VICTORIAN
LANDCARE
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Autumn 10 Issue 48

SOIL AND SOIL CARBON FEATURE

Dairying in a changing climate

Farm audits reduce greenhouse emissions

North east projects link soil health and soil carbon

Victoria
The Place To Be

LANDCARE VICTORIA

Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management

Autumn 10 Issue 48

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Carrie Tiffany, PO Box 1135, Mitcham North 3132 Phone 0405 697 548
E-mail: carrie65@optusnet.com.au

Cover photograph
Ian Humphry collects a soil sample on the property he farms with his brother Lindsay at Springhurst, near Wangaratta. The Humphry brothers won Victoria's Landcare Primary Producer Award in 2008. They are part of a new soil carbon program being run in the north east. Photograph by Michael Bell.

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From the Minister

This year is already shaping up to be a busy one for Victorian Landcare, with a lot of great projects and initiatives continuing to shape the future of our land and biodiversity.

There is plenty of information on soil and soil carbon in this issue. Soil is an essential building block for agriculture and for the environment – healthy soil is critical for our social, economic and environmental sustainability. Increasing interest and concern about greenhouse gas emissions has led to a renewed focus on building up soil organic matter.

The story in this issue from Victoria's north east shows how one region is increasing the skill base of its landholders with soil health forums and workshops that have a focus on practical changes to make farms more economically viable and sustainable.

The interview with dairy farmers Stuart and Jacqui Tracy from South Gippsland highlights the complexities of managing a modern farm. With the added challenge of a changing climate, the Tracys approach every decision with research and knowledge; they reuse water, recycle nutrients, test their soil and use energy saving technology.

A parliamentary enquiry into soil carbon sequestration in Victoria is currently underway and a report is due later this year. The Environment and Natural Resources Committee has been exploring the possible environmental benefits of soil carbon, considering how measurement can be undertaken, identifying costs and harms and looking at links with other schemes and policies. Importantly it will explore options for the Victorian Government to support the benefits of soil sequestration.

Congratulations to Victorian farmers Alice and Kevin Knight who were recently awarded the McKell Medal for excellence and achievement in natural resource management. The award commemorates the contribution of former Premier of NSW and Governor-General of Australia Sir William McKell to soil and land conservation.

During the past 40 years, the brother and sister team have turned their Pittong farm into a showcase of conservation farming and have been doing some great work in tackling severe dryland salinity in their area.

Alice and Kevin were founding members of the Pittong-Hoyles Creek Landcare Group, with Kevin a driving force behind the success of the Woady Yaloak Catchment Project. I join with the Victorian Landcare community in congratulating both the Knights and the Tracys on their outstanding achievements.

Congratulations are also due to the many people who work tirelessly on Landcare projects throughout Victoria. Their efforts are a cornerstone of managing resource management for today and tomorrow.

Gavin Jennings, Minister for Environment and Climate Change MLC

Left, Kevin Knight on the farm at Pittong. Right, Alice Knight at a function for the Woady Yaloak Catchment Project.

Dairy farming in a changing climate

By Gillian Hayman

Jacqui and Stuart Tracy are adapting their farming practices to the changing climate.

Stuart and Jacqui Tracy are dairy farmers at Waratah Bay in South Gippsland. They milk 470 cows on their ocean-front property and are members of the Fish Creek Landcare Group.

Stuart Tracy believes that he and Jacqui are observing changes in the climate. They have noticed later autumn breaks – often a winter break, milder winters resulting in more grass growth and the growing season finishing earlier, often resulting in an early silage season.

According to Jacqui they have not had a wet winter since 1996.

"We now make silage in September, so there is no getting away in those school holidays anymore," Jacqui said.

Changes in the climate have brought changes to the Tracys' farming system. The extended dry season over the summer months and less runoff throughout the winter means water supply is tighter and needs to be managed carefully.

Effluent captured from the cow shed and feed pad is irrigated over half the milking area. Not only is water reused, but nutrients are recycled too. Annual soil testing allows Stuart and Jacqui to monitor nutrient levels on these areas. The reuse of nutrients has resulted in a reduced application of phosphorous and potassium fertilisers and in turn equates to financial savings.

A new cow shed completed in 2006 services the farm well. The Tracys are seeking energy savings in the shed and run their automatic wash system at temperatures of about 50 degrees celsius. Quantum (heat pump) hot water services were installed this year and Stuart and Jacqui are keeping an eye on new technologies to reduce energy and water use even further.

"We want to save energy, dollars and not have such a big impact on the environment," Jacqui said.

March calving

In 2002 the Tracys made the decision to change their calving pattern. Tired of calving cows in muddy, cold conditions during the winter and seeing significant pasture damage, calving was moved to March.

According to Stuart calving is now much easier with calves born on to dry paddocks.

"Our milk production is much more even. We used to have large peaks and troughs in milk production which would cost us money. Winter milk incentives are gained with this calving pattern and lactating cows can make the most of grass growth through the winter months," Stuart said.

With calving now in early March there are also some challenges. Hot days can cause some heat stress to the young calves in the shed; this is managed with shading of the calf rearing area. With later autumn breaks freshly lactating cows are not always able to move on to green pastures. A feed pad built in 2004 allows the feeding of oaten hay, bread, almond hulls and home-grown silage.

The other challenge that Stuart and Jacqui did not predict was mastitis. The often dusty conditions in March and the increased number of flies that come with drier summers have meant more cases of mastitis.

Pasture trials underway

Traditionally rye grass has been the predominant pasture species on the farm. Longer, drier summers have brought concern about pasture survival and Stuart has found that annual over-sowing of pastures is becoming expensive. With this in mind he is investigating alternative deep rooted species, more suited to the sandy loam soils and drier summer conditions. Stuart has begun trialling cocksfoot, fescues and prairie grasses and is working through palatability, grazing and management issues with these species.

The Tracys' focus on establishing shelter belts over many years is paying off as longer, hotter and drier summers are occurring. Stock are able to use the shade and shelter and it provides important habitat for many coastal bird species.

Managing a farming system is complex. With the added challenge of changing seasonal conditions, every decision made requires careful research and knowledge. The Tracys have obtained information from other farmers and advisors. They are managing their farm using the best management practices available and adapting to the changing climate that they are observing every day.

For further information contact Gillian Hayman, the Dairying for Tomorrow Co-ordinator for Gippsland, on 5683 2663 or visit the website at www.dairyingfortomorrow.com

Stuart and Jacqui Tracy's ocean-front dairy farm (the boundary marked in red) at Waratah Bay.

Soil carbon research in New Zealand is concentrating on improving grazing land management.

> *New proximal sensing methods are becoming available which speed up the process of soil carbon analysis in the field.*

New Zealand soil carbon news

Like Australia, New Zealand is currently exploring a system to encourage landowners to adopt land management practices that increase the carbon stored in agricultural lands.

About 75 percent of land farmed in New Zealand is devoted to pastoral farming. This means the system can concentrate on incentives for improving grazing land management. Many New Zealand farmers already have a well-developed understanding of soil science and are experienced in using soil tests. This knowledge base, along with established relationships with soil testing institutions, means New Zealand farmers are well placed to understand and comply with scheme requirements.

Soil carbon levels in New Zealand soils are typically higher than in Australian soils. This is because much of the land is high productivity pasture, under a temperate climate which was originally under forest. In addition the volcanic ash soils which occur in New Zealand are particularly good at stabilising soil organic matter.

