

NESSI NEWSLETTER

Providing land management
information to the community.



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Introduction

In this edition we celebrate 10 years of publishing the NESSI newsletter, although for some 1000 landholders they will be included for the first time in the distribution. The North East Salinity Strategy Implementation (NESSI) newsletter was first printed in winter 1999, to raise landholders awareness of the increasing problem of dryland salinity. The first edition covered topics such as stream monitoring, pastures & salinity and groundwater investigation. People often ask why NESSI and not a native symbol? Well, apart from the acronym, NESSI was considered appropriate due to the similarities between salinity and the monster, both rise from the deep and are difficult to predict and locate. So the NESSI monster symbol has been used on every edition of the newsletter and many publications.

In recent years the newsletter has grown to include a wider audience and cover a greater range of topics. This led to a change of the NESSI acronym, to become the North East Sustainability and Science Information Newsletter. NESSI has not only been a newsletter, it is also a program that has involved environmental monitoring and on-ground works. Over the 10 years many of these activities have been promoted in the newsletter.

One project site that has been significant in the NESSI program is the Carlyle Water Reserve near Rutherglen. This site featured on the front page of the Winter 2002 edition, when the NESSI team was involved in planting some 12,000 trees at this site along with the Rutherglen Landcare Group, North East Catchment Management Authority, Scouts and GreenFleet. Today this site is a flourishing plantation showing signs of natural regeneration (photo's below).

If you have any questions about the newsletter or about land management in general don't hesitate to contact any of the staff on the back page.

Kylie Macreadie



Site Prior to planting June 2002



June 2009

Gully Erosion Control Case Study - Bethanga

Talgarno farmer Anthony Nicholl runs a 460ha beef property on the Talgarno Rd. Anthony bought the property in 1995 and has been actively working on addressing gully erosion since then.

In January this year Anthony applied for support through the North East Environmental Incentives to obtain technical and financial assistance to rehabilitate a gully which has been actively eroding since before Anthony bought the property (figure 1).

The catchment area feeding the gully is 14ha and the soil is highly dispersive. A dispersive soil is one which collapses and loses its strength when wet which makes it highly prone to erosion. The gully was very actively eroding along the walls and at the head which was 1.5m in depth. The floor was relatively stable.

There were three components to the plan to manage this gully. Construction of a rock chute at the head, fencing of the gully to exclude stock and revegetation of the banks to stabilise them.

The majority of gullies in the NE (around 80%) can be treated using fencing and revegetation alone, however where the gully has a deep and actively eroding head a rock structure (or rock chute) may be required. The nature of this gully head meant that the only option was to treat it with a rock chute.



Figure 1: Before rock chute

A rock chute is a carefully designed and constructed structure that protects a deep, actively eroding gully head from eroding further upstream. When constructing a rock chute it is important to ensure that appropriate design and planning is undertaken and that a reputable and experienced contractor is used to construct the works.

With assistance from Craig Turton, DPI Wangaratta, and a contractor to place the rock, a chute was constructed (figure 2).

The rock work was completed mid-May and Anthony is in the process of revegetating along the banks with local native plants. The plants will help to stabilise the banks and provide habitat for native animals. Grass seed and fertiliser will be spread on the disturbed ground to encourage grass growth to protect and stabilise any disturbed soil.

The last step will be fencing the gully out to exclude stock. Stock grazing and trampling in gullies increase the erosion potential by removing vegetation which binds and protects the soil. Excluding stock allows the soil to stabilise and grass to grow which binds and protects the soil against water erosion.

Funding for this project was provided through the North East Environmental Incentives, and supported by DPI, North East Catchment Management Authority and Talgarno Landcare Group .

Craig Turton, DPI Wangaratta, Ph: 035723 8682



Figure 2: After rock chute

Students get hands-on with Sustainability

Over 100 Grade 5/6 students from Eskdale/Mitta, Sacred Heart, St Michael's, Talgarno, Tallangatta, Upper Sandy Creek, and Walwa primary schools participated in the School Environment Day on the 21st May at Tallangatta Showgrounds.

