the soil. Salt accumulation is not a serious problem at sites irrigated with low salinity water (Cobram, Mangalore or Undera). However, the increasing trend in salinity at Shepparton suggests that it may be a problem in the future.

Yet irrigation with high sodium municipal effluent at Shepparton has produced growth rates to age six years amongst the highest recorded in southern Australia.

The full report is available from Charlotte Keller (02) 6272 3736.

Meet the Landcare team



By Mark Costello

A statewide Landcare team made up of ten Regional Landcare Co-ordinators, a Statewide Landcare position and a research position has now been appointed. The team brings a great deal of enthusiasm and vast experience to the job of providing leadership and support for Landcare in Victoria.

This team will oversee the implementation of *Healthy Landscapes – Sustainable Communities* – the ten-year Victorian Action Plan for Second Generation Landcare.

The Action Plan was released in May 2002. It includes a framework of actions to maintain Victoria's leadership in community-based natural resource management. The Landcare team positions are funded through the Bracks Government's four-year, \$6 million investment to implement the Action Plan.

The Regional Landcare Co-ordinators are hosted and managed by the ten Regional Catchment Management Authorities and are responsible for implementing the Action Plan in the regions. They will also play a significant role in developing new approaches to increasing community participation in natural resource management. The Statewide Landcare Facilitator provides leadership and co-ordination to the team.

Over the next four years the team will:

- develop five-year Landcare support strategies for each Catchment Management Authority region;
- develop three-year investment plans to increase funding surety to regions and Landcare groups;
- develop and implement statewide and regional training programs;
- improve community input to Landcare and natural resource management decision-making processes;



Victoria's Regional Landcare Co-ordinators. Back row from left – Paula Camenzuli, Mike Gooley, Jo Roberts, Phil McGarry, Matt Crawley, Clare Claydon. Front row – Max Skeen, Mark Costello, Doug Evans, Tom Croft, Mark Hardy, Joanne Webber, Phil Stevenson. Absent – Joanne Greenwood.

- develop guidelines for the employment of Landcare co-ordinators and facilitators; and
 - develop and implement programs in volunteer management strategies
- (including occupational health and safety), and labour support for Landcare.
- Mark Costello is the Statewide Landcare Facilitator at DSE. He can be contacted on 9412 4785.

Statewide Landcare Co-ordination team

Joanne Roberts	Corangamite CMA	5253 9131
Paula Camenzuli	East Gippsland CMA	5153 0462
Phil Stevenson	Goulburn Broken CMA	57611673
Mark Hardy	Glenelg Hopkins CMA	5571 2526
Matt Crawley	Mallee CMA	5022 4331
Clare Claydon	North Central CMA	5440 1820
Tom Croft	North East CMA	(02) 6043 7619
Doug Evans	Port Phillip CMA	9785 0117
Phillip McGarry	West Gippsland CMA	5382 1544
Max Skeen	Wimmera CMA	5662 4555
Joanne Greenwood Landcare Research Analyst	DSE	9412 4560

Transforming Coomoora



By Pamela Manning

A weed-infested slab of vacant Crown land next to the Coomoora residential area near Daylesford did not immediately stand out as the ideal location for a much-needed playground and recreation area.

Coomoora became a residential area after several farms were sold and subdivided into one-acre allotments. It is settled mainly by new Australian and young families owing to its closeness to Daylesford and affordability.

Local resident Mark Sartori recognised the unique character of the vacant land that runs along Wallaby Creek. It was densely infested with blackberries, gorse, St John's Wort and other nasties. However, Mark was impressed by the wonderful old gum tree, the natural springs trickling from the bank of the creek and a number of small blackwoods pushing up their heads.

Mark contacted the local Landcare Co-ordinator for some assistance and advice on how the area could be developed in a way to best suit the natural environment.

The Landcare Co-ordinator established a working group to discuss the project and work with the three existing land lessees. The lessees saw the potential benefits of the project, particularly weed control and tree replanting. Two lessees have agreed to relinquish their leases in mid-2003 and discussion is continuing with the third.

One of the key concerns for the working group was insurance – both for those working on the site and those using it for recreation. Land Victoria's Land Manager in Ballarat, Greg Leece, suggested a relationship with the nearby Landcare group, so that volunteers on the project would be covered by the group's insurance.

The proposed Coomoora project was raised at the next Landcare Group meeting and received strong in-principle support. Further communication was undertaken to promote awareness of the project amongst the Coomoora community and to promote the involvement of the Landcare group.

Land Victoria will be approached to have the leases changed and the group formally established as a Committee of Management for Crown Land.

While the insurance issue has caused a slight delay in the project, the group is seeking funding in 2003/2004 to start its substantial weed removal and replanting works. Plans are also underway to involve a volunteer community environmental crew to help build the playground equipment and undertake structural work on the creek.

The Coomoora project is a good example of how local Landcare Co-ordinators can help small communities improve their social and natural environment.

For further information contact Pamela Manning on 0428 610 628.



Local resident Mark Sartori has been a driving force behind the Coomoora project.

The condition of Wallaby Creek demonstrates the scale of the project.



Your Land



The Wimmera Landcare Team were the hosts of the 2002 Conference.