Carolyn Hedley is a soil scientist with Landcare Research and co-ordinator for CarbonNet, a national program that connects New Zealand's carbon research community and provides knowledge and advice on soil carbon processes and inventories. According to Carolyn, New Zealand is discussing the possibility and practicalities of assessing soil carbon change due to agricultural management practices, although no definite decisions have been made at this stage.

"There are big challenges for measuring soil carbon accurately over time, to adequately include its spatial variability, for example, over the size of one farm. Traditional methods of soil sampling, including an estimate of the bulk density of the soil, are very time consuming and expensive," Carolyn said.

Carolyn referred to new methods that are becoming available to extrapolate point measurements across a landscape, using spatial autocorrelation geostatistics. An article by Hedley et al. in the *New Zealand Journal of Agricultural Research*, 2009, reports on the assessment of soil carbon sequestration under land recently converted from plantation forest to pastoral farming.

"In addition, new proximal sensing methods are becoming available which speed up the process of soil carbon analysis in the field. These proximal sensing methods are at the development stage – they allow more measurements, but at perhaps less precision than the traditional methods."

Carolyn also referred to an article by Kusumo et al. in the *Australian Journal of Soil Research,* 2009, which describes a proximal sensing method for field analysis of soil carbon.

New Zealand's Agricultural Greenhouse Gas Research Centre opened earlier this year. The centre will undertake research into methane, nitrous oxide and soil carbon, looking for methods to reduce methane and nitrous oxide emissions, and stabilise soil organic matter levels in agricultural soils.

CarbonNet is exploring how soil carbon is stored in soils, and how quickly this can change. Soil carbon researchers are also looking at the effects of changing land use, management and climate on soil organic matter levels; as well as developing improved methods to verify the amounts, and rates of change, of soil carbon in New Zealand soils.

For further information go to http://www.CarbonNet.co.nz/

The auditors worked with each farmer to calculate their total greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption and waste to landfill.

Bob Davie discusses strategies for reducing methane emissions in cattle with scientist Richard Eckard.

Farm audit the key to reduced greenhouse

Fifty farmers who participated in the Westernport Greenhouse Emissions Project have achieved more than just significant energy, water and waste reductions. They have also improved their farm productivity and developed auditing and monitoring skills that will prove invaluable when emissions trading is introduced.

The three-year project – a collaboration between the Bass Coast and Westernport Catchment Landcare Networks and the South Eastern Councils Climate Change Alliance challenged farmers to reduce their energy consumption and waste to landfill by 10 percent and improve water efficiency by 15 percent, while improving farm productivity.

The project was funded by Sustainability Victoria, included close co-operation with researchers at DPI and was linked to small amounts of funding for on-farm works. The environmental audit company GenesisNow audited each farm's resource use and developed an action plan – which included a business case – to deliver the project targets.

According to Moragh Mackay, co-ordinator of Bass Coast Landcare Network's Sustainable Agriculture Program, it was important that farmers had enough data in front of them to be able to apply their usual decision-making processes to each action.

"They needed to be able to consider each action as a business, as well as an environmental, investment," Moragh said.

On-farm environmental audit

Beginning with an on-farm visit, the auditors worked with each farmer to calculate their total greenhouse gas emissions, water consumption and waste to landfill. This involved reviewing energy, water, fuel and fertiliser invoices, income receipts, farm plans, and stock records. The audit also included a detailed review of the farm's animal and pasture management practices, as well as a discussion of the farmer's short, medium and long-term economic and environmental goals.

The auditors then identified around ten actions needed to achieve the reduction targets. A business case, specifying the expected capital cost, long-term financial savings, the return on investment, as well as the resource savings, was prepared for each action.

The suggested actions ranged from the cheap and easily implemented (for example, replacing mercury vapour lights with fluorescent globes) to more innovative capital works such as wind turbines and methane digesters. They also included changes to bring pasture and animal management practices into line with current best management practices for reducing methane production in ruminants, and nitrous oxide emissions from soils.

Although a final audit has not been completed, project organisers are confident

Moragh Mackay from Bass Coast Landcare Network talks carbon with Phillip Island beef farmer Bob Davie. Anne and Bob Davie hosted a field day on their property last year where they showed around 100 farmers how they have managed to reduce their carbon footprint.

> *If you know how you're using your resources, it's much easier to make changes to how much you use.*

emissions and productivity boost

By Jillian Staton

that overall targets for the project have been met and that most farmers have comfortably achieved their individual targets.

Peter Ronalds, the Sustainable Agriculture Project Officer at Westernport Catchment Landcare Network, attributes the success of the project to an increased awareness of how resources are used on-farm.

Understanding resource use

"If you know how you're using your resources, it's much easier to make changes to how much you use. For example, understanding how much water is lost each year to evaporation prompted many participants to use anti-evaporative, silicone-based agents in their dams.

"We haven't done strict trials as yet, but the anecdotal evidence is that farmers have saved a lot of water with very little cost or effort," Peter said.

Other water-saving strategies included building new dams in better catchments, recycling washdown water, and reticulating to troughs. Improved options for recycling silage wrap have enabled most farmers to easily meet their waste-to-landfill target.

Audits of dairy sheds revealed several opportunities for dairy farmers to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and save money on their power bills. These ranged from simply servicing all equipment to ensure that it is running efficiently, to innovations such as refrigeration heat exchange units (10-15 percent savings for a $4000 investment) and night sky cooling (20 percent savings for a $5000 investment).

Reductions in methane and nitrous oxide emissions have been more difficult to measure and were estimated using web-based calculators. The recommended reductions are based on the fact that methane represents a loss of energy and nitrous oxide represents the loss of a valuable nutrient from the farming system.

Build-up of practical knowledge

Both Peter Ronalds and Moragh Mackay are confident that farmers who have adopted the best management practices outlined in their action plans will have achieved their targeted reductions – as well as improved productivity.

"Obviously there are qualifiers, but current research indicates that farmers can achieve 20 percent less methane and 10 percent less nitrous oxide simply by implementing best practice farm management," Moragh said.

To reduce nitrous oxide waterlogged soils are excluded from grazing, nitrogenous fertilisers are only used when pasture is actively growing and feed pads with effluent collection are used to avoid dung and urine entering soils.

Methane-reducing actions include improving pasture quality (particularly in summer), breeding for high feed conversion and culling unproductive stock. Some farmers have also trialled dietary oils, tannins and other supplements and have recorded small gains over short periods.

As the project comes to a close participants are being encouraged to continue monitoring their emissions using the web-based calculators.

Moragh Mackay believes that the build-up of practical knowledge will have long-term value for farmers and researchers.

"The auditing, monitoring and evaluation skills that the project has developed will ensure that Landcare farmers can take advantage of the opportunities offered by an emissions trading scheme when we see it," she said.

Yea field day uncovers soil essentials

A field day held on Tom and Olivia Lawson's beef property at Yea last October featured renowned soil biologist Dr Christine Jones. Dr Jones is a groundcover and soils ecologist who works with landholders to implement regenerative land management techniques that enhance biodiversity, increase biological activity, sequester carbon, activate soil nutrient cycles, restore water balance, improve productivity and create new topsoil.

According to Dr Jones, the most meaningful indicator for the health of the land is whether soil is being formed or lost.

Tom and Olivia Lawson have applied biological farming practices for around eight years on their farm where they run Charolais, Red Angus and hybrid seed stock cattle. The Lawsons adhere to Dr Jones's principles which they believe are particularly beneficial to get them through long, dry spells.

"We have consciously reduced our chemical inputs while using natural based fertiliser each year. We have seen a noticeable reduction in animal health problems and increase in nutrient density and growth in our pastures.