Students were involved with hands-on activities with salinity, water catchments, recycling, food waste, water conservation, biodiversity, waterwatch, energy use, endangered animals, plant propagation and wetlands all focusing on North East Victoria.

"The concept of the day is to allow students and teachers to participate in real life learning about environmental issues in their own backyards" says Karen Jones SEED Project Manager. These days are organised by the School Environment Education Directory (SEED) project to assist north east teachers deliver sustainability into curriculum and classroom.

The activities are all related to curriculum and allow teachers access to local knowledge and environmental staff.

These events are generously supported by Department of Primary Industries, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Cleanaway, Local Government, North East Catchment Management Authority, North East Greenhouse Alliance, NevRwaste and North East Water. It is through their generous support that the events are provided free for all primary schools. School travel costs were also covered by NevRwaste.

For further information or to register your students for the next Student Environment Day in Myrtleford on 22nd October 2009 please contact Karen Jones SEED Project Manager on seed@nevrwaste.vic.gov.au or phone (03) 5722 9232.

Rutherglen community get together to fight serrated tussock.

Recently members of the Rutherglen Landcare Group got together to improve the treatment of serrated tussock on an infested roadside in the Rutherglen area. Walking 6 abreast they marked every serrated tussock plant along both sides of a two kilometre stretch of the Indigo Gooramadda Road with easy to spot, pink, iridescent flags. In many cases the plants were hard to find as they were small seedlings and often hidden under other vegetation.

Serrated tussock is classified as a Regionally Prohibited Weed in the North East. It is the landholder's responsibility to treat the plant where it occurs on private land. There are some small infestations in the Rutherglen Chiltern area mainly confined to roadsides; however there are a couple of places where it has invaded adjoining pasture paddocks.

Indigo Shire will be organising a contractor to treat all known roadside infestations, this work is funded through the DPI's Future Farms Initiative projects to eradicate regionally prohibited weeds. The community roadside survey will significantly assist with the elimination of this weed from the local area. Instead of the contractor spending most of the time looking for serrated tussock plants he will be able to go straight to the pink flags and spray plants making for a much more effective and cost efficient overall treatment.

According to Jenny Davidson, Chair of the Rutherglen Chiltern Serrated tussock Committee, the survey was a great success with more than 200 plants marked for treatment. Previous treatments of this roadside have often missed plants as they are often small seedlings and well hidden under other vegetation.

Members of the survey group enjoyed the morning activity and generally agreed that this type of survey could become an important part of eliminating serrated tussock from the Rutherglen Chiltern area and the North East.



Picture: Members of the Rutherglen Landcare Group flagging serrated tussock plants. (Photo: Jenny Davidson)

Greg Johnson Weed Alert Officer, DPI Wodonga, Ph 0260437900

Looking for Regent Honeyeaters and Swift Parrots



The Regent Honeyeater and Swift Parrot are both listed nationally as Endangered species and are found locally in areas of Box and Ironbark forests and

woodlands. Every year volunteers across the state participate in two national survey weekends to look for these iconic species, held on the third weekend in May and the first weekend in August. The information collected from these surveys is vital to provide an overview of the number and location of these threatened woodland birds across south-east Australia.

As part of the National Regent Honeyeater/Swift Parrot survey weekend in May this year, a group of volunteers spent a day in the Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park in north-east Victoria. A major focus of this survey was the continued monitoring of captive-bred Regent Honeyeaters which were released into the Park in May last year. The captive-bred birds, which were fitted with radio transmitters, were successfully monitored by a team of specially trained volunteers for 12 weeks after the release, with an amazing 70 percent of the birds still being observed after that time. With a group of 30 volunteers to undertake the surveys, we were able to cover much of the northern Chiltern section of the park and other key sites. Unfortunately no Regent Honeyeaters were observed during the May survey this year, but this is not overly concerning at this stage given the lack of eucalypt flowering in the forest at present.