Q. What is the Victorian Landcare Network?

A. The Victorian Landcare Network (VLN) is an incorporated organisation in its own right. The network formed in 1997 and works to advance Landcare in Victoria by providing support, effective communications and statewide standards for Victorian Landcare professionals and workers whilst recognising and advocating the importance of community Landcare. Our goals are centred round the themes of support, communication and statewide standards.

Q. Who are the members?

A. All Victorian Landcare workers voluntary or paid can be members of the network. Simply contact Brenan

Wotherspoon at the VFF to register on 9207 5527.

Each Landcare region (based on CMA boundaries) sends two representatives to the Network regions and it is the responsibility of those representatives to disseminate information back to Landcare within their region. If you want to know who to contact in your region check out the contact box.

Q. Why do we need a network?

A. There is a number of issues that affect Landcare workers and the communities they represent. The network provides a forum where issues can be raised at a statewide level. It allows for information transfer between community representatives and Government agencies.

It provides a support base for Landcare workers who often operate in isolation. Employment issues can be raised by the network and resources and ideas can be shared.

Q. Who runs the network?

A. The network is run by a voluntary committee. Liza Price is the current president of the network. Liza is from the Yarram Catchments Network of the West Gippsland Region. Liza has been involved with the network for two years and has been involved in Landcare in NSW. Liza hopes to see the network grow and gain further recognition as a statewide organisation that represents community Landcare.

Landcare Network explained



Clive Crouch, local environmentalist, talks to co-ordinators about biodiversity and the role of native species found in the Little Desert at the 2002 Victorian Landcare Conference.

Max Skeen is the vice president. Max is from the Wimmera region and works as a Regional Landcare co-ordinator for the Wimmera CMA.

Brenan Wotherspoon from the VFF is the network's administrative officer – a crucial position that holds the network together.

Q. What does the network do?

A. The Victorian Landcare Network plays an active role in information transfer – acting as a conduit between Federal and

State Governments, the regions and the community. It assists communication between the regions, works towards unification and a statewide approach to 'big-ticket' Landcare issues.

The network also runs an annual Victorian Landcare Conference. In 2002 the Wimmera hosted the conference at Whimpy's Little Desert Lodge just outside of Nhill.

The conferences provide an opportunity for Landcare staff to workshop ideas and share information and to come together to build on and establish partnerships. The conference also provides the Victorian Landcare Network with the opportunity to elect new office bearers.

Q. What plans does the network have for this year?

A. The network is planning a Victorian Landcare Conference to be held in East Gippsland. It is also working on an information campaign for Landcare employers and staff based on the new NHT and the formalisation of a number of currently informal processes.

Thanks to Denis Martin

The Victorian Landcare Network's long-standing president, Denis Martin, stood down recently and is retiring from Landcare.

Denis achieved a great many things for the network. He fostered discussion, advocated a career structure and employment conditions for Landcare professionals, maintained strong links across the State and encouraged regional representation and participation.

We thank Denis for his hard work and dedication to the Landcare movement and wish him the very best for the future.



Denis Martin with Wooragee landholder Anne Nankervis.

Victorian Landcare Network contacts:

Corangamite	Lyall Bond	5596 2079
East Gippsland	Darren Williams	5152 0600
Glenelg-Hopkins	Mark Hardy	5561 5661
Goulburn-Broken	Sarah Hearn	5191 3199
Mallee	Matt Crawley	5022 4327
North Central	Clare Claydon	5448 7124
North East	Geoff McKernan	(02) 6056 5661
Port Phillip	Pat Corr	9714 8270
West Gippsland	Erlina Compton	5139 0120
Wimmera	Max Skeen	5382 1544

Co-ordinators get to experience a different view of the world during a presentation from National Landcare Facilitator Coral Love at the 2002 Conference.



Healing the burn – recovering from the

Victoria's climate, weather patterns and vegetation make it one of the most wildfire susceptible regions in the world. With drought in many parts of the State and very low levels of soil moisture, conditions were perfect for the extreme fire behaviour we saw last season. The 2002/03 fire season was the worst in Victoria for more than 60 years.

On January 8, lightning started 84 fires in the north east and just over the border in NSW. All but nine of these fires were quickly contained. The remaining fires eventually joined up, burning for nearly three months and moving progressively towards and through East Gippsland.

Thousands of people were directly involved in fighting the fires including 3350 employees from DSE, DPI and Parks Victoria, over 3000 CFA volunteers, personnel from NSW, Tasmania, Qld, SA and the United States and over 100 army and navy personnel. A large number of SES volunteers and local community members provided crucial help in support roles.

Despite the efforts of all involved the fires burnt around 1.1 million hectares of land. Earlier in the summer the Big Desert fire burnt 200,000 hectares, bringing the total area burnt for the fire season up to 1.3 million hectares.

That the fires did not result in even greater tragedy is due to the preparedness and co-operation of communities, improvements in emergency management and the courageous dedication of the firefighters and the many support staff and volunteers behind them.

National Parks and State forests take the brunt

More than 80% of Mt Buffalo National Park was burnt, as well as around 60% of the Alpine National Park and nearly 440,000 hectares of State forest, some of which will need to be replanted to ensure a sustainable timber industry.

