

# NESSI NEWSLETTER

Providing land management  
information to the community.



Spring 2008

EDITION 37

Welcome to Spring. Here we go again with another challenging season. There is a suite of new drought assistance information in the media both in the local print and available on the internet. The Dept of Primary Industries (DPI) website is a good starting point to look for drought information relating to Victoria. [www.dpi.vic.gov.au/drought](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/drought)

Don't forget we are coming into the storm season again with the chance of erratic weather over the next couple of months. Check out the State Emergency Service website on [www.ses.vic.gov.au/stormsmart](http://www.ses.vic.gov.au/stormsmart) and also the Bureau of Meteorology for up to date climate issues. <http://www.bom.gov.au/wat/index.shtml>

The Australian Plague Locust has been found in the NE region during the last few weeks. DPI has set up a Locust Incident Control Centre to respond to this locust threat in northern Victoria. We encourage all landholders to be vigilant in looking for locusts on your properties. The early identification and appropriate control will dramatically reduce the developing locust population. Locust information can be sourced from [www.dpi.vic.gov.au/locusts](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/locusts). All locust sightings should be reported immediately to the DPI Locust Reporting Hotline. Ph: 1300 135559.

Our DPI land management team this year has changed its extension and incentive program to reflect the new directions of the Australian Government "Caring for Our Country" funding initiative. In the North East CMA region, our team is now working across two asset priority areas centred on Warby / Killawarra / Greta and Chiltern / Mt Pilot. The focus in these two priority areas is on biodiversity enhancement but funding is also available for a range of land protection issues. The focus across the remainder of the NE catchments will be on farm planning and community education. DPI / DSE staff listed on the back page of this newsletter can talk with you about these initiatives.  
Peter Ockenden, DPI Wangaratta

## **Direct Seeding 2008**

This winter, DPI contracted Greening Australia (GA), to sow 27ha of native plant seed on 10 properties as part of our landholder incentives program. Most sites were within the Chiltern Biolink and Greta Valley Targeted Areas. These sites will improve our understanding of direct seeding as a

viable alternative and complement to tubestock planting within the North East.

In late July, 8 ha of seasonal drainage line running through a property at Greta was direct seeded. The site was sprayed with a knockdown herbicide and direct seeded by James Greenway from GA using a Hamilton direct seeder. A total of 10kg of seed was used. Local native species were sown including Silver Wattle, Golden Wattle, River Bottlebrush, Cassinia, River Red Gum and Yellow Box. Seed was supplied and pre-treated by the GA managed North East Seedbank.

Soil moisture is an important consideration in direct seeding, at the site soil moisture was good at the time of sowing. "Under the right conditions wattle seed will begin to germinate after 6 weeks. Eucalypt seed will germinate later as it needs warmer soil temperatures. River Red Gum for example, germinates best at about 28 degrees", says James Greenway. Particular species can continue to germinate up to 4 years later, (and longer), depending on seasonal conditions.

Traditionally direct seeding was developed for use in areas with lower, less predictable rainfall and hence greater difficulties associated with tubestock planting. Machine direct seeding of indigenous tree and shrub species can be a less labour intensive and more cost effective approach to enhancement planting and revegetation projects. Direct seeding requires good site preparation.

Broadleaf weed and grass competition can be a problem for germinating and establishing plants within their first year. Landholders may need to complete three sprays prior to planting. A summer spray, a second spray in April/May (depending on the autumn break), and a third just before sowing in winter. Sites also need to be regularly checked for damage from Red-Legged Earth-Mite and rabbits or hares in the weeks after sowing.

Discuss direct seeding with DPI staff as an option for your next revegetation project. Fingers crossed for good follow up rain soon at all sites!

Mary Anderson, DPI Wangaratta

Editor: Kylie Macreadie

## **Prisoners Plant for the Future**

Prison crews from the Beechworth Correctional Centre have planted over 15,000 trees and shrubs across the Chiltern-Mt Pilot area over the past two months. This is part of a relatively new Victorian Government initiative known as "*Landmate*", which is coordinated by both Corrections Victoria (Department of Justice) and Department of Sustainability & Environment.

*Landmate* crews are small groups of prisoners who undertake environmental related works on private and public land in the Beechworth and surrounding districts. The aim of the program is to provide prisoners with opportunities to learn new skills and develop and maintain a work ethic that will assist their re-integration into society on release. It is also an opportunity for prisoners to make a positive contribution to the local community.

The crews have put in a tremendous effort for the Chiltern-Mt Pilot project, but this is only a small part of all the great work these people are doing throughout the year. "Landmate crews take some of the pressure off those landholders that want to plant trees or fence out areas of native vegetation" said Kate Hill (Native Vegetation Officer - DSE, Wodonga). "A lot of environmental work would never get done without these crews – they are vital to the north-east".