"Our commitment to a best practice holistic approach has included fencing all waterways, large-scale revegetation and fencing off remnant areas. We also try to apply rotational grazing to pastures and prefer longer term productive perennials rather than short-term grasses while maximising ground cover at all times.

Dr Christine Jones describes every green plant as a solar powered carbon pump.

Consequently, our organic carbon content has increased by two percent across the farm," Olivia Lawson said.

Dr Jones explained to field day participants the irrelevance of arguing about optimum enterprise mix, pasture species, fertiliser rate, or the percentage of trees if productive soil continues to be lost.

"To improve the quality of the soil, it must always be covered with plants or plant litter and groundcover should be initially rested from grazing. Then, ideally, the groundcover should be grazed or slashed periodically. Cell grazing is good for producing green leaf and returning carbon to the soil," she said.

Dr Jones described every green plant as a solar powered carbon pump.

"Soil conditions must enable soil organisms to flourish. So producers must think carefully about the effects of any drenches, pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers used. A composty smell indicates high levels of biological activity, particularly fungi. The activities of beneficial soil microbes are important for the formation of soil aggregates which give it structure, while improving porosity and water-holding capacity.

"When new topsoil is forming, it will have better structure and will contain more air and more pore spaces than degraded soil, so the bulk density will be less.

"A one millimetre increase in the height of new soil would equate to the formation of around five to ten tonnes per hectare of organically enriched topsoil."

According to Dr Jones improving the level of soil carbon will hold the water where it falls.

"If water runs off rather than going into the soil it will take the nutrients with it. Plants need to grow to a certain size to develop a good root system, and then be grazed to pump carbon back. Keeping pasture short degrades the soil."

Dr Jones stressed that healthy root systems are essential for maintaining the soil food web of micro-organisms that make nutrients and minerals available to plants, and hence to stock.

For more information go to www.amazingcarbon.com and www.carboncoalition.com.au

Paringa Charolais bulls on Tom and Olivia Lawson's property at Yea. The Lawsons are working to increase organic carbon on the property.

Farmers discuss the results of the soil trials. Early results show that different types of fertilisers have a significant impact on soil biology.

Do different fertilisers affect soil health?

By Peter Ronalds

The Westernport Catchment Landcare Network is now into the third and final year of its healthy soils, stock and pasture project. The project is trialling more than 30 fertilisers on six farms in the Westernport catchment to measure the effects that different fertiliser treatments have on soil health and pasture nutrition and growth.

A range of fertilisers being trialled include chemical blends, chook manure, bulk compost, Charlie Carp, TNN blends, compost teas, rock phosphates, biochar, fish, seaweed and minerals, with each farm having a control to monitor against. Lime is also applied if required.

The fertilisers are all readily available to landholders in bulk, and were matched to the soil test taken in each paddock. All treatments have been costed on a dollars per hectare basis, which varied from $242 per hectare through to $420 per hectare (per year), with most being around $300 per hectare.

Four of the farms have test strips with between four and eight different fertiliser applications running the length of the paddock. These four trial sites are grazed by cattle and pasture samples are taken with pasture growth measured before the cattle enter the paddock.

Two of the farms have trial plots that are fenced so cattle can't access them. Six different fertiliser regimes are being trialled on these two farms along with a control. Each treatment has three replicate plots to increase the reliability and accuracy of the results. These plots are cut with a lawnmower when the pasture is at grazing height. The pasture is weighed and then a sample is taken for drying to determine the amount of dry matter grown.

Testing occurs each time the pasture is ready to graze. The pasture tests include dry matter per hectare grown, pasture nutrition, sugar levels, protein, energy in pasture, digestibility, mineral content and species present. The soil tests include temperature, soil acidity, salinity, chemical analysis, water holding capacity, compaction, and also counts for bacteria, fungi and Actinomycete.

Fertiliser trial results:

- Pasture growth – There are huge differences between treatments on each farm. The pasture growth difference between test strips on each farm varied from 27 percent to 102 percent.
- As a generalisation, chook poo is often one of the highest yielding applications, but over time the pasture species have changed with more weeds growing.
- Different types of fertilisers do impact on soil biology. Some fertilisers have 100 percent higher microbiology counts than others.
- Trends are suggesting that the highest yielding pasture growth plots also have the highest protein and digestibility levels.
- Trends are also suggesting there is a direct correlation between the levels of minerals in the fertilisers and the level of minerals in the pasture.

An update on the results gathered to date is now available. Final results for the project will be available in September.

To view the trial sites or for more information contact Peter Ronalds on 5941 8446 or email pronalds_cec@dcsi.net.au

Soil tests are carried out on one of the six farms in the Westernport catchment involved in the healthy soils, stock and pasture project.

Farming brothers Ian and Lindsay Humphry from Springhurst, near Wangaratta collect soil samples on their property as part of a new soil carbon program being run in the north east.

North east projects link soil

Les Brown from Mudgegonga participates in a soil carbon field day.

Landcare groups and farmers in north east Victoria are discovering how soil carbon can reverse degradation, build soil health and improve productivity.

Soil erosion, soil structure decline, organic matter loss and salinity are all significant soil health issues in the region. The north east also has some of the most acidic soils in the State.

A suite of innovative partnerships is helping to build community understanding about the links between soil health and soil carbon.

A soil health program led by the Ovens Landcare Network has been a major building block for interest in soil health in the region. Operating since 2004 the program has involved more than 300 landholders each year in annual forums, field days and trials.

Landholders share insights at soil health forums

The network's 2009 soil health forum included two main events, integrated with a series of field days.

Speakers at the major forum, *Creating a Sustainable Future – the Past's Future Soil and Carbon,* discussed holistic farming and grazing management while local landholder mentors shared insights gained through local trials.

Guest speakers at the *Rural Sustainability Forum* focused on adapting to climate change, alternative fuels and transport, and future water trends.

The soil health projects led by the Ovens Landcare Network have attracted NLP and Caring for our Country funding and have been supported by the North East CMA. The success of the Ovens Landcare Network projects has encouraged other Landcare groups and the North East CMA to develop additional soil health projects.

Dung beetle projects spread

The catchment-wide Do it with Dung – from the Mountains to the Murray project is one example. The foundations for this program were laid in 2005 when the Lucyvale Better Beef Group secured

Dung beetles ready for release in the north east.

> *By understanding how to increase soil carbon, farmers can increase the microbial activity of their soils, assisting the uptake of nutrients and reducing the need for nutrient inputs, like fertilisers.*

health with soil carbon

By Mary-Anne Scully

NLP funding to release a range of dung beetles. The project focused on improving phosphorus and nitrogen retention, soil productivity and water quality in the Upper Cudgewa Creek catchment in the Upper Murray.

The success of the Lucyvale Group's approach spread, particularly through the development and distribution of a dung beetle resource guide to interested landholders.

In response to growing community interest in soil health, the Kiewa Catchment Landcare Groups, Lucyvale Better Beef Group and Landcare facilitators from the North East CMA jointly sought funding for a catchment-wide project focused on dung beetles, soil health and water quality.

Their joint bid attracted funding through the Caring for our Country open grants process and Do it with Dung – from the Mountains to the Murray was born.

The project now spans the entire north east catchment plus Corowa Shire on the NSW border and features the establishment of fortnightly dung beetle community-based monitoring sites and the training of volunteers in beetle identification and monitoring. Dung beetle species are distributed and potentially suitable species are trialled. Field days are held on caring for beetles, soil health and parasite management.

The North East CMA has continued to support the rollout of Do it with Dung by running e-Farmer training for landholders to help with monitoring and assisting with the release of dung beetles.