The fires also affected over 80 threatened flora and fauna species. Scientists are particularly interested in how the Mountain Pygmy Possum and Spotted Tree Frog will fare over the coming months and years after having most of their habitat burnt.

Many indigenous sites, historic places and artifacts were also destroyed, including historic huts in the high country. On the positive side, clearing away the undergrowth has provided a great opportunity to survey and document indigenous artifacts and evidence of recent European occupation such as gold workings.

A burnt paddock near Omeo in East Gippsland.



Support staff working at an Incident Control Centre in the north east.

worst bushfires in 60 years

By Jodi Braszell



The fire on Mt Buffalo in the evening of 21 January 2003.

While nature will take care of most things, there are particular issues requiring attention from land managers as the bush recovers. For example, the protection of alpine bogs that may be lost to erosion, and controlling foxes that place increasing pressure on threatened species such as the Long-footed Potoroo. Some areas of young Alpine Ash forest that were burnt will need to be re-seeded.

The fire also presents an opportunity to make headway in controlling some pest species such as English Broom.

The fires have also affected more than 1100 tourism businesses, with adventure nature-based tourism businesses operating on public land the most seriously affected.

There is much to be done in restoring public access to over 5000 kilometres of tracks, as well as repairing or replacing bridges, picnic areas, camping grounds, toilets, walking tracks, signs and snow pole lines.

Approximately 24,000 hectares of Alpine Ash forest that was burnt in the fire is suitable for salvage logging. The timber will need to be harvested within two years or it will start to crack and become unsuitable for milling into high value products.

Private land losses

The magnificent efforts of fire fighters limited the damage to private land to 90,000 hectares. Compared to the 1939 and 1983 fires this damage to private property is extremely contained. Nevertheless, affected landowners face big issues. Twenty-six houses were damaged or lost and about 350 farms affected. Over 13,000 head of livestock were killed. Of the 150,000 sheep and cattle that survived the fires many received injuries or were left without feed.

Farming communities, already suffering from the drought, now face additional problems such as stock and fencing losses,

the destruction of feed, and damage to pastures. The VFF has provided valuable assistance after the fires by organising over 50 semi-trailer loads of donated hay.

Water and catchments

Much of the land burnt is within water supply catchments for towns in East Gippsland and the north east. The loss of vegetation in these catchments has created a serious risk of soil erosion following rainfall. Soil, ash and other debris is being deposited into rivers and waterways which lowers oxygen levels killing stream life and degrading water supplies.

Stabilising the 6000 kilometres of containment lines constructed during fire fighting on public and private land was an immediate priority after the fires.

Even with this work completed large quantities of ash and sediment will wash from the Victorian alps into waterways until groundcover is established.

Water authorities are facing a difficult challenge to maintain clean supplies of water for farm and domestic use. This problem will be particularly acute in autumn and early winter, gradually subsiding as the bush regenerates. The impact on fish and other life in our

waterways is difficult to predict.

An opportunity to build on

In the face of a terrifying natural disaster the people of East Gippsland and the north east demonstrated an astounding capacity for goodwill, leadership and co-operation. The positive relationships that developed during the fire will have a great impact on the success of recovery.

With the leadership and support of Community Recovery Committees and Local and State Government agencies, communities are developing plans that focus on recovery at individual, community and regional levels.

The community is also helping to report on and record the fire season, which will improve our bushfire preparedness, response and recovery for the future.

The fires have cost us a great deal. The Victorian Government has spent \$115 million on fire suppression and \$86 million is committed to recovery. However, for many people the costs may never be measured in dollars.

For further information on the Bushfire Recovery Program contact the DSE Customer Service Centre on 136 186 or visit www.info.vic.gov.au/bushfires

Weed Alert!

by *Kate Blood*

Imagine that you live in the early 1800s. The latest nursery seed catalogue has just arrived in the post. You open it eagerly and immerse yourself in the newest garden trends. The must-have new garden plant is a gorgeous herb with bright purple flowers. The herb forms lovely purple swards to bring colour and movement to the garden. Seeds can be posted right to your door. How can you resist?

Now imagine yourself in 2003. Your farm is covered in the purple herb. It has invaded the paddocks and roadsides. It has contaminated your hay. You are spending a fortune to control it – and you are not alone. Over \$30 million is being spent annually throughout Australia on control.

The herb is Paterson's Curse (*Echium plantagineum*). Every spring its purple carpet is a familiar sight along the Hume Highway and elsewhere around Victoria. Back in 1842 it was the must-have garden plant.

Similar scenarios are still happening today as people are making decisions to buy the latest plants for their gardens. Modern seeds are not just ordered from the local seed merchant, but can be sent from the other side of the globe via the Internet and mail order catalogues.

The push for low water-use garden plants, although a worthy cause, is likely to promote many weeds of the future. Anything that can survive in the Australian climate without human help has a good chance of becoming invasive. Many succulents and ornamental grasses are likely to become our next wave of agricultural and environmental weeds.

These are some of the weeds that have been found recently in Victoria:

Mouse Ear is a serious weed threat to Victoria.

