



Wollombi Valley Landcare Group News for October 2012



Voluntary Conservation Agreements in Action

Saturday 20th August at 2:00 pm at Warwick Biggs' property,
St Yves, Wollombi

There are two reasons we are eager to visit this property and talk to Warwick. Firstly, he has a heath and secondly to learn of his experience with a Voluntary Conservation Agreement (VCA).

Partly because of the heath, he has recently entered into a Voluntary Conservation Agreement (VCA) covering the portion of his block that includes not only the heath but the surrounding area where there are several examples of the endangered *Melaleuca groveana*.

As a lawyer, Warwick cast a keen eye on the proposed VCA and his acceptance of an amended version should help ease any concerns held by other people who are considering arranging one for their own properties.

Generally speaking VCAs are a good thing and hopefully seeing what Warwick has done and hearing what he has to say will convince more people to do the same, as Jane Mowatt's has done on 80% of her property in Knight's Arm. Amongst the advantages is a pro-rata decrease in Council rates - a benefit for many that eases the pressure to try and make money out of the bush just to cover the rates.



After the talk and tea/coffee, we will walk up through the newly protected area and visit the heath.

Does anybody know of any other heaths in the Wollombi Valley?

This is the only one I know of. Heaths are easily recognized by their lack of trees and dense and diverse layer of shrubs (height usually determined by time since fire). Frequently the shrub species are quite different to those in the surrounding woodlands and forests

and there is often a varied ground cover of plants also not found under the edging woodlands. There are also snakes, so wear solid shoes and long trousers if coming on the walk. Hats and water bottles are also a good idea.

We will car pool at the U turn opposite the cemetery in Wollombi, leaving at 1:45 pm because there is limited parking at the house.

Everyone is welcome. We look forward to seeing you there.

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Wollombi Valley Landcare Group Inc, or any other Landcare agency or government department, but are presented to promote discussion about and the practice of sustainable land use and environmental responsibility.

Our last meeting on the 18th August 2012....a bushwalk at Stanford Merthyr

We ventured out of our local area to view the results of a major rehabilitation project carried out by Max Elliott and Greg Major on the heavily used and consequently degraded Crown Land just south east of Kurri Kurri.

It was particularly brave of Max to take us on his trip to evaluate the success of the work carried out up until June 30th last year but the progress of the project so far was very encouraging to all of us who have eroded gullies and unwanted trails to re-vegetate. Max and Greg would be the first to agree that the weather has been unusually conducive to seedling establishment and survival. (Remember last year? Rain interspersed with showers?)

The area has a history of heavy recreational use and could not be fenced off to exclude traffic so the revegetation has been subjected to continued disturbance from walkers, horses and trail bikes. Local feedback varied from some walkers who appreciated the attempt to improve the vegetation to people who resented any interference in their access and use of **their** local piece of bush. An unavoidable and understandable position.

However, this 100 acres of Crown Land contains **three** Endangered Ecological Communities and a good population of the local endemic the Endangered Species *Grevillea montana* (which was flowering) [see photo at right] so the NSW Government funded a rescue operation. The Donaldson Coal Co also contributed.



Because the main reason for action was to protect the vegetation communities present, it was particularly important NOT to introduce genetic material from outside the area and community. All seeds had to be collected from the local plants and from the correct community. The last fire was approximately 10 – 15 years earlier so many of the shrubs carried a considerable seed bank e.g. *Bankia spinulosa*, *Hakea sericea*, *Leptospermum polygalifolium*, several species of *Melaleuca* including *nodosa*, *thymifolia* and *erubescens*.

A very successful process for establishing seedlings in this situation, is to cut branches of the local shrubs that are carrying closed seed capsules and lay them across the paths. The capsules open as the branches dry out and the seeds are dropped onto the semishaded and protected microhabitat beneath the branches [see photo at right]. There was very impressive establishment of *Hakea sericea* and *Leptospermum polygalifolium* across eroded tracks.



The severely eroded paths required more expensive procedures.

A bobcat was brought in to rip the compacted ground which was then direct seeded. Trees were dropped down across tracks to stop car and bike use.

The highly unofficial motorcycle circuit which had been bulldozed illegally was re-landscaped to be less friendly to bike use and the *Acacia* is now recolonising.

Coir bolsters or “logs” were laid across ripped steep eroding tracks to catch the soil carried by water running down the developing gully. Costing about \$30 for a 2 m log the coir degrades into the soil in 3-4 years. A berm at the top of the slope redirects as much water away from the gully as possible.