Activities such as soil testing and specialised workshops are also helping to spread knowledge about soil health across the north east.

In a recent development, a team of local sustainable landscape officers are supporting and linking local farmers and Landcare groups with a clear focus on soil health.

Soil carbon initiative

Almost 200 farmers have registered interest in a new sustainable agriculture, soil carbon initiative led by the North East CMA and funded through Caring for our Country.

The new program aims to help landholders develop an understanding of current soil carbon levels and aid in the development of sustainable agricultural management.

The program offers plenty of practical support for participants. It includes free soil tests and agronomic advice (eligibility criteria apply), detailed on-farm soil tests, free mapping training and opportunities to learn about soil carbon through forums and field days.

Farmers who join the soil carbon program can obtain baseline data through highly detailed soil testing and advice, learn how to improve soil moisture and nutrient holding capacity; and map, monitor and control their soil health.

The North East CMA has leased a mechanical soil sampler to make sampling faster and simpler, particularly in the heat of summer.

North East CMA Land Stewardship Manager Chris Reid hopes farmers who take part in the program will also find new ways to lower their input costs.

"By understanding how to increase soil carbon, farmers can increase the microbial activity of their soils, assisting the uptake of nutrients and reducing the need for nutrient inputs, like fertilisers," Chris said.

For further information visit www.necma.vic.gov.au or contact Chris Reid at: chris.reid@necma.vic.gov.au

Volunteers – where to find them and how to keep them

By Grant Godden

Landcare is essentially a volunteer movement and the Landcare model is acknowledged as one of the best around. However, many groups have identified the need to increase the numbers of volunteers involved in Landcare and to reach out to new sectors of the community that haven't been involved before.

The Landcare and Community Engagement Unit of DSE has been running a series of Volunteer Action Training Workshops to help Landcare members and support staff encourage more volunteers and members, and to retain them once they've joined.

The training was delivered by Kerrie Spinks, a consultant who specialises in the community volunteering sector. The sessions got participants thinking about the types of members and volunteers they currently have, what made them participate and what would make people want to join in.

The training kicked off with an overview of the traits of different generations of volunteers and what appeals to them.

Landcarer Doug Small participates in a catchment art session with a primary school student in Kyabram.

> *Understanding what motivates people to volunteer is very important.*

It gave participants a good insight into how to connect with different generations, in particular Generation X and Generation Y.

The second session focused on the theories behind engaging volunteers and new members and how to retain them once they've come on board. The four R's of volunteering were introduced: recruitment, recognition, reward and renewal.

Participants workshopped ideas for projects eligible for DSE's Volunteer Action Training Small Grants. These grants are currently being distributed to groups and networks throughout the State to help run an event or project to increase volunteers and membership.

Peter Smart from the Cowwarr Landcare Group attended the Volunteer Action Training in Maffra. Peter describes the Cowwarr group as reasonably active, but says more members are always welcome.

"We've got about 15 active families and another 15 families who participate when they can. Most of our members are at least middle-aged and some are just not interested in meetings. They'll come along when there's something active like a planting day, but they are not interested in coming in from work and having to go out again for meetings."

Peter said the training showed how important it is for the group to have a website where people can get clear information on the different projects and activities that are up and running.

"The training showed that young people, especially, prefer to communicate online. And if we are trying to attract people from different backgrounds it is good to show them in photographs when advertising.

The Echuca Landcare Group involved parishioners from the Echuca Moama Uniting Church in a planting day at Echuca.

This way they'll feel more comfortable about attending," Peter said.

Rhonda Day attended the training in Bendigo. Rhonda is an Environmental Projects Officer with the Shire of Campaspe and finding ways of engaging volunteers is one of her constant challenges.

"We are always looking for new faces to get involved, share the load and help prevent our regular stalwarts from getting burnout."

Rhonda said the training was a mix of brainstorming with the other participants to create a pool of ideas and input the presenter, Kerrie Spinks, had picked up across the State.

"I came away with a couple of pages of notes about different techniques we could try," Rhonda said.

"Understanding what motivates people to volunteer is very important. We discussed the characteristics of different generations and the ways they communicate. Getting information out on Facebook, or by text messaging is more relevant to young people than newsletter articles."

For more information on the Volunteer Action project and to access notes from the training sessions go to http://www.landcarevic.net.au/vri/volunteer-action

The knowledge – volunteers

- The average age of a Landcare member or volunteer is 40 plus and older in some groups. In general fewer young people are entering the farming sector and they are not necessarily interested in Landcare.
- While traditional Landcare volunteers are always welcome, groups can also use people with other skills including project management, web design, communications, book-keeping/accounting, administration and human resources.
- Some people are looking for a flexible approach to volunteering. They are looking for events that suit their busy schedules.
- Some volunteers are looking for opportunities to contribute from home.
- Younger volunteers are looking for a social component to volunteering.
- Volunteering is increasingly being undertaken as a step towards future employment.

Farmers share knowledge on measuring emissions

DPI has formed a Carbon Toolkits in Agriculture Network to help farmers stay informed about greenhouse gas accounting tools and to share their on-farm carbon accounting experiences.

According to Sarah Holland-Clift, the project co-ordinator, the network is for anyone who wants to measure, or help landholders to measure on-farm greenhouse gas emissions. Network users can include farmers, farm consultants, farm accountants, Landcare co-ordinators, extension staff and training providers.

The network has a monthly update covering the latest developments in farm-related greenhouse gas accounting tools, upcoming events, training opportunities and resources. Training for farm service providers and farmers on how to use the latest tools is being planned and a series of workshops and forums will be held so information and experiences can be shared.

A series of case studies is also being developed to demonstrate positive, practical action that farmers are taking to measure and manage on-farm greenhouse gas emissions.

Sarah says many farmers are keen to measure their greenhouse gas emissions and there are a number of good reasons for doing so.

"The loss of greenhouse gas emissions on a farm represents a significant loss of energy from the farm system. By understanding their on-farm greenhouse emissions, farmers can start to take positive, practical action in responding to climate change. They can focus on the current win-win options, rather than the future what ifs."

To join the network and for further information contact Sarah Holland-Clift at DPI on 0427 331 627, by email at Sarah.Holland-Clift@dpi.vic.gov.au or go to the website at: www.dpi.vic.gov.au/climaterisk

FTLA news

The Farm Tree and Landcare Association (FTLA) will be holding a one-day forum incorporating the annual general meeting in May. The forum is the main way the association gets direction from its members, so all members are encouraged to attend.

National Framework for Landcare
A cross-section of Victorian Landcarers attended a forum in Melbourne last October to discuss the new National Framework for Landcare, the impacts of climate change, future funding options and the social aspects of Landcare.

Out of that forum the FTLA submitted a response to the new National Framework for Landcare emphasising the need for basic support for Landcare groups and co-ordinators. The response was in line with the model approved by the FTLA AGM. It stressed the need to return to the foundation values of Landcare: localism, group action, diversity, integrated sustainable land management, partnerships, education and longevity.

Business plan survey
To help the FTLA in refining the business plan presented at the 2009 AGM surveys have gone out to office bearers and members. We appreciate that Landcarers are busy, but collecting information is important to make sure the association is doing the best it can for members. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey. If you haven't received a survey and would like to participate contact Susi Johnson at the address below.

Committee of Management
The FTLA Committee of Management has regretfully accepted the resignations of Peter Huthwaite and Kate O'Bryan. We thank them for their service and wish them all the best in the future. The committee welcomes David Clark of the Upper Mt Emu Creek Landcare Network as an ordinary member.