Japanese and Giant Knotweed

Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) and Giant Knotweed (*Fallopia sachalinensis*) have been found recently in a few locations in Victoria. Japanese Knotweed is one of only two noxious weeds in the United Kingdom. It is a perennial that evolved on the slopes of Mt Fuji in Japan in an environment where it was regularly smothered by lava. The plant is able to puncture its new shoots through the rock-hard lava and continue growing. The problem is, it can also puncture through bitumen roads, footpaths, the floors and wall cavities of buildings . . . and now it is here in Victoria.

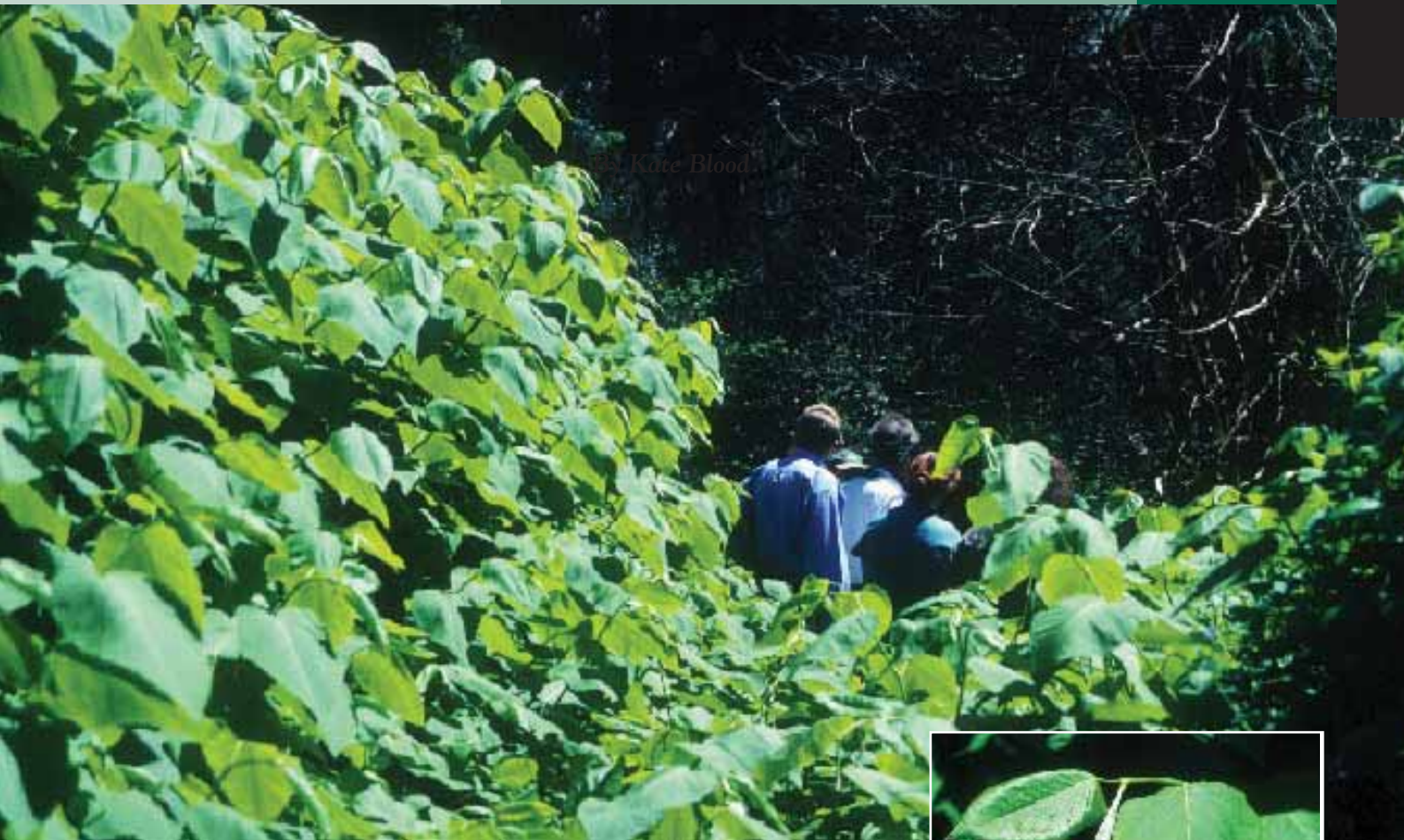
Giant Knotweed is an even taller version of the plant. Management programs are being put in place to contain and remove these localised infestations usually originating in gardens.

Mouse Ear

How many little weedy yellow daisies do you have at your place? Dandelions, Flatweed, Ox Tongue . . . the list goes on.

One of the world's worst weeds, Horsetail, is available at markets and nurseries in Victoria.





Kate Blood

Giant Knotweed is a serious weed found at two locations in Victoria and now under active control.

Another look-alike recently found in Victorian gardens and weekend markets is Mouse Ear (*Hieracium pilosella*). It looks like all the other invasive daisies with yellow flowers but does have some distinguishing features. It has runners like a strawberry plant and the whole plant, including the runners, is covered with long hairs.

Mouse Ear is one of many seriously invasive *Hieracium* species (old name *Pilosella* species). Many originated in Europe and have become serious weeds overseas including New Zealand, USA and Canada. The pastoral productivity in some areas of New Zealand has dropped considerably and stocking rates reduced by 30% on some properties because of *Hieracium* invasion.