Full jute mats were required on the fine white patches of soil. These soils are particularly vulnerable to erosion once exposed.

Apart from the successful strategies for rehabilitating eroded tracks, this area is particularly interesting because it contains *three* endangered plant communities – the Spotted Gum Ironbark Forest, the Kurri Sand Swamp Woodland and the Hunter Lowland Red Gum Forest. I'm not familiar with these plant communities and to be introduced to them by people who can identify all the plants is a rare treat.

We started off in the Spotted Gum Ironbark Forest with three species of ironbarks, *Eucalyptus fibrosa*, *E. crebra* and *E. siderophloia* and Spotted Gums *Eucalyptus (Corymbia) maculata*, with the occasional Grey Gum, *E. punctata* and an understorey of *Indigofera*, *Acacia elongata*, *A. longifolia*, *Banksia oblongifolia*, *Melaleuca nodosa* with a good stand of the ROTAP listed *Grevillea montana*. Ground cover included *Lomandra longifolia*, *Macrozamia*, *Correa reflexa* and *Caladenia* (Lady Finger Orchids) and *Pterostylis*, (Greenhood Orchids).



There was evidence of continuing horse traffic.

After a short walk the vegetation changed to the Kurri Sand Swamp Woodland. As you would expect in a woodland the trees thinned out and became shorter with the occasional *Angophora bakeri* (Dwarf Apple) and another endangered species *Eucalyptus parramattensis* (Parramatta Red Gum), distinguished by its grey leaves from its relatives, *E. tereticornis* and *E. amplifolia*, the red gums native to the Wollombi Valley.

Most of the vegetation is a dense and very varied shrub layer of *Banksia*, *Leptospermum* and lots of *Melaleucas* [see photo above right], *Lambertia formosa* (Mountain Devil), *Dillwynia* (“Bacon and Eggs” pea) and *Styphelia*. The ground cover included *Lomandra obliqua*, and the carnivorous plant *Drosera peltata* (Sundew). Some seedlings of *Melaleuca decora* had been planted and were well established.



The third community, the Hunter Lowland Redgum Forest was the most degraded, including as it did the motorcycle circuit. However the rehabilitation was clearly working with an understorey of colonising Acacias including *A. elongata*, *A. terminalis*, *A. longifolia*, *A. falcata* and *A. parvipinnula* (well known to us as one of our “Black Wattles”) with *Dodonaea* and *Dillwynia* establishing a shrub layer under the *E. tereticornis* (and occasional ironbark) dominated canopy [see photo at left].

For the historically interested, we also passed the ruins of a Water Storage Dam, built to supply water to a Stanford Merthyr coal mine. The dam was blown up after a mine tragedy around 1910 closed the mine.

Considering the amount of traffic the area is remarkably free of weeds although one small patch of *Richardia brasiliensis* was sighted and brought to Greg Major's attention. There was also some unmistakable deer tracks. Anybody else getting the impression that the deer population is expanding around here? On a happier note, there were also lots of kangaroo tracks.

We are very grateful to Max and Greg for allowing us to tag along and ask lots of questions on their rehabilitation project. We wish it well and picked up useful ideas for revegetation closer to home.

Jane Mowatt

Wollombi Valley Country Fair

The Wollombi Valley Country Fair is on again this year on Saturday 3rd & Sunday 4th November and you are invited! There are loads of activities, food and wine to taste and share the fun.

Landcare will have a stall again and is looking for members who would be prepared to spend a few hours on either day to help man the stand. For new members this is a great opportunity to get involved and meet other members while learning more about our group. If you are able to assist could you please contact Louise Hicks or Chris Jackson on 4998 8660 or 0419 919 078 or louisehicks@bigpond.com

Maxelliott.net.au

Members of Landcare know of Max Elliott as the host at our meeting last October when he provided a very informative tour of his *Grow Local* nursery at Wallaby Gully, Ellalong and more recently acting as one of our guides when we visited the site of the revegetation program he had participated in at Methyr Stanford.

Grow Local has been operating since 2003 supplying native plants for revegetation projects in Cessnock and the surrounding area and operates on a grow to order basis from October each year ready for a planting during the following autumn, but there are always a few extras in stock for small projects.