The Committee of Management welcomes member input and assistance. Openings are available on the forum and AGM working party, the governance working party and the communications working party.

For further information contact Susi Johnson on 9207 5527 or by email at sjohnson@vff.org.au

EcoTender gets the job done in West Gippsland

Under DSE's EcoTender program, landholders are paid to manage their land and water resources in ways that provide environmental improvements. The improvements can include weed and pest control, fencing and protection of native vegetation, protection of gullies and wetlands and stock control.

Successful landholders enter into contractual agreements with DSE and receive periodic payments as they deliver the improvements.

Caroline Ottinger from DSE asked Korumburra landholder Andrew Buchanan about his experience with EcoTender. Andrew bought his 92-hectare property at Kongwak in 2004 and currently runs about 140 head of beef cattle.

How did you get involved in EcoTender?

"I heard about EcoTender through Landcare and thought it might be another way to get funding. Dave Bateman from the Bass Coast Landcare Network did the site assessments for the EcoTender. Basically it's financial support to do the projects you want to do, and provide a benefit to the environment. There's a pretty big financial cost to get them up and running and the financial offset is a great assistance."

What are the steps involved in submitting a bid?

"I did an expression of interest form, and then a field officer came out for a site assessment. Then you do the bid. If the bid is successful, DSE does a five-year management plan and contract for you. Michelle Butler from DSE was really helpful. The contracts were extremely well done with photographs and site maps. The wording was very clear and concise."

Was the bid process difficult?

"I took part in the Port Phillip and Westernport EcoTender in 2009. The bid process was very straightforward. I had no trouble with it, although it is time consuming. The aim of the bid process is to get the best bang for your buck. People need to put in the best bid for value for money, so we get the most trees in the ground."

What have you been doing with your EcoTender funding?

"I entered five bids that were successful under EcoTender. Planting was done last winter to give trees the chance to establish over summer. We're planning now for the other sites. Our property is in the hills so I'm organising access. People need to carefully consider their plans – the site they use needs to be freely accessible."

What's your advice for landholders thinking of applying for EcoTender?

"You should definitely do it. It's a very good project. It gives you fantastic flexibility to work with the funding provided to achieve your own environmental goals.

"There is also the flexibility to alter the timing of the contract payments and work within your constraints. The initial costs of purchasing the trees, fencing, assembly and planting are big, and I was able to tailor the payment timing to meet these costs."

The current West Gippsland EcoTender covers the West Gippsland CMA area, from Warragul to Sale and from the Great Dividing Range to Wilsons Promontory.

To register an expression of interest call the DSE Customer Service Centre on 136 186, or email customer.service@dse.vic.gov.au

More information on EcoTender is available at: www.dse.vic.gov.au/ecoMarkets

Andrew Buchanan has had success using EcoTender to help fund revegetation works on his property at Kongwak.

From left, Gavin Brock from Melbourne Water, Tony Gardner from the South Gippsland Landcare Network, Glenn Raven from South Gippsland Railways and Ron Barnacle from the Loch Nyora Landcare Group at the launch of the Hilda Falls regeneration project.

> *Controlling weeds to protect agricultural land and managing native vegetation are very important to the Landcare groups in the network.*

Next stop Hilda Falls

by Tony Gardner

Five years of work by the Loch Nyora Landcare Group and adjoining landholders is paying off for the beautiful Hilda Falls on the South Gippsland railway line near Loch. The falls were a tangle of blackberry and hawthorn before the Hilda Falls regeneration project got underway.

The project has benefited from a partnership between the South Gippsland Landcare Network (SGLN) and the tourist railway. Two years ago the SGLN started discussions with the railway about weed concerns along the track. The project has now grown to include the regeneration of Hilda Falls and has brought the railway enthusiasts into the world of Landcare.

The tourist railway has signed a three-year weed management agreement to contain weeds along the track and they are also planning to build a small platform at Hilda Falls. This will allow passengers to disembark and enjoy the surroundings while the train moves on to Nyora and returns to pick them up.

The tourist railway recently received funding through DSE's EcoTender program for weed works from Nyora to Ferriers Road and through the Foundation for Regional Rural Renewal for weed mapping.

The partnership with the railway is very important to the SGLN. The railway and the Great Southern Rail Trail cover more than 6000 hectares and over 100 kilometres of line, right through the middle of the network. More than 500 rural landholders share a border with the line which is an important wildlife corridor and biolink containing creeks, river crossings and important vegetation, including at Hilda Falls.

Controlling weeds to protect agricultural land and managing native vegetation are very important to the Landcare groups in the network. The groups see the line as a significant piece of tourism and history for the region and want to see it looked after.

The SGLN will continue to help the railway to develop their management plan and undertake improvements at Hilda Falls and along the railway line.

A platform will be built at Hilda Falls so railway passengers can disembark and enjoy the area.

Starting up a Landcare network

By Ross Colliver

Victoria's Landcare networks have grown from the local level up. From the mid 1990s Landcare groups started to band together into networks to be more effective at administering government-funded projects and providing technical support to landholders wanting to improve their land management practices.

The Landcare and Community Engagement Unit of DSE has developed the Landcare Network Readiness Project to support Landcare networks to become more effective and influential in landscape change. In 2009, the project ran a series of forums across Victoria, facilitated a Network Development Group with staff and community management from five networks and researched Landcare Network planning.

The forum held in Castlemaine in April 2009 brought together Landcare groups thinking about becoming a network, or who had recently formed a network, to sit down and talk with more experienced networks. Of the 43 participants at the forum 15 were from local groups just starting to talk about being a network, 14 were from networks beginning to formalise arrangements and 14 were from established networks.

The forum presented experiences on the motivations and pathways for forming networks, the management structures that could be used and the ways to strike a balance between network management and local group ownership. There were presentations from the established networks, discussion about the issues they raised and some reflection from participants.

This is a summary of themes from the Castlemaine forum.

Every Landcare network is a one-off. Every network will have a different focus and a different management structure. Personalities and community politics are often part of the picture. Every CMA relates to Landcare differently. You have to negotiate your way to a workable arrangement and keep asking – is this working for us?

A landscape scale planning session for the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges Landcare Network – an opportunity to see the big picture.

Working as a network brings in expertise and increases influence. Funders are heading towards bigger projects. A network structure lets you build up expertise to bid for and run such projects. A network can also handle a lot of administrative work and take this load off volunteers in local groups.

Local groups have to own the network. Long-term vitality depends on local groups wanting the network and enough community leaders wanting to step up and do the work of managing a network.

Local groups have to feel their connection to other local groups. Local groups often start out thinking they don't have much in common. They need to get acquainted, to visit each other and see what is happening in other groups. It is essential to put time into building up this feeling of shared responsibility for the landscape, even though each local group will keep doing their own thing.

The network needs a vision. Groups have to decide what they want out of a network. They need to create a vision of Landcare operating at network level, with collective resources and a potential advocacy role. Part of this might be a vision for the landscape itself – what are they working towards in 20 or 50 years time?

The network serves its local groups and landholders. The network has to make a difference that will matter at the local level. A network needs to regularly ask local groups and landholders what they want to do and put this at the centre of its plans and activity.

The community manages the network. Members of the network management committee must be clear that their role is to manage the network, not to push the interests of their individual local groups.

The more heads the better. Members of the Jacksons Creek EcoNetwork plan their future projects.

> *A network needs to regularly ask local groups and landholders what they want to do and put this at the centre of its plans and activity.*

Network work is often back office work. Networks make proposals, report, plan and negotiate with government programs. Don't expect an easy life. Avoid duplication by shifting shared administrative functions from the local group level to the network.