Mouse Ear has been found in a number of public and private gardens. It is also being sold at markets, nurseries and traded at garden club swap-meets. Trying to prevent its distribution and establishment is a high priority to protect agricultural industries and the natural environment.

Horsetail

The growing interest in architecturally interesting foliage plants for gardens has seen a local increase in one of the world's worst weeds – the Horsetail. Many species of Horsetails (*Equisetum* species) are very serious weeds and are being promoted in Australia for gardens and for medicinal purposes through the herb and permaculture trade.

Horsetails are virtually impossible to kill. They contain large amounts of silica making it almost impossible for herbicides to penetrate the plant. They reproduce by millions of tiny dust-like spores. Horsetails produce long and deeply growing underground stems called rhizomes. Some species can send these rhizomes two metres below the soil surface and they can run for 100 metres underground. Building a house on top of an infestation will not stop it.

Apart from being highly invasive and virtually impossible to kill, it is toxic to livestock and can even kill animals that eat contaminated hay. In some parts of the world it reduces crop yields by 50%.



The leaves of Giant Knotweed.

Weed Spotters WANTED

To tackle potential, new and emerging weeds more effectively, DPI is developing a Weed Alert Rapid Response Plan for the State. One of its initiatives is to develop a network of Weed Spotters to report new weeds. Weeds might be found in paddocks, on roadsides, in National Parks, at nurseries or the local fete or market.

To become a volunteer Weed Spotter in Victoria, send your contact details to Kate Blood at DPI, PO Box 7, Beaufort 3373 or email Kate.Blood@nre.vic.gov.au

Grazing success



Magenta Stork's-Bill (Pelargonium rodneyanum) is a wildflower often seen in native pastures.

Native grasses such as Windmill Grass (Chloris truncata) indicate a healthy landscape.



The barren landscapes of Iraq seen on our television screens recently are a stark reminder of the fragility of our own land. Iraq covers what was once called Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and with its rich natural resources became one of the birthplaces of human civilisation and agriculture.

Human use of the land and water has reduced much of Iraq's land to desert. In northern Victoria, the evidence is all around us that we face similar challenges – dust storms, blue-green algal blooms in waterways, rivers choking with eroded sediments, dying wetlands and salt rising to the surface. These are all signs that we cannot keep using our land the same way.

Alternative systems needed

Evidence suggests the need for alternative agricultural systems based on perennial native vegetation, but what are realistic options?

Ian Higgins from the North Central CMA is a keen promoter of native vegetation. Ian suggests that perennial native grasses and saltbushes may provide the answers for grazing production. Recent survey work funded by the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality has shown that there are still significant areas in north central Victoria where grazing production is based almost entirely on native grasses.

“Both perennial native grasses and saltbushes are palatable and nutritious,

with native grasses

By Sandra Volk and Ian Higgins



stand up to livestock grazing and, as good colonisers, are easy to re-establish,” Ian explained.

Ian is encouraging people to learn to recognise and appreciate the native vegetation already in their paddocks.

“After all, unlike many introduced pasture species, the native grasses grow for free and don’t need expensive inputs like fertiliser, irrigation and lime to persist.”

Studies in southern NSW have shown that grazing production systems based on native grasses were more profitable than those based on introduced species. Ian believes the NSW work demonstrates that we can have economically viable production systems based on native vegetation.

“Keeping the native vegetation already in our paddocks makes the most sense, as re-establishment of native grasses

from scratch will not yet be economically viable. In many situations, becoming more sustainable is just a matter of learning to better manage the native vegetation resources we already have,” Ian said.

Fine wool merinos thrive

Glenn and Anne Wilkin and their son Trent are using native grasses for grazing on their fine wool merino property at Sedgwick, south of Bendigo. Glenn’s family has farmed the property for five generations and 140 years. His son Trent is now in charge.

The Wilkins shear 2400 adult sheep and raise 800 lambs in their self-replacing fine wool merino flock. The 700-hectare property is mostly granite hills. According to Glenn, if managed properly native pasture produces a steady supply of feed all year round. These conditions are ideal for producing the fine wool that the property is known for.

Feather Heads (Ptilotus macrocephalus) amongst native grasses.



Anne and Glenn Wilkin from Sedgwick graze their fine wool merinos on native pastures.

“Improved pastures don’t persist well here and are expensive to maintain, while the resilience of native plants makes them good in drought conditions and an ideal food supply for fine wool merinos,” Glenn said.

The Wilkins have introduced a rotational grazing regime which spells the paddocks and allows the pasture to recover and set seed. This type of grazing also reduces competition from weed species which will allow the native pasture to recover in the degraded areas over time.

“Native grasses also promote a more effective use of water and improved water quality through their use of rainfall. This prevents surplus water removing salts from the soil and carrying them into waterways and low-lying areas,” Glenn said.

For further information contact Ian Higgins on 5440 1821.



South Gippsland's

Innovative and successful Landcarers were recognised for their outstanding approaches to farming at the recent annual South Gippsland Landcare Network dinner and inaugural Better Farming Awards.

The judges praised the high quality of the entrants and recognised that they have been inspirational within the community.

All entrants received a farm gate plaque.