However most will not be aware that Max has a website which includes a listing of the diverse flora we can grow PLUS "Some tips for Large Scale Planting..." A very useful source of information on ordering plants, caring for tubestock, soil preparation, herbicide application, planting, protection and follow-up watering. So if you are like me and wonder why you a not meeting with much success then I suggest you go to www.maxelliott.net.au click on Native Plants then scroll down for all those gems of information from an expert.

Graham Taylor

Hunter Farm Forestry Network

A few members of Landcare have planted small plots of native trees in their goal of participating in farm forestry and there are, I suspect, many others that have thought about it but progressed no further.

If you are in this category, then you maybe interested to know about the Hunter Farm Forestry Network (HFFN) that facilitates the exchange of information related to farm forestry and promotes the productive and sustainable use of trees on farms in the Hunter Valley region of New South Wales, Australia.

The HFFN organise regular field days for members on all aspects of farm forestry. Interested? Then why not browse their website www.hffn.org.au to learn more.

Graham Taylor



The poster for the Wollombi Valley Country Fair features a yellow banner at the top with the text 'Wollombi Valley' in a cursive font. Below the banner, 'Country Fair' is written in a larger, elegant script. The dates 'Saturday 3rd & Sunday 4th November' and the time 'from 10am throughout Wollombi village' are printed in a bold, sans-serif font. A red heading 'All weekend long come and enjoy:' is followed by a bulleted list of activities: wine tasting, food & local produce stalls, arts & crafts stalls, street & musical entertainment, kids animal farm, and NSW Corps of Marines historical re-enactments... and more. A yellow box contains the event schedule for Saturday and Sunday. Saturday activities include stalls opening at 10am, historical re-enactments, bush poetry, a sculpture opening at 5pm, a sausage sizzle at 6pm, live music at 6.30pm, a lantern parade at 7.30pm, a bonfire at 8.15pm, and a light show at 8.30pm. Sunday activities include stalls opening at 10am, a museum open day, an antique machinery display, and historical re-enactments. At the bottom, a 'Thanking our 2012 Sponsors and Partners' section lists: Sharpes Tractor Centre, Wollombi Real Estate, Noyce Brothers Wine, Wollombi Tennis Club, St Michaels Church, Sweetmans Timber, Wollombi Wool Store, Endeavour Museum, and St Johns Church. A small illustration of a tractor and a sheep is in the bottom right corner.

Wollombi Valley
Country Fair
Saturday 3rd & Sunday 4th November
from 10am throughout Wollombi village

All weekend long come and enjoy:

- wine tasting
- food & local produce stalls
- arts & crafts stalls
- street & musical entertainment
- kids animal farm
- NSW Corps of Marines historical re-enactments... and more.

SATURDAY

10am Stalls open in Negro St, Wollombi
Historical re-enactments throughout the day
Bush Poetry throughout the day

5pm Opening of Sculpture in the Vineyards in the Grays Inn gardens

6pm Sausage Sizzle in Negro St, Wollombi

6.30pm Live music at the Wollombi Cultural Centre

7.30pm Wollombi Valley Lantern Parade throughout the village

8.15pm Bonfire for burning of the lanterns

8.30pm Light show at St Michaels
Live entertainment at the Wollombi Tavern

SUNDAY

10am Stalls open in Negro St, Wollombi
Wollombi Endeavour Museum Open Day
Antique Machinery Display
Historical re-enactments throughout the day

Thanking our 2012 Sponsors and Partners

Sharpes Tractor Centre
Wollombi Real Estate
Noyce Brothers Wine
Wollombi Tennis Club
St Michaels Church

Sweetmans Timber
Wollombi Wool Store
Endeavour Museum
St Johns Church

WOLLOMBIA VALLEY Country Fair

Christmas meeting/party

Scary isn't it, the way Christmas comes around so quickly. I thought we would give you an early warning that this year we will be having our combined December meeting and Christmas party on Saturday 1st December when Brian and Barbara Barnes will be our hosts on their hill top eyrie overlooking Blaxland's Arm and much of the rest of the valley.

It is a week earlier than usual, so there is no excuse for missing any of the other celebrations and parties scheduled around the valley at this time of the year.

It will be an opportunity to see how Brian & Barbara's place has developed since our last visit in June 2008 and then watch the sunset over Mt Yengo while we enjoy a barbeque with a glass of wine in our hand.

Graham Taylor

Learn about sustainable and profitable farming in Wollombi

Do you want to improve farm production while protecting natural resources?

The Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (CMA) is inviting landholders to a three-day sustainable grazing course in Wollombi at the subsidised price of \$100 per property (normally \$1000 per property).



CMA Catchment Officer Geoff Geoff LeMessurier says 'The Pasture to Pocket course helps the farmer know with confidence when to graze and when to rest'.

Add in the other topics of property development, nutrition, reproduction and economics and the farmer is equipped to run a sustainable farm business to suit their circumstances.'

'The course provides information for graziers to calculate total stock feed requirements for their herd as well as total pasture feed availability for the months ahead, so grazing intensity can be matched to pasture growth to maximise productivity'.

'A detailed understanding of carrying capacity and pasture growth patterns can lead to increased productivity, faster pasture regeneration and increased ground cover.'

Pasture to Pocket includes a two-day workshop followed by a pasture assessment field day. The Wollombi course will be held from Tuesday 27 to Thursday 29 November.

To take part in the course contact the Hunter-Central Rivers CMA on 4930 1030 or hcr@cma.nsw.gov.au.

Wollombi Valley Landcare Group Contacts

Mail: Wollombi Valley Landcare Group, Inc. c/o Wollombi General Store, Wollombi 2325

Items for newsletter: Graham Taylor - 9981 6317/4998 3326 or

wollombi.landcare@gmail.com

Presentation by Prof Willgoose

The Wollombi Community Hall was packed on Saturday 25 August 2012 for a presentation by Professor Gary Willgoose from the University of Newcastle. The event was a joint initiative of the Wollombi Valley Progress Association and the Wollombi Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Professor Willgoose is an independent expert and academic currently advising the State government on the hydrology issues associated with coal seam gas exploration and extraction.

After first outlining his impressive qualifications and experience, Professor Willgoose outlined “who pays the bills” in relation to his work for the government at Broke/Bulga so as to demonstrate his independence from political and commercial interests. He then spoke for 70 minutes on water issues and CSG.

The presentation was objective, informative and clear.

Some take-away points:

1. The geological and physical aspects of each region are different and it is not possible simply to export techniques that may be safe and effective in one region to another e.g. Broke/Bulga to Wollombi.
2. The key hydrology issues are 2-fold
 - (i) Removing water from the coal seam so as to depressurise it and allow the gas to escape. This is not always problematic but depends on the region. In the Wollombi area the aquifer water is saline and not useable for farming.
 - (ii) Refilling of the empty aquifers by water from other aquifers – an exceptionally long process (thousands of years).
3. Much more scientific work is required before CSG exploration and mining can be allowed to continue at haste e.g. mapping the aquifer systems in NSW and Qld.
4. The gateway process introduced by the State government is too late in the mining process (gateway applies at the post-exploration, pre-production stage). This is because the exploration phase could include some production activities –for example if there is to be fracking in the production stage there will be fracking in the exploration phase.
5. Some of the impacts of gas mining in the US as portrayed in the film “Badlands” were only relevant to shale gas and not CSG. Done properly, fracking of a coal seam on a CSG mine could be reliable (creating 2 horizontal cracks only) – this was not the case with shale gas. As an aside Professor Willgoose noted there was reason to be concerned about unexplained fires in wells such as that in Queensland recently the topic of press reports.
6. Wells in the Broke/Bulga area were originally sunk by Sydney Gas and had been acquired by AGL. The exploration licences in the Wollombi area were all held by AGL. In Professor Willgoose’s view, AGL’s processes at Broke/Bulga were more than adequate and some were in fact state of the art. However he reiterated that it was not possible without more scientific work to simply apply those same processes to another region which would have a different geology e.g. slope of coal seam.

The presentation was followed by 30 minutes of questions and then lunch courtesy of Panino Restaurant. At 1pm some attendees participated in a “meet the candidate” session for the upcoming Cessnock Council election.

Louise Hicks

Coal Seam Gas Update – AGL wins in the Gloucester Basin

EDO NSW acted for the Barrington - Gloucester - Stroud Preservation Alliance Inc. ('the Alliance') in judicial review proceedings that challenged the planning approval granted to AGL's coal seam gas project for up to 110 coal seam gas wells in the Gloucester Basin. The Alliance argued that

1. The conditions imposed in relation to both groundwater and wastewater left open the possibility of a significantly different development from that for which approval was sought and was therefore, uncertain.
2. In making its decision, the PAC failed to properly consider principles of ecologically sustainable development ('ESD'), particularly the precautionary principle.