"It's a great program. We now have two crews of eight prisoners working fulltime. It gets the prisoners out and about and doing practical work" said an onsite Industry Supervisor (Beechworth Correctional Centre).

The Chiltern-Mt Pilot project is about to open a range of new funding opportunities to help landholders better manage areas of their property for conservation. Landholders that are a part of these programs also have opportunities to use the Landmate crews for labour assistance.

If you are interested in hearing more about these opportunities or would like to register your expression of interest please contact Kate Hill, DSE Wodonga or Kylie Macreadie, DPI Wodonga.



## **Where are ...the Barkers?**

### **A short film (37 mins) produced by Wooragee Landcare Group**

Entertaining and educational, this short docudrama features the 'endangered' Barking Owls of North East Victoria. Filmed on location in the Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park and surrounding area, the film is based on the research of PhD student Natasha Schedvin and the owls she came to know and love.

It is intended to increase awareness and understanding of a little known or understood species and its habitat requirements in order to help secure its survival as a species. The film has been developed to appeal to a wide range of audiences.

In this film you will meet Betty, a Barking Owl, wildlife ecologist Dr Natasha Schedvin and local landholders and children of the Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park area near Beechworth and Chiltern as we discover more about the fascinating Barkers.

'Betty Barker' shares with you some of the significant events of her life's story – finding a mate, raising a family – the dangers that are always lurking in the bush. Betty and her partner Todd survive the disastrous wildfire of 2003 but Betty's life is changed forever.

DVDs are available free BY REQUEST from:  
Beechworth Information Centre: Ph 0357288066  
Chiltern Information Centre: Ph 0357261611  
Rutherglen Information Centre: Ph 1800622871  
Wangaratta Government Centre: Ph 0357238600  
Wodonga - DSE/DPI Office: Ph 0260437900  
CMA Offices: Ph 0260437600  
Yackandandah Visitor Information Centre: Ph 0260271988

A 4 page information sheet is also available to accompany the DVD.



## Landholder Environmental Incentives Applications

(Ovens, Kiewa and Upper Murray Catchments)

Applications are invited from individual landholders in North East Victoria for financial assistance for the implementation of works to protect land and water resources.

Assistance is available through a range of Commonwealth and State funded programs. Eligible works include protection and management of remnant vegetation (including fencing, grazing management, some pest control), planting and fencing of native trees, shrubs and groundlayer (minimum widths apply), land class fencing and soil conservation works.

In addition to the incentives mentioned above, landholders in the Chiltern / Mt Pilot and Warby / Killawarra / Greta areas may be eligible for a specific range of incentives to protect certain 'high value' natural assets.

Priority will be given to works which protect native vegetation and habitat for threatened wildlife, address salinity issues, improve water quality, control sediment runoff and improve both hill country management and soil conservation.

The simple application form is available from the DPI / DSE in Wodonga and Wangaratta. Applications will be assessed as they are received. Applications ideally need to be submitted by the **12<sup>th</sup> December 2008. However later applications will be accepted.** Successful application works will be announced in January 2009.

For further information about a specific program contact the relevant staff listed on the back page. For an application form contact DPI Wodonga, Ph: (02) 60437900 or DPI Wangaratta, Ph: (03) 57238600.

Kylie Macreadie, DPI Wodonga.

## To Guard or not to Guard.

Many landholders ask me if they should use tree guards when undertaking revegetation projects. So here is an overview of some guard options available along with the pro's and con's of guarding trees.

There are a wide range of tree guards available today, you can even personalise the guard using a custom printing service.

- The traditional guard: consists of three bamboo stakes and a plastic sleeve,
- The milk carton guard: consists of a 1 or 2 litre carton with two stakes. The milk carton guard is now also available with pre-cut stake.
- The mesh guard: made from plastic and requires two stakes. These are designed to use in areas with high wind or floods, while still providing protection from rabbits.
- The rigid guard: this triangular shaped guard clips together using tabs, only requires 1 stake and can be easily removed. They do not flap in the wind.

Stakes come in a variety of materials such as bamboo (green or natural), hardwood and wire frames. The cost of a complete tree guard varies greatly, with some options costing 50 cents and others \$2.50. Cost is also influenced by the volume that you purchase. If you only wish to purchase a small number of guards then combine with your neighbours or members of your local Landcare group to reduce costs.

### Pro's

- Protection from vermin.
- Protection from wind and frost.
- Can help to create a microclimate and retain moisture around the seedling.

### Con's

- The time required to install and maintain the guards.
- Guards with insufficient ventilation can cook the seedling.
- Guards can fall over and smother the seedling.
- Wind storms can blow the guards away.
- Remembering to remove them.
- The cost – it might be cheaper to replace the seedling.