The awards were sponsored by West Gippsland Fertilisers, Phillip Ould Organic Rice Hulls, Outdoor Adventures, South Gippsland and Western Port Water Authorities, Parks Victoria and Edison Mission Energy.

Primary Producer Award

The Primary Producer Award was a dead heat, shared between the Sinclairs and the Horners.

Dairyfarmers Daryl and Fay Sinclair and their four sons, Brent, Hayden, Joel and Kurt, have transformed the landscape of their farm since they bought it in 1986.

According to Fay the aim was to achieve a sustainable balance between using the natural resources as shelter and ensuring that those natural resources remained available for future generations; in their case, four sons.

"We set ourselves long-term goals when we arrived and created our ideal landscape vision," Fay said.

Fay and Daryl Sinclair farm with the future in mind.



Rivercare Award

Chris and Sharon and Coral and Kevin Hughes of Koonwarra won the Rivercare Award. This family encompasses three generations of Landcarers. Their success is due to a great team effort.

The family's tree planting began over thirty years ago when Chris's parents, Kevin and Coral, took over the management of the family farm. They started planting the hilly, windswept terrain in 1972 using seed that Coral

collected from remnant vegetation on the farm and from nearby areas.

The Hughes family have now planted over 30,000 trees across their 193-hectare property on which they run both dairy and beef cattle. The revegetation continued when Chris and Sharon took over management of the farm in 1997. According to Sharon everyone has a role.

"Chris and Kevin are the fencers, I'm the milker and Coral is the planter."

Kevin, Coral, Chris and Sharon Hughes on their property at Koonwarra.



top Landcarers

By Clare Lamers



Angus breeders Ross and Wendy Horner are rejuvenating the bush on their property at Inverloch.

Ross and Wendy Horner of Inverloch are the joint winners of the Primary Producer Award. The Horners breed Angus cattle. Since 1990 they have been fencing off and enhancing remnant vegetation and planting shelterbelts and wildlife corridors. They have planted around 17,000 trees.

Ross grew up on the property and remembers it with large areas of bush that teemed with wildlife. Although much of the bush is now gone the Horners are attempting to rejuvenate what is left by increasing the diversity of plants and animals and improving the natural balance of the ecosystem.

Dick Howarth Smaller Properties/ Individual Landcarer Memorial Award

Dawn and Mark Marotti of Arawata have transformed their 67-acre, steep, weed-infested property in just two years. The Marottis bought the property in winter and received quite a shock the next spring when the property was almost totally covered in thistles and ragwort.

The couple set to work and despite the difficult terrain have removed the blackberry, thistle and ragwort

infestations. They are now concentrating on revegetation, especially in areas of the property that provide habitat for Giant Gippsland Earthworms.



The Marotti's small property at Arawata – now mostly weed free after just two years.

Bushcare Award

Ann and Phil Hargreaves have fenced off areas of swamp scrub within their 60-acre property at Pound Creek and planted a variety of indigenous species.

Swamp scrub (in this case scented paperbark, swamp paperbark and

batwing fern) is considered to be endangered in the Gippsland Plains Bioregion.

According to Chris Rankin, one of the Bushcare Award judges, many people do not value swamp scrub and often run stock through it.

“The Hargreaveses have protected their scrub by fencing it off. They have also undertaken regular weed control, which is admirable. Once you get into the swamp scrub it is quite dark and usually pretty wet so we have recognised the efforts they have gone to,” Chris Rankin said.



Ann and Phil Hargreaves's property at Pound Creek boasts rare swamp scrub as well as indigenous plantings.

Shaping Landcare in the Mallee

By Matt Crawley
and Glennis McKee

The Mallee Regional Landcare Forum, held at Murray Downs in March, was different from any Landcare event previously held in the Mallee. The region's Landcare groups and co-ordinators had direct input into shaping the program. They decided the location, the time and the sessions that made up the forum.

One of the biggest challenges was getting the 30 busy Landcare leaders in the same place at the same time. Two-thirds of all Mallee Landcare groups were represented. Each group was encouraged to send a new or active member who may take on a leadership role in the future as well as current leaders.

The forum had a number of objectives – firstly, to give groups a say in how Landcare looks in their region including resourcing, support and capacity building

opportunities for group executives and co-ordinators – secondly, to provide greater understanding and awareness of executive and co-ordinator roles and responsibilities.

Investigating these issues should lead to a more aware, skilled and resourced Landcare movement in the region.

Some of the forum outcomes were subtle – people simply having the chance to get to know each other and share experiences. Other outcomes were more tangible with the establishment of the Mallee Regional Landcare Network Executives.

The forum also provided an opportunity for our Landcarers to become more familiar with the Mallee CMA structure and the State Landcare Action Plan – *Healthy Landscapes – Sustainable Communities*.

Keynote speaker Neville Brady and the Kookaburra dinner and cruise were highlights of the forum. Neville Brady took the group on a journey of self-discovery. He helped us to realise that we all have the capacity to improve ourselves and to recognise ourselves as leaders in our own right.

The team-building golf event on the last afternoon was also a great success. The Landcarers navigated the notorious Murray Downs course in teams of four and in doing so had many laughs while strengthening ties and reflecting on and debating the issues of the forum.

For further information contact Matt Crawley on 5051 4331 or Glennis McKee on 5095 2363.