The case was heard in the Land and Environment Court ('LEC') on 18-20 October 2011, and judgment was handed down on 27 August 2012.

Regrettably the LEC dismissed the claim, stating that the conditions imposed in relation to the project were within the permissible limits of the law; were not uncertain with respect to impacts; and that the precautionary principle was adequately considered by the PAC in granting the project approval.

If you want to learn more about this case and updates on other cases being pursued by the EDO then go to their website www.edo.org.au

Graham Taylor

New soil carbon workshop date announced

We have previously advised members of this series of workshops being conducted by the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority (CMA). So with only one of the originally scheduled workshops in Muswellbrook on 24 October left, popular demand has prompted the CMA to run a second soil carbon workshop in Singleton.

So on Tuesday 23 October Department of Primary Industry's Neil Griffiths will be back in Singleton to talk about the agricultural benefits of increased soil carbon.

Last month cattle farmers, vignerons, hobby farmers, agriculture teachers and other local landholders attended workshops in Singleton and Cessnock.

Wollombi Landcare member, Shelagh Brigg, attended the Cessnock workshop, and said 'My soils are very poor, very acidic and very shallow with very little carbon in them and I came today to find out how I can improve the carbon content of the soil and improve the soils generally'. 'A lot of my questions have been answered and a lot of myths and misconceptions have been put to rest.'

Participants left the course with a clearer scientific understanding of soil carbon and information on how they can adjust their land management practices to reap the benefits of this essential element.

To attend the workshop please contact the CMA's Steve Clarkson on sclarkson@singleton.nsw.gov.au or 6578 7346.

If you are not sure about these courses then here are some further details:

With the new Federal carbon packages coming on line it's a great time to get up to speed with the environmental and financial benefits of increasing carbon on your property.

The CMA is inviting rural landholders to a one-day course introducing soil carbon, delivered by the NSW Department of Primary Industries.

Singleton
Muswellbrook

Tuesday 23 October
Wednesday 24 October

Bookings essential. To reserve your place contact the CMA on 4930 1030.

This workshop is suitable for land managers wanting to understand more about soil carbon and learn practical skills to increase the resilience of their farming system. It identifies practices that build soil carbon stocks on farms and methods to monitor increases in carbon. The workshop will cover the following topics.

- Agricultural soils as a sink, rather than source of atmospheric carbon.
- Production benefits of increasing carbon in soil.
- Why carbon isn't carbon; types of carbon in soil.
- Potential of soil to sequester carbon; is there a limit?
- Practices to increase carbon stocks on your farm.
- Trading soil carbon; understanding what is required

Participants are also asked to bring 0.5kg of their 'better' and 'poorer' soil to compare.

Funding for this program has been made available through the Australian Government's *Caring for our Country* initiative, the NSW Government's Catchment Action Program, and Hunter Catchment Contributions. This funding has allowed the CMA to offer this course to landholders **free of charge**.

Calling all Hunter Valley Landowners to an information workshop about the GER Hunter Valley Stepping Stones Project

The Great Eastern Ranges Initiative (GER) is connecting people and nature along the east coast of Australia stretching 3,600km from the Grampians in Victoria to far north Queensland. The Hunter Valley is a critical gap in the ranges. There are 4,350 isolated patches of bushland on private lands in the Hunter Valley. The Stepping Stones project seeks to reconnect these patches of bushland to the backbone of the Great Eastern Ranges by creating a series of "Stepping Stones" on private lands.

The GER are organising 3 workshops at Merriwa (Monday 15 Oct), Muswellbrook (Tuesday 16 Oct) and Maitland (Thursday 18 Oct).

What the Workshops will include:

- What is Stepping Stones and how can you be part of the Stepping Stones project.
- Use the Atlas of living Australia to find out what plants and animals are recorded around your place.
- Use the Atlas to do property planning, mapping and project planning to help you on your farm or property.
- What is the latest on the carbon farming initiative, planting trees to store carbon and carbon credits.

How to Register your Attendance:

Simply select the workshop in the location that is most convenient to you and complete the online registration process at www.gersteppingstones.org.au or you can RSVP to Denise Aitken by phone on 6655 2180 or by email daitken@ozgreen.org.au

The Stepping Stones Project in the Hunter Valley Great Eastern Ranges corridor is supported through funding from the Australian Government's Clean Energy Future Biodiversity Fund.