Local groups need their own autonomy. Networks need to watch that they don't take over. They need to deliberately support independent action by local groups, get a local flavour into newsletters and have local groups planning for their own area.

Be clear about the roles of the network and local groups. Every network will work out its own mix of what the network does and what local groups do. Negotiate an arrangement that works in your area.

Keep the social connections strong. A network is a social connection as much as a shared physical landscape. Networks need to create occasions where people can meet each other and develop bonds. Social events and holding network meetings in different parts of the area help to keep the social connections strong.

Keep the reporting transparent. It's not just about reporting up to funders and down to members. Find out what members want to know.

Plan ahead. Don't just react to funding criteria. Ask local groups and landholders what they want to do over the next five years, put that in your plans, and then see what funding is available.

If you want new members, talk to them. The network management committee and any staff may be better placed to drum up new business than local groups.

Local groups and networks have a life cycle. Groups go through periods of activity and inactivity – don't fight against it. Let groups fold if that's what they want; let the network change.

Manage your staff. Set up clear cut employment conditions and look after your staff as much as possible. Make them feel connected to the network and encourage them to contribute their views.

Long-term staff makes life easier. They get to know you, you get to know them, the trust develops, and you all get more done with less effort. Weathering funding rounds makes this difficult, but it is worth working towards.

Aligning with CMA goals and projects is valuable, but not what defines a network. CMAs can be valuable partners and partnerships with CMAs can minimise the risk of networks being seen as competitors for funding. Negotiate with CMAs and understand their planning systems.

Look wider than government NRM funding. Networks can get involved in corporate funding, philanthropic funding, industry funding and markets for ecosystem services. Look outside the box.

Talk regularly to other networks in your region. Get together with other networks and set your own agenda for Landcare in the region. Take your agenda to the CMA – don't wait for them to come to you.

All of the groups at the forum who were thinking of becoming networks identified the tasks they needed to do next. These included bringing local groups together to sit down with maps and develop a vision for the landscape; planning social activities so group members can get to know each other, pursuing funding and starting to develop a network strategy.

The Landcare Network Readiness Project also ran forums on setting up and managing big projects and on new roles for Landcare. A report on the forums is being produced and will be available on the Landcare Gateway.

For further information contact the forum facilitator, Ross Colliver, on 0411 226 519 or by email: colliver@ttdg.com.au. Or contact your Regional Landcare Co-ordinator.

Soil information now online

The Victorian Resources Online (VRO) website now has a comprehensive soil health section. The development of the soil health section recognises a growing interest in soil and its critical role in agricultural sustainability and ecosystem services.

The new section contains material on soil health, including information notes and field manuals. Animations and videos describing soil processes are currently being developed and will be included.

Much of the information comes from a four-year healthy soils project which organised soil management workshops and ran soil-pit-based field days in grain growing regions across Victoria.

More than 5600 attendees at these events received information around topics of interest such as soil biology, soil organic matter management, soil chemical testing, soil type and soil structure evaluation and subsoil constraints.

VRO also includes soil and landform mapping for Victoria, downloadable reports and maps. Soil pit site information is available describing major Victorian soils and their key morphological, chemical and physical properties. Some of this information was collected as part of an NLP funded project that supported the running of soil pit field days with Landcare groups in the 1990s.

The soil health section can be found at: http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/vro/soilhealth

New soil health information now available on the VRO website was collected for a series of workshops and field days like this soil pit training exercise held at Dunkeld.

Students from the School for Student Leadership are participating in a series of sustainability lessons thanks to assistance from the Heytesbury District Landcare Network's craters to coast alliance.

Heytesbury network encourages the whole community

By Yonie Tiljak

Four local community groups and two schools have been given a funding incentive in the Heytesbury and District Landcare Network's (HDLN) craters to coast programs. The funding is through the craters to coast alliance which is facilitated by the HDLN to help local school and community groups run important projects.

The Simpson Primary School plans to start a garden club that will run each week and be tied into the curriculum. This will allow students to take part in hands on activities as part of their curriculum, developing valuable practical skills as well as leadership and environmental ownership amongst the students.

According to teacher Ryan Jones, an excursion is planned to see an edible garden at another school.

"We wish to start from the little that we have and develop a garden where students can grow their own food, from seed to stomach. This funding should help us develop it into a sustained program that runs each year," Ryan said.

The School for Student Leadership is using the funding in the curriculum at the Gnurad Gundidj campus.

Peter Torey, the School for Student Leadership's curriculum co-ordinator, said environmental sustainability lessons are planned.

"We want to provide students with a practical means to improve the sustainability of their actions, here and now and the learning from this can be transferred back to their home communities," Peter said.

Other projects under the craters to coast alliance include installation of interpretive signs in local parkland and bushland restoration. The alliance seeks to support local environmentally focused community groups with projects that benefit not only the local environment, but the community as a whole.

For more information contact Yonie Tiljak at the Heytesbury District Landcare Network by email: admin@heytesburylandcare.org.au

Burn benefits biodiversity at Bald Hill

By Brad Henderson

Wannon Water is the regional urban water corporation for south west Victoria, covering about 10 percent of the State. In 2009 Wannon Water released a Biodiversity and Land Management Strategy. The focus of the strategy is on establishing biodiversity hotspots that perform multiple functions and produce multiple values.

Wannon Water has a revegetation target of 25 hectares by 2013. Rather than leaving it at planting trees, Wannon Water is also maximising the benefits to the region by securing long-term sustainability through land covenants and ongoing management plans. Enhancing natural assets already in good condition is also a focus.

One example is the Portland heathland management project. Wannon Water has major water and reclaimed water treatment plants located on a 20-hectare site at Bald Hill, south of Portland. The land is part of an extensive heathland complex which stretches around the coast of Portland and is managed by various private and public landowners. The area has recreation and conservation values and is of interest to both the local and wider communities.

The heath has deteriorated significantly over recent decades. Shrubby weeds and coast wattle are invading and replacing heath; habitat is being turned into non-habitat. The advanced age in the remaining heath due to lack of fire is also of concern. To turn this situation around Wannon Water has developed a management plan to protect and restore heath vegetation and dependent fauna. The plan is being implemented in co-operation with neighbouring landowners.

In May 2008 Wannon Water, in association with the local CFA, undertook an ecological burn of around seven hectares of the heathland. Pre-burn flora and fauna assessments were carried out to ensure the correct extent and best possible timing of the burn. Several key species of interest, such as Sand Ixodia, a native daisy listed as vulnerable, and the Southern Brown Bandicoot, were not recorded during these assessments.

The ecological burn was conducted on a mild, still autumn day, and was successful in terms of the heat of the fire and completeness of the burn. Flora and fauna monitoring of the area started during the spring. Bonseed initially regenerated in large numbers, but after two seasons of targeted spraying it has been brought under control.

More pleasing was the abundant return of heath species such as Sand Ixodia. Through the use of motion sensing cameras a number of bandicoots have also been recorded foraging for food in the areas that were burned.

Monitoring and evaluating the use of fire as a management tool for heathlands continues at the site. Additional areas are scheduled for ecological burns and the monitoring program will be expanded to determine the effect on other sensitive species, such as orchids.

For further information contact Brad Henderson on 1300 926 666.

The degraded heathland site in 2007.

The site in January 2010, two years after the ecological burn. The white flower is the vulnerable Sand Ixodia.