The Mallee mob aboard the Kookaburra.



Bernadette, Noel and Wayne Cheshire standing in one of their irrigated pasture paddocks. Notice the difference between the surrounding country and the irrigated paddock.

Land Stewardship at Burrowye

Burrowye beef producers Noel, Bernadette and Wayne Cheshire believe in the importance of supplying a product to suit the customer. Their beef herd is Cattle Care, European Union and Meat Standard Authority accredited.

To help tie in the on-farm management with the business and environmental aspects of their operation they recently completed a Whole Farm Business Plan through the North East CMAs Rural Land Stewardship program.

The Whole Farm Business Planning Course run by the CMA is accredited by Rural Finance through FarmBis which means the cost of the training attracts a 90% subsidy. For a course costing \$3850 the landholder only pays \$385. The training is delivered one-to-one at home, which allows the landholder to produce a comprehensive and relevant plan that will give direction and help to drive the business for the next few years.

The Cheshires run a breeding herd of 260 breeders on their 590 hectares. Numerous areas of their property have been planted with trees and fenced to protect areas of gully erosion and provide shelter for livestock.

“We have cold winters and hot summers in this part of the Upper Murray and if we are to continue to produce quality cattle we need to do our best to look after them,” Noel Cheshire said.



The environmental activities on the property are ongoing. Some of the work has been funded through grants, but the family has undertaken much of it with their own resources. They have also been actively involved with the Burrowye Landcare Group since its inception.

Chris Reid, the co-ordinator of the Land Stewardship Program with the North East CMA, believes that for landholders to be involved in ongoing environmental works the business needs to be on a sound financial footing.

“You can’t divorce economics from the environment. We are working with farmers to structure their business so we can achieve environmental outcomes.

“The environmental component of the training covers a diverse range of issues. It can include investigating the economics of changing from annual to perennial pastures, tailoring fertilising to suit

landforms and changing from flood to spray irrigation. It is much more than just fencing off some land and planting trees,” Chris Reid said.

The Cheshires have a small area of flood irrigation and as a result of doing the whole farm business planning they are currently investigating the costs involved to change it over to spray irrigation. Through the Water for Growth initiative DPI has funds available for landholders wanting to change over from flood irrigation.

Noel Cheshire sees huge environmental benefits in converting to spray irrigation as well as it being more cost effective from a business perspective.

“It’s about using all of the available tools to get the best possible outcome,” he said.

For further information contact Chris Reid on (02) 6043 7600.

Greenfleet – simple, ingenious

Greenfleet Australia is an innovative, world-first program that it is doing something positive and practical to offset greenhouse gas emissions.

Run from a small office on a South Gippsland farm, Greenfleet offers motorists the opportunity to compensate for the emissions produced by their cars. The program has been responsible for the planting of more than a million native trees since 1997.

The inspiration for Greenfleet came about by chance. Henry O'Clery was driving in his car when he heard a radio interview with the research director at the Bureau of Transport and Communication Economics. The researcher explained that the most cost-effective way to offset greenhouse emissions from transport was to plant trees. He went on to explain how many trees were needed to lock up the emissions from the average car – and from that idea Greenfleet was born.

It started as a small project, but Greenfleet Australia is now a not-for-profit organisation specialising in transport and the environment.

Greenfleet is the first organisation in the world to offer motorists a carbon-offset program. Motorists pay \$30 a year (tax deductible) and Greenfleet plants 17 native trees on their behalf. Over their lifetime, the trees soak up 4.33 tonnes of CO² – the amount emitted by the average car each year.

Greenfleet's policy is to plant indigenous trees that will help to restore native vegetation. The Greenfleet trees create 'forests of diversity' which in addition to absorbing greenhouse gases also reduce salinity and soil erosion, provide wildlife habitat and improve water quality. The trees will never be harvested, and create an investment for future generations.

Land for large-scale tree plantings is sourced from both local landholders and government, with a focus on high-priority areas. Greenfleet tries to plant the trees where they are most needed.

Henry O'Clery explained that a carbon agreement is signed by the landholder after planting.

"The agreement specifies that the trees will never be harvested and that Greenfleet maintains the rights to 'count the carbon' soaked up by those trees during their lifetime," Henry said.

Greenfleet and the Australian Greenhouse Office are currently working together to develop a cost-effective method to evaluate the carbon up-take by the trees.

Greenfleet's largest supporter is the Queensland Government which has signed up its entire fleet of 12,600 vehicles. This is closely followed by the Victorian Government with some 8000 vehicles. Other businesses involved include ENERGEX, LeasePlan, Monash University, BRL Hardy, Peter Lehmann Wines and Yarra Valley Water.

Greenfleet is also involved in promoting future transport technology including hybrid electric and fuel-cell vehicles, renewable and low carbon fuels and lightweight materials. They assist in fast-tracking these technologies, which will result in a substantial reduction of environmental damage from motor vehicles.

Greenfleet believes that there may be a potential market for up to 10 million trees a year and they are focused on developing the organisation to deliver that target.

According to Henry O'Clery Greenfleet's largest tree planting project is Murray Darling Rescue (MDR), a joint initiative between Greenfleet and Scouts Australia, which calls on the community to 'Help halt the salt'.