Whilst the tally for Regent Honeyeaters and Swift Parrots was zero, the weather was fine and there were other birds to enjoy during the survey. Robins were a highlight, with Scarlet, Red-capped, Yellow, Flame and Hooded all making an appearance. As expected, with this being an 'off' year for Ironbark (a biennial flowering species) and the dry conditions, there is minimal flowering in the forest and a lack of honeyeaters in general - small numbers of Fuscous and Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters and a few others were seen. There were a number of species, including Friarbirds, Wattlebirds, Black-chinned, Brown-headed, White-naped, Fuscous and White-plumed Honeyeaters observed feeding in a patch of flowering Long-leaved Box which is one to look out for at present.

The next National Survey weekend for 2009 will occur on August 1-2 but we also want to keep a look out for Regent Honeyeaters and Swift Parrots at any time. Check for these birds in areas supporting local flowering Eucalypts (such as White Box and Mugga Ironbark), and planted species including Spotted Gum. Gardens with native flowering plants could also attract the birds.

If you would like further information about the surveys, you can contact Sarah Kelly at DSE Wangaratta on (03) 5723 8659. The Birds Australia freecall numbers to report sightings are 1800 665 766 (for Swift Parrot sightings) and 1800 621 056 (for Regent Honeyeater sightings) and further information can be found on Birds Australia's Woodland Bird Conservation (WBC) project website www.birdsaustralia.com.au/wbc. The WBC project is funded by the Australian Government's Caring for our Country program.

Photo: Dean Ingwersen

Replacement planting of trees

This last spring and summer were especially hot and dry but many of you have reported good success from trees planted last winter. Some sites have not done as well, including mine near Eldorado, where I have lost at least 70% of plants. It is worth while where you have major losses to consider replanting.

To begin with, the best idea is to do a full survey of your site(s) to see how many plants are alive and which species have done best. Plants need to be ordered from the nursery asap if you are planning on planting this winter. Plants should normally be ordered in November prior to planting in the following winter. Ordering this late, you may find that nurseries do not have the species you need, so it may be worth ordering now and planting next winter. Remember to chose local species from the North East

Timeline

Activity	Time of year	Comment
Assess tree losses	Over summer	Monitor over summer – guess overall losses so you can order earlier or wait and order for following winter.
Order plants	Over summer	For this winter or next.
Site preparation – Ripping	When soil is dry, summer through to autumn	This allows soil to shatter. Do not rip clay soils when wet.
Spraying	After first autumn/winter rain and again before planting	Talk to your local chemical retailer about what is best to use.
Rabbit/hare control	On-going	Talk to your local Landcare Group about control in your area.
Planting/guarding	When soil is damp, usually in winter	Planting earlier gives trees more time to establish before the hot weather. Tree guarding is a really good idea if rabbits or hares have been a problem at all.
On-going monitoring	All year	Get out and look at your new trees. Look for any damage and ensure to check fences.

Revegetation Guide for your area.

To replant your site, you will need to control weeds. In sites where plants have survived here and there this can be difficult. Spot spraying 1 metre wide circles is often your best bet. If there are larger sections with no plants, it may be easier to deep rip and re-spray planting lines again. Ripping will allow new plants to get their roots down and helps water permeate the soil layers. Good weed control is essential. Any rabbit and hare activity must be controlled or you are wasting your time and money. Also check your fences and make sure stock are not getting into your site.

If you have any questions about replacement tree planting, please contact Mary Anderson on (03) 5723 8655.

Bushfire Recovery Update

The 2006/07 Bushfire Recovery program is in its second year with fire affected rural landholders offered several incentives from the Victorian Government to assist with rehabilitation of their land.

The incentives included wild dog fencing, control of woody weeds, erosion control and de-siltation of stock and domestic dams, whole farm planning and personal needs advice. The majority of landholders have taken up the opportunity to be involved in the bushfire recovery program.

Mrs Nicki Calvene, located at Cheshunt South, is one of the landholders who put in an expression of interest for wild dog fencing and woody weeds incentives.