Mistletoe and tree stress

By Ray Thomas

Mistletoe plants are native parasites that live by attaching their roots deep into the bark of a tree, and extracting nutrients from the host rather than the ground. There are dozens of different species across Australia, many of them carefully adapted to living in a particular environment. For example, they often cleverly camouflage with the host tree to escape leaf-eating predators.

A typical case of severe mistletoe infestation in scattered paddock trees. Note the complete lack of understorey shrubs that are needed to attract the butterflies, possums and birds that keep mistletoe in balance.

Mistletoe vine site six years later. Note the healthy trees and well-developed understorey.

Mistletoe are often seen as pest plants, but they're not all bad. In fact they play a valuable role in healthy ecosystems, providing nectar from their flowers, delicious fruits that many birds need and dense branches for birds to nest in.

Mistletoes are spread almost exclusively by tiny mistletoe birds, which eat the fruits and then excrete the sticky seeds onto tree branches where the seeds can germinate and take root into the bark.

Loss of natural processes

Mistletoes are normally kept in balance by several natural processes, but once the understorey is gone, this balance is disturbed and mistletoe becomes a problem. For example, the larvae of several butterfly species need mistletoe leaves as their sole food supply and whole mistletoe plants can be completely defoliated by a colony of these caterpillars.

In the typical rural landscape understorey shrubs and wildflowers have largely disappeared and along with them the nectar source and protective cover for adult butterflies. Without butterflies there are no eggs and no caterpillars, so the mistletoe spreads.

Common brush-tailed and ring-tailed possums actually prefer mistletoe leaves to eucalyptus leaves. But lack of tree hollows and the isolation of paddock trees make it impossible for possums to do their control work.

In a healthy forest setting there are also a large number of birds that eat mistletoe fruits and drop the seeds randomly on the forest floor where they can't grow. The lack of protective understorey shrubs in open farmland means most of these birds are no longer present. The hardy little mistletoe bird is without competition and is able to spread the seeds precisely, placing their droppings only on the tree branches where the seeds will grow. Once again the mistletoe is advantaged.

Mistletoe plants also do better on forest edges where there is more light available. In the typical rural situation, where trees are isolated, all the trees are on the forest edge. Once mistletoe has taken over a large proportion of a tree crown it out-competes its host for nutrients and water. For trees that are already suffering other stresses, mistletoe is often the straw that breaks the camel's back.

Treating mistletoe

In severe cases of mistletoe infestation, manual removal will almost certainly be needed or the tree could die before the natural controls can take effect. Both short-term and long-term strategies are needed.

Pruning mistletoe allows the tree to feed itself, and the regrowth is phenomenal. But reinfestation can easily occur if the root causes of stress, isolation and lack of understorey are not addressed.

The best approach is to fence off the patch of trees to exclude stock and encourage natural regeneration, then replant the missing indigenous shrubs to attract the butterflies and birds. If the trees are too young to have natural hollows, nest boxes can be placed to provide homes for possums.

Mobile Landcarers tackle mistletoe

By Doug Parke

The Victorian Mobile Landcare Group (VMLCG) has members from all walks of life who share a common interest in environmental rehabilitation and four wheel drive touring. The group was formed in 2009 from members of four wheel drive special interest groups who have been active in Landcare and conservation projects. The group has about 35 members and is actively seeking new members. Four wheel drive ownership is not mandatory.

In May last year a small group of VMLCG members travelled to Benalla to help the Regent Honeyeater Project with saving remnant Mugga Ironbark trees from serious mistletoe infestation. These trees provide crucial habitat for many threatened species including the Regent Honeyeater, Grey-crowned Babbler, Squirrel Glider and Brush-tailed Phascogale. Local landholders have been seriously concerned about the mistletoe as remnant trees are the backbone of future landscape values and sustainable farming.

The recent trip involved the use of a trailer-mounted 15-metre cherry picker, generously donated for the weekend by Boom Sherrin. Pole hand saws were used to clear mistletoe lower down the tree, leaving the cherry picker for the otherwise inaccessible higher canopy work.

Volunteers selectively remove mistletoe using hand pruning saws on long poles.

The trailer-mounted cherry picker proved invaluable for getting into the higher canopy.

Saturday night saw a communal pub meal in Benalla. Most of the team returned to commitments in Melbourne on Sunday morning, but three stalwarts stayed on until the job was finished.

Judicious pruning of mistletoe from the severely stressed trees, in conjunction with replanting the understorey, has been highly successful. Monitoring shows vigorous regrowth of the pruned trees and an increase of eucalypts flowering. We expect improved nectar flows for Regent Honeyeaters together with extra seed production to promote natural regeneration.

To join the VMLCG or for help with logistics and remote area access on your Landcare projects visit the website at: www.victorianmobilelandcaregroup.onefireplace.com or phone Doug Parke on 0412 300 251.

Around the State – News from the

Port Phillip and Westernport
Bass Coast Landcare Network hosted the successful 2009 Victorian Landcare Network forum at Phillip Island last October.

Second Generation Landcare Grants have been awarded in the region with 36 groups receiving a $300 group support grant, 27 groups a $500 promotional grant and 21 groups a project grant between $515 and $20,000.

Localised maps and notes have been prepared to help local groups and networks understand which targets are relevant to them in the Caring for our Country 2010-2011 investment round.

For further information contact Doug Evans on 9296 4662.

Corangamite
Landcare has faced some challenges in recent months with uncertain funding for on-ground projects and co-ordinator support, but even in tough times the enthusiasm, passion and dedication to Landcare in our community continues.

The Bellarine Coastal Forum was a huge success with 150 people attending the two-day event. Five field trips were run and 24 presenters discussed Swan Bay, the coastal saltmarsh, sea grass and coastal Moonah woodlands, the Connewarre catchment, wader and shore bird monitoring, the Marine Biology Centre and the work of Southern Bay volunteers.

Landcare networks and groups continue to encourage communities, support volunteers and recruit new members

Monitoring local wader and shore birds at Lake Victoria during the Bellarine Coastal Forum.

with recent workshops on farming in a changing climate, understanding soil biology, profitable and practical perennials and dung beetles. Landcare has been represented at many community festivals including Birregurra, Heytesbury, Winchelsea and the Sustainable Living Festival in Melbourne.

For further information contact Tracey McRae on 5232 9100.

West Gippsland
Landcare has secured approximately $1.78 million of funding across the region for natural resource management activity. This does not include the in-kind and financial contributions of individual Landcarers.

The Yarram Yarram Landcare Network has controlled roadside weeds on 40 roads covering more than 300 kilometres of roadsides within the network's boundaries.

The Lake Wellington Landcare Network assisted with a Rotary Bushfire Recovery Day that involved over 500 people. The Maffra and District Landcare Network launched their new community display trailer with assistance from DSE's Volunteer Recruitment Initiative.

Bass Coast Landcare Network's land stewardship project had 29 successful submissions with 52 project bids. The South Gippsland Landcare Network was one of 11 new organisations entered on the Register of Environmental Organisations and now has tax deductible gift recipient status.

For further information contact Phillip McGarry on 1300 094 262.

Wimmera
Project Platypus hosted a Linking Wimmera Landscape Landcare Forum in February. This was a follow-up to the Changing Landcare Landscapes Forum held in October 2009.

The Project Platypus team presented information to other groups and Landcare representatives on organisational structure, managing activities and projects and reporting and the use of GIS. The day included a bus tour to a local property to observe on-ground projects and challenges in the Upper Wimmera Catchment.

It is pleasing to see a few groups had success in the last round of Caring for our Country Action Grants. The funding will greatly assist delivery of important local projects. Second Generation Landcare Grants are underway for 2010. Landcare groups are co-ordinating 20 medium to large-scale pest management programs which will be completed by June 2010.