"MDR is a ten-year initiative to bring life back to the Murray Darling by planting millions of native trees and to generate public support for revitalising the river. The third year of plantings will start at the end of May. So far, Greenfleet and the Scouts have planted 600,000 trees in the Murray Darling.

Scouts and Greenfleet working together on Murray Darling Rescue.



and successful

By Cathie Agg



It's a positive start – one that's funded by motorists, planted by the community, and beyond government policy."

The scale of the program has impressed Swan Hill landholder Greg Ogle. An army of 300 Scouts revegetated part of his 200-acre property as part of the Murray Darling Rescue Program.

"The land was cleared in 1973 to grow wheat. But we had one of the wettest years on record in 1973/74 and the groundwater came up straight away. It just went to salt even before they got a crop from it – and it never recovered."

The Scouts planted 30,000 trees on the property over one weekend in 2001. Despite battling salinity and the drought the trees are showing a decent survival rate.

"We've had only a few inches of rain in the last twelve months. Down in the salty areas only the saltbush and eucalyptus have survived, but up on the dunes they're actually doing quite well – some are about 60 centimetres high now," Greg said.

Greenfleet is always seeking large tracts of land for plantings. For more information contact Greenfleet forester Jackie Waring on 5664 0172.



IN BRIEF

Northern Plains farm forestry expo

Making trees work in low-rainfall environments was the theme of a farm forestry conference and expo held at Kamarooka, north of Bendigo, earlier this year.

The Northern United Forestry Group hosted the event in response to a strong demand from landholders for information on farm forestry species, silviculture and marketing.

The event focused on the economics of growing hardwood species on the northern plains, both in terms of returns for wood products and integrating tree growing into existing cropping and grazing enterprises for environmental rewards.

Guided bus tours, trade displays and information stalls provided participants with the latest on all aspects of farm forestry from sourcing seeds and seedlings to site preparation and tree management. Speakers included Don Jowett, Corey Watts, Phillip Polglase, Peter Bulman, Des Stackpole, Mark Stewart and Andrew Lang.

For further information contact Ian Rankin on 5488 2271.

Moving On

A new online newsletter for Victorian communities recovering from drought has been launched by DPI. *Moving On* rounds up the latest news from the various government departments assisting landholders with managing the drought.

The first issue contains stories on drought feeding and management of sheep and beef cattle, Farmbis training, silt traps and filters in dams and the affect of stress on family members.



Tim and Ann Barden, of Ko-warra Nursery, Echuca, attended the Northern United Forestry Group's Conference and Expo at Kamarooka earlier this year.

There's also a comprehensive contact list to follow up for further help.

Go to www.nre.vic.gov.au/drought and follow the links to *Moving On*.

Merton Tastes and Tales

The Merton Landcare Group has produced a fascinating and unusual book to mark its tenth anniversary. The Group has been very active, imaginative and progressive over the past decade and *Merton Tastes and Tales* is yet another successful project.

The book weaves the history, land use

and social customs of the area in an engrossing mix. It contains recipes, photographs and anecdotes from local residents which combine to create a real sense of place.

According to Ruth Solly, the group's president, Merton's identity is changing.

"We wanted to record and validate what was, to attempt to share and understand the joys, trials and customs of those who worked so hard to establish this supportive farming community."

For copies and further information contact Ruth Solly on 5778 9610.

New fund for young Wimmera Landcarers

A new Young Wimmera Landcarers fund is aiming to raise \$10,000 to organise a Wimmera Kids Conference in early 2004.

The Wimmera CMA launched the fund in front of a crowd of 150 people at a 'Blues, Burgundy and Bulokes' regional Landcare celebration held on the banks of the Wimmera River in March.

The Young Wimmera Landcarers Fund will provide cash grants for projects that are unable to obtain funds from existing sources. It will help pay for educational resources for schools and will fund field trips to Wimmera places of environmental interest such as Wail Nursery.

Supported by the Wimmera CMA and given tax-deductibility status through Landcare Australia, the fund aims to foster positive Landcare messages for young people in the region and to recognise the value of involving young people in caring for our natural resources.

The fund is currently open to primary school pupils with plans to include

secondary school students in 2004. It is hoped that young people between the ages of 18 and 25 will be included by 2005. The fund could provide potential tertiary scholarships in natural resource management in the future.

Chief executive of the Wimmera CMA John Young said that young people are an important starting point because they are the future Landcarers of the region and that the CMA was keen to do something practical.

"We are currently looking at some funding options to help a network of schools run a conference that focuses on an environmental issue of concern in the region. The fund will help pay for administration, training and other resources such as guest speakers.

"The kids conference is an exciting concept that would also help develop young people's leadership skills."



Pictures courtesy of The Weekly Advertiser

Jenni Papst, left, and Anne Hammerton enjoyed the music and the chance to network.

So far the fund has already attracted donations from individuals and groups including The Norman Wettenhall Foundation, Iluka Resources, Geoff and Helen Handbury and DPI. The Wimmera CMA has also pledged support to the fund through the State Government's Second Generation Landcare Program.

For more information contact Max Skeen on 5382 1544.

The Annemarie Sharry Quintet entertained the crowd on the banks of the Wimmera River at Blues, Burgundy and Bulokes.