“Although the fires were over two years ago, farmers are still recovering from the aftermath,” Mrs Calvene said. “Fire recovery takes extra time, increased workload and stress”.

“DPI assisted us with advice and incentives; therefore we were able to develop an appropriate rehabilitation plan and a time-line for the control/eradication program for woody weeds and the construction of a 1.2km wild dog fence”.

“This has allowed me time to focus on other farm projects that I have left undeveloped for over 12 months”.

“Having a DPI Case Manager has been a positive experience as it allowed me to deal with just one person for advice, guidance and support,” Mrs Calvene said.

The North East CMA is managing the Federal Government’s Caring for our Country, Victorian Bushfire Recovery Package in the region for landholders effected by the 2009 bushfires.

The NE CMA is contacting landholders to discuss ways that the new funding can be utilised, including; controlling and containing new and emerging high risk environmental weed infestations; activities that support affected nationally threatened and endangered species; fencing of river reaches, riparian areas and wetlands to protect important remnant vegetation areas and water quality; and identifying and protecting exposed Indigenous sites.

For further information, please contact Peter Sacco at the NE CMA on (02) 60437600.

Story by Martin Revrenna, DPI Ovens.

Soils all the Buzz in the North East & Goulburn Broken

Almost 200 landholders and community members attended six Soils Alive workshops held across the North East and Goulburn Broken catchments.

Participants travelled from as far as Wagga and the suburbs of Melbourne to hear valuable information on how to improve soil organic matter, the amazing benefits of dung beetles and gain an insight into the fascinating world of soil biology.

The workshops provided participants with up to date scientific information on soil biology and the way of the future. Kristy Youman DPI Soils Health Project Officer said the days were a great success with a lot of positive feedback from participants. It was also a good example of DPI and Landcare groups working together.

Some of the key messages from the presenters were the importance of keeping soils covered/maintaining ground cover, grasses are most effective at increasing organic matter, that soil biology is a growing area with many questions to be answered and how we can look after dung beetle populations to better gain their benefits.

Janice Horsfield local landholder from Tallangatta Valley was highly complementary of the soils workshops, highlighting how good it was to get independent advice.

Some quotes from landholders :

"All speakers excellent with great knowledge presented in easy to understand manner"

" Very valuable to me by making me consider practices I use"

"I enjoyed all sessions. Afternoon was very interesting with a lot of new information and what is happening currently with soil biology"



Kristy Youman, Soil Health Project Officer, Ph 0260437900

If you are interested in learning more about soils, the Ovens Landcare Network is holding soil basics training, for more information contact the Ovens Landcare Co-ordinator Klaus Boelke on 0428444190.

Have you ever thought about developing a whole farm plan?

A whole farm planning course will be held in Beechworth in August 2009. The course will consist of three full days spread across the month.

The course will cover topics such as land classing, biodiversity, pastures, weeds, soils, salinity, erosion, water and much more. The information will be delivered by local Department of Primary Industries and Department of Sustainability staff and be relevant to landholders in North East Victoria.

For more information contact Mary Anderson Ph: 0357238655.



Are The Pobblebonk's Calling At Your Place?

Have you heard the call of the pobblebonk? This large frog's call is described as an explosive, musical note producing a resonant "bonk", repeated every few seconds. They are often found in large numbers at night, particularly after rain, calling from floating vegetation (occasionally from land at the water's edge).

The Pobblebonk (sometimes known as the Banjo Frog or Southern Bullfrog) is a burrowing frog, and are sometimes dug up in gardens and occasionally misidentified as a cane toad! The Pobblebonk is distinguished by a large gland on the thigh, and a raised pale stripe from behind the eye to the flanks.

Want to hear a Pobblebonk's call? Go to the Amphibian Research Centre website (www.frogs.org.au) and click on the Frogs of Australia section. It has descriptions, distributions, images, breeding calls, and more for every frog in Australia. This website is a great tool to help you identify the frogs you might be hearing.



Photo: Nick Clemann

Mary Titcumb, DSE Wodonga, Ph 0260437900

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Victorian Fauna Database (2005) Viridans

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