Planning is also underway for the community and volunteer Landcare planting events around the Grampians, Little Desert and Yarriambiack Creek during July and October. These events are open to new and experienced volunteers so enquiries are welcome.

For further information contact Max Skeen on 5382 1544.

Goulburn Broken
Fire recovery has consumed lots of time and effort for the Landcare groups across the affected areas. The Upper Goulburn Landcare Network has taken a lead role in the community recovery. Their new Landcare Fire Recovery Co-ordinator is overseeing several projects including the co-ordination of volunteer support.

The Gecko CLaN have been busy with their sustainable farming projects including a pasture cropping project and the information sessions on a climate for opportunity.

Landcare in the Shepparton irrigation area will hold a celebration day in April to highlight, celebrate and reward all things Landcare.

On a catchment scale the Goulburn Broken CMA is working on funding options for Landcare into 2010/11 which will focus on demonstrating the services that Landcare provides to agencies as a contribution to catchment outputs.

For further information contact Tony Kubeil on 5761 1619.

North East
The Ovens Landcare Network co-ordinated a successful regional Landcare forum last November. Participants from across the north east discussed a wide range of topics and opportunities.

The Mitta to Murray Landcare Network held its inaugural gathering last December and is now a fully incorporated network. The network is now planning a range of potential projects.

The regional dung beetle project has now wound up. The final stages of this Caring for our Country project saw around 90 landholders attending a feedback

Regional Landcare Co-ordinators

workshop. The workshop presented the findings from the monitoring activities across the region and was the public launch of the dung beetle song by Peter Denahy. Full reports, maps and results are available on the project website http://northeast.landcarevic.net.au/dungbeetle

Thanks to DSE's Volunteer Recruitment Initiative and Caring for our Country, the North East CMA now has a fully equipped Landcare promotional trailer for groups in the region. The trailer has a full display setup, awning, power supply and a large barbecue for community events.

For further information contact Tom Croft on (02) 6024 9107.

Glenelg Hopkins

A number of groups in the region have now completed their action plans. Groups have been proactive in using Second Generation Landcare Grants to reflect on past works and provide future direction for their members. Some of the groups include the Hamilton to Coleraine Railway Line Landcare Group, Gazette Landcare Action Group, Wennicott Creek Landcare Group, Bushy Creek Landcare Group and the Bahgallah-Killara Landcare Group.

Over 20 groups have been successful in obtaining 2009 and 2010 Second Generation Landcare Grants and planning is underway for revegetation, weed and pest plant control, erosion control and many different field days and information sessions.

For further information contact Tony Lithgow on 5571 2526.

East Gippsland

Welcome to Paul Harvey, the newest member of the East Gippsland Landcare team.

All groups are busy working on their projects, holding meetings and renewing action plans. Well done to those groups that applied for Second Generation Landcare Grants.

Farming systems agronomist Maarten Stapper ran a successful workshop on soil health and biological farming in March. More information is available from the East Gippsland Landcare Network on 5152 0600.

Remember to update your group's website at http://eastgippsland.landcarevic.net.au/ For help with the website or if you require any training contact your local Landcare facilitator.

For further information contact Becky Hemming on 5150 3577.

Mallee

After completing a somewhat mixed harvest season the dryland farmers of the north west Mallee are now gearing up for the season ahead. There has been substantial rain across the area, although it has been extremely variable. This has allowed farmers to have some confidence in the coming season as it provides a sub-soil moisture bank that will be a great help when the autumn break arrives. As 90 percent of the Mallee's Landcare groups are dryland farmers this also gives confidence with implementing revegetation and trial projects.

A number of groups were successful in obtaining Second Generation Landcare Grants targeting rabbits and weeds. These programs are now getting underway.

Groups are reviewing their Environmental Management Action Plans which involves updating priorities and actions for the coming three to five years. We are seeing a decline in volunteer activity with group members facing the challenge of stepping into co-ordination and organisational roles while trying to maintain other volunteer services in their communities. Together we are working on ways to continue to support the great work already being done while maintaining the core volunteer base.

For further information contact Kevin Chaplin on 5051 4344.

North Central

Second Generation Landcare Grants are being rolled out with 35 groups receiving major grants for on-ground works and 13 groups receiving grants for promotion and education activities. Congratulations to all the groups that were successful in their applications.

A community grants guide to assist groups and individuals access support from the many sources of funding available to not-for-profit groups has been launched. The guide has tips on the nuts and bolts of applying for grants with information on incorporation, insurance and volunteer recruitment. The guide can now be downloaded at www.nccma.vic.gov.au

Information is being collected for the development of the annual report card. We are aiming to provide a comprehensive picture of what Landcare does in the region, including its sustainable agriculture achievements.

A regular network co-ordinators forum is now meeting to provide support to existing and developing networks.

Our new Regional Landcare Co-ordinator has been appointed. Welcome to Jodie Odgers who joins the team in late March.

For further information contact Melanie Taube on 5440 1883.

Landcarers discuss soil carbon on a property at Tambo Crossing with groundcover and soil ecologist Dr Christine Jones. The two-day event hosted by East Gippsland Landcare, Greening Australia and Evergraze attracted over 150 people.

In brief

Australian Landcare International
Karen Brisbane, the third Australian Landcare International (ALI) travel fellow, had a great trip to the US last year. Karen visited community environment and conservation farming projects in Missouri, Kansas, Washington and California, and attended the Land Trust Alliance Rally in Portland, Oregon. She spoke to many groups about Landcare in Australia.

The persistence of Secretariat for International Landcare members Sue Marriott and Victoria Mack has resulted in Finland agreeing to support Landcare projects on the slopes of Mt Merapi in Java. ALI hosted a visiting German politician, one of the founders of Landcare in Germany, during February.

ALI has now distributed over 70 copies of Landcare, *Local Action – Global Progress* to politicians, academics and community environmental groups. This engrossing book looks at how Landcare has developed in different countries through the eyes of local authors who are most involved. For further information about ALI and copies of the book ($25) contact Horrie Poussard by email at poussard@thereef.com.au

New resources on the Landcare Gateway
The employment toolkit is a practical guide to employing and managing Landcare support staff in Victoria. The toolkit includes guidelines and a framework for employment. There are templates and examples for position descriptions, work plans, employment agreements and performance reviews. Occupational health and safety information is also available. Go to: http://www.landcarevic.net.au/resources/for-groups

The new Landcare group start-up kit outlines the formal and informal steps required to start a new group. Existing groups can also find information on how to stay healthy, vibrant and effective. Go to: http://www.landcarevic.net.au/vri/group-start-up-kit

ALI fellow Karen Brisbane talks about Landcare to staff of the Natural Resources Conservation Services at the Bennett Springs State Park in Missouri, USA.

Next issue – fire recovery
The next issue of the magazine will feature stories on fire recovery. We welcome your contributions on all aspects of fire recovery as well as your general Landcare news and views.

Contributions to the next issue should be sent to the editor by 11 June 2010.

Carrie Tiffany, editor

Victorian Landcare & Catchment Management magazine
PO Box 1135, Mitcham North 3132
Phone 0405 697 548
email: carrie65@optusnet.com.au

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Mailing list enquiries
VFF Farm-Tree and Landcare Association
Executive Officer, Victorian Farmers Federation
Phone 9207 5527 Fax 9207 5500
Email: sjohnson@vff.org.au

To receive your copy via email alert
Contact Sally MacAdams
Phone 9637 8039
Email: landcare.magazine@dse.vic.gov.au

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