A good management practice is to undertake weed control and vermin control prior to planting. If you do decide to use tree guards the most important thing you need to do is to **remember to remove the tree guards.**

Kylie Macreadie, DPI Wodonga.



## Managing Your Property in Challenging Times

Limited rainfall so far this year is going to present another challenging spring and summer for landholders in NE Victoria. Following are sources of information and a number of key points to consider that may be useful in managing your property.

One useful source of information is the DPI Information Notes which can be found by accessing the website: [www.dpi.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au) and then selecting the option "Information Notes Series" on the home page. Alternatively just type in the Information Note number (eg: LC0066) that you are looking for into the search facility. This website provides a large number of Information Notes on an extensive range of agricultural & environmental topics. You can also gain access to these Information Notes by contacting one of the DPI staff listed on the back page of this newsletter.

### **Now for some key points to consider;**

**Water supplies** – a fundamental consideration in the management of your property. Know the surface water characteristics of your property and also the likelihood of finding groundwater, its depth, yield and quality attributes. Be aware that evaporation losses from a dam will be at least one metre (1000mm) during the year in the NE Region. So to minimise evaporation it is a sound practise to have drought reserve water supplies in deeper dams. The DPI booklet titled *Managing Farm Water Supplies in Drought* is a very useful guide which includes information on stock water quality needs, daily volume requirements and calculating dam storages. This free publication is available from DPI Wangaratta and Wodonga. Also there are various Information Notes available on water themes including LC0066, LC0071, LC0073, LC0080 & LC0089.

**Water salinity testing** – this free test is available from DPI Wangaratta & Wodonga. If you are relying on surface water that is saline be aware that the water salinity status will increase during the summer months due to evaporative loss from the storage. So it may be useful to get a water salinity test completed. Information Notes on water salinity include LC0064 & LC0089.

**Groundcover** – consists of pasture species, weeds and organic litter. Maintaining adequate groundcover on your paddocks is critical to reduce soil loss from wind erosion and rainfall run-off events. The recommended minimum level of groundcover is 70%. A useful resource is the *Pasture Health Kit* published by Meat & Livestock Australia. This free publication is available from DPI Wangaratta.

**Drought feeding and management books on beef cattle and sheep** – these free DPI publications are invaluable references which cover all aspects of livestock management during drought. These books are available from DPI Wangaratta and Wodonga offices.

**Stock containment areas** - are used to assist with livestock management during drought and in times of emergency such as fire. Under these circumstances the confining of stock can protect paddocks from overgrazing by retaining sufficient groundcover and can make feeding, managing and monitoring of stock easier and more effective while reducing their energy requirements. Stock containment areas should be set up as permanent facilities on a carefully selected part of the property. Guidelines on establishing stock containment areas can be sourced from Ian Gamble, DPI Wangaratta while Information Notes (eg: LC0075, LC0077) are available on the DPI website.

**Native grass pastures** – offer the potential for significant environmental, biodiversity and animal production benefits in low input farming systems. These native pastures are now mainly limited to non arable land in NE Victoria. Appropriate management of these native grass species is imperative to achieve these potential outcomes. Information on the identification and management of these species is available by contacting DPI Wangaratta and Wodonga offices. Also Information Note AG0720 provides details on the common native grass species.

Ian Gamble, DPI Wangaratta

### **Booroolong Tree Frog - Did You Know?**

- The 'Booroolong' (*Litoria booroolongensis*) is critically endangered.
- Adult males grow 3-4cm and adult females 4-5cm.
- Their slightly warty skin may be grey, olive or brown and often have salmon coloured flecks.
- They live exclusively along permanent streams, especially those with rocky habitats.
- Past clearing and on-going streamside degradation is one of the reasons for its decline.
- They are found in Burrowye and Guys Forest Creeks NE Victoria.
- On the 7th of October, 500 Booroolong that were bred at the Amphibian Research Centre, were released in to NE streams to help increase the population.



For more information contact Glen Johnson DSE Wodonga 0260437924. Visit [www.frogs.org.au](http://www.frogs.org.au)  
Photos: Group - Glen Johnson, Booroolong Frog - D.Hunter.

## Five minutes with a Land for Wildlife Extension Officer

### **Q. What is your role as a Land for Wildlife Extension Officer?**

A. Landholders ring me when they are interested in registering their properties under the *Land for Wildlife* program. My role is to go out to their place and discuss any flora and fauna values on their property, as well as any other conservation management issues. At the same time, I assess whether they are eligible for Land for Wildlife status.

### **Q. What do landholders have to do to be eligible for *Land for Wildlife*?**

A. There are a huge range of properties that are eligible for *Land for Wildlife* status. The main criteria are that the landholder manages their property in a way which:

- 1, attempts to integrate nature conservation with other land management objectives. OR
- 2, clearly pursues the maintenance and enhancement of native flora and fauna.

So, this can vary from revegetating a small area with native species to managing 100 hectares of bushland. Or it can be as simple as retaining scattered trees and fallen logs in paddocks, protecting wetlands, or creating habitat friendly areas.

### **Q. Why do people register their property as Land for Wildlife?**

A. The main reason people register with Land for Wildlife is to get recognition for all the voluntary conservation works that they have done on their property – no matter how small or large. A lot of people say that “they just want the green sign to hang at their front gate”, but it’s more than that - them wanting that green sign is like a symbol to say we want to be acknowledged for our commitment to habitat protection and restoration.

### **Q. What does a Land for Wildlife membership provide?**

A. Memberships are purely voluntary (there are no legal binds or cost).

Some of the perks are:

- Practical advice for the management of flora and fauna habitat.
- Typical species that occur in your area and their ecological needs.
- The different types of vegetation communities in your local area .
- A brief farm plan highlighting habitat areas and actions to do in those habitat areas.
- Advice on the availability of grants, incentives and other assistance.
- A sign to acknowledge your efforts.
- A quarterly newsletter that gives you contact with other landholders interested in conservation and management information.



### **Q. What’s the best part about being a Land for Wildlife Officer?**

A. The best part about my role is seeing all the great work that people are doing on their properties to help conserve flora and fauna. I also love teaching people about the ecology of different species or ecosystems and developing a habitat plan for their farm. But the best part is handing over the green Land for Wildlife sign and thanking people for their contribution to biodiversity conservation – no matter how large or small.

### **Q. Who do people contact if they are interested in registering with Land for Wildlife?**

A. Please contact Kate Hill, DSE Wodonga.

## Woodland Birds Of The Chiltern - Mt Pilot Area With Ian Davidson

Sunday 30th November 2008  
9:00-11:30 am

Location: Sandersons Rd, Springhurst - Meet  
at Chiltern Pool Carpark at 8:30.

Enjoy a morning of bird watching and improve  
your skills at identifying local bird species.

Don't forget to bring your binoculars, walking  
boots and water.

For details about the location contact Kate Hill,  
DSE Wodonga.



Photo by Ian McCann



Photo by Toby Edmonds



Photo by Ian McCann



Photo by Ian McCann

## Feels Good, Smells Good, Must be a Healthy Soil!

The North East Soil Health Kit was launched at Towong on the 4<sup>th</sup> September. Landholders spent the morning out in the paddock with shovels and the kit, getting their hands dirty and literally smelling the soil to determine its health.

Healthy soils are vital in maintaining the productivity and sustainability of our farming systems. Monitoring key indicators such as soil pH, ground cover, earthworm numbers, structure stability and drainage can help us understand the health of our soils.

The North East Soil Health Kit contains a range of tests that allow landholders to assess the health of their soil using an easy to follow scorecard. Whilst the soil health kit does not replace conventional soil testing through accredited labs it does however provide landholders with a benchmark to compare the health of their soil on an annual basis across their property.



The soil health scorecard is very flexible and can be altered to suit your local area such as the one developed by landholders in the Upper Murray.

Soil Health Kits can be purchased from the Department of Primary Industries for \$66.00. For further information on the North East Soil Health Kit please contact Kristy Youman at DPI in Wodonga.



If undeliverable please return to  
Department of Primary Industries  
PO BOX 1084  
WANGARATTA VIC 3676

## To The Landholder

Published by the Victorian Government Department of Primary Industries, 2008. Also published on [www.dpi.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au)

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ISBN 1442-4258

DSE staff also provide assistance in the development and content of this newsletter. For more information contact:

**Peter Ockenden**, Team Leader - Land.....**Ph:**(03) 57238674

**Ian Gamble**, Salinity / Pastures .....**Ph:**(03) 57238671

**Kylie Macreadie**, Salinity / Revegetation ..**Ph:**(02) 60437922

**Philippa Noble**, Private Forestry Officer...**Ph:**(03) 57238686

**Craig Turton**, Soil Conservation/Health.....**Ph:**(03) 5723 8682

**Kristy Youman**, Soil Conservation/Health.....**Ph:**(02) 60437968

**Geoff Holloway**, Farm Planning.....**Ph:**(02) 60437927

**Mary Anderson**, Salinity /Revegetation... ..**Ph:**(03) 57238655

**Sarah Kelly** CORIS/LFW.....**Ph:**(03) 57238659

**Kate Hill** CORIS/LFW.....**Ph:**(02) 60437973

### **DPI/DSE Wangaratta Office**

62-68 Ovens Street

Wangaratta

**Phone:** (03)57238600

**Fax:** (03)57214423

### **DPI/DSE Wodonga Office**

1 McKoy Street

Wodonga

**Phone:** (02)60437900

**Fax:** (02)60437910

### **Customer Service Centre**

**Phone:** 136186

**web site** [www.dpi.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au)

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