

VICTORIAN

# LANDCARE

Winter 2020 Issue 78

& CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT



## LANDCARE AND EMERGENCY RECOVERY

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A community response to drought

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Landcare-led fire recovery

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Cultural burning lessons



Victorian  
**Landcare**  
Program



**VICTORIA**  
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Government

# Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management

WINTER 2020 ISSUE 78

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### Cover photograph

Farideh Lashkary with a rake hoe soon after the February 2014 fire at her and John Robinson's property at Bylands. Photograph by John Robinson.





## From the Minister

The first half of 2020 has presented multiple challenges for Victorians. This summer's bushfires devastated not only property and lives, but also our wildlife and biodiversity. As our communities began their recovery, coronavirus (COVID-19) struck, compounding the strain for many.

The Victorian Government is still supporting the bushfire recovery, while working hard to help Victorians stay safe and well.

Our Landcare and environmental groups and networks play a vital role in the recovery of our landscapes and of our communities post-bushfires. The knowledge and connections members share help them respond quickly and effectively following bushfires. These groups and networks, largely made up of volunteers, play an important role for Victoria's unique biodiversity, but also for local communities.

We are continuing to back Landcare and environmental volunteer groups and networks through these challenging times by extending funding for existing Victorian Landcare Facilitators until the end of the year. This is an important decision that ensures the groups and the Landcare facilitators themselves are given the

appropriate support and job security while we work through the broader impacts of the current situation in the coming months.

This will also enable the Victorian Landcare Program to run an Expression of Interest process later this year for Landcare and environmental volunteer groups and networks who would like to employ a Landcare facilitator from 1 January 2021.

This is part of a suite of recommendations the Victorian Government is implementing following the 2019 independent Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program Review to improve the program starting next year.

In this issue of the magazine we feature some inspiring stories about how Landcare groups and networks deal with emergencies, such as fire and drought. Landcare members also talk about the innovative ways they have adapted to a changed world.

The Northern Bendigo Landcare Group tells its story of losing a decade's work restoring the Creekline Grassy Woodland habitat within Huntly Streamside Reserve to bushfire in January. In the aftermath, the group has collaborated with Parks Victoria to replant. They and the Huntly Fire Brigade are working on how to

enhance habitat values along Bendigo Creek while minimising the fire risk.

A number of stories in this issue of the magazine touch on the important role recovery work plays in enhancing the mental health and wellbeing of communities affected by fire and drought.

The Heytesbury Landcare Network led a collaborative approach after the March 2019 fires burnt more than 24,000 hectares of the south west. The network worked across organisational and geographic boundaries and with government agencies for the benefit of landholders, producing some great outcomes.

By working together to help the land and our biodiversity recover, we are strengthening communities. The bonds that have developed are also helping these communities cope in the current circumstances.

The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio

Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change

Minister for Solar Homes

## Advice for volunteers on coronavirus (COVID-19)

The Victorian Landcare Program staff at DELWP urges you to continue to follow public health measures and stay informed through the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) website. DHHS have released a factsheet for Victorian volunteers *DHHS Volunteer Factsheet*.

We know that environmental volunteering and Landcaring are great ways to stay connected with people

and the environment, and we are cautiously welcoming the easing of restrictions whilst being urged to remain vigilant and ensure everyone's safety. As volunteers and members of community organisations you are resilient and adaptable, and together we will get through this challenging time.

DELWP's Landcare and Community Programs staff have prepared a

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document to provide some suggestions about what you could do under the current public health measures. The FAQs are on the Landcare Gateway at [www.landcarevic.org.au](http://www.landcarevic.org.au) (News).

Stay safe,

Victorian Landcare Program staff –  
DELWP

# Community grows together after Bunyip fires

By Marijke de Bever-Price, Bronwyn Fleming and Kirsten Leiminger



In March 2019 the Bunyip complex bushfire consumed 15,000 hectares of Bunyip State Park and properties south of the park from Tynong North in the west through to Tonimbuk in the east.

Pam Cunningham, Secretary of the Cannibal Creek Catchment Landcare Group (CCCLG), coordinated the first working bees while the fires were still smouldering. In the year since the fires, which impacted 300 properties around

her home at Cannibal Creek near the foot of Mt Cannibal, Pam put the call out to volunteer groups to clean up fence lines, chainsaw felled trees, replant vegetation and construct deer fencing to protect remnant vegetation.

Using well-established community networks, Pam has coordinated more than 200 volunteers who contributed 1300 hours to help her community recover. Like many of her fellow volunteers, Pam is caring, eager and has extraordinary organisational abilities.

Fellow resident Garry Burns saved his home from the fire but lost his machinery shed, hay shed, fencing and cattle run.

A committed community volunteer involved in the local Cannibal Creek Reserve Committee, Friends of Mt Cannibal and CCCLG, Gary found himself struggling to cope with the emotions of anger and frustration at the loss. The turning point came when Pam Cunningham arranged 45 volunteers including the Western Port Intrepid Landcare Group to help Garry's family clear up the paddocks.

## Recovery groups a voice for community

Garry is now a member of the local community recovery committee – a group of fire-affected residents who act as an important voice for the wider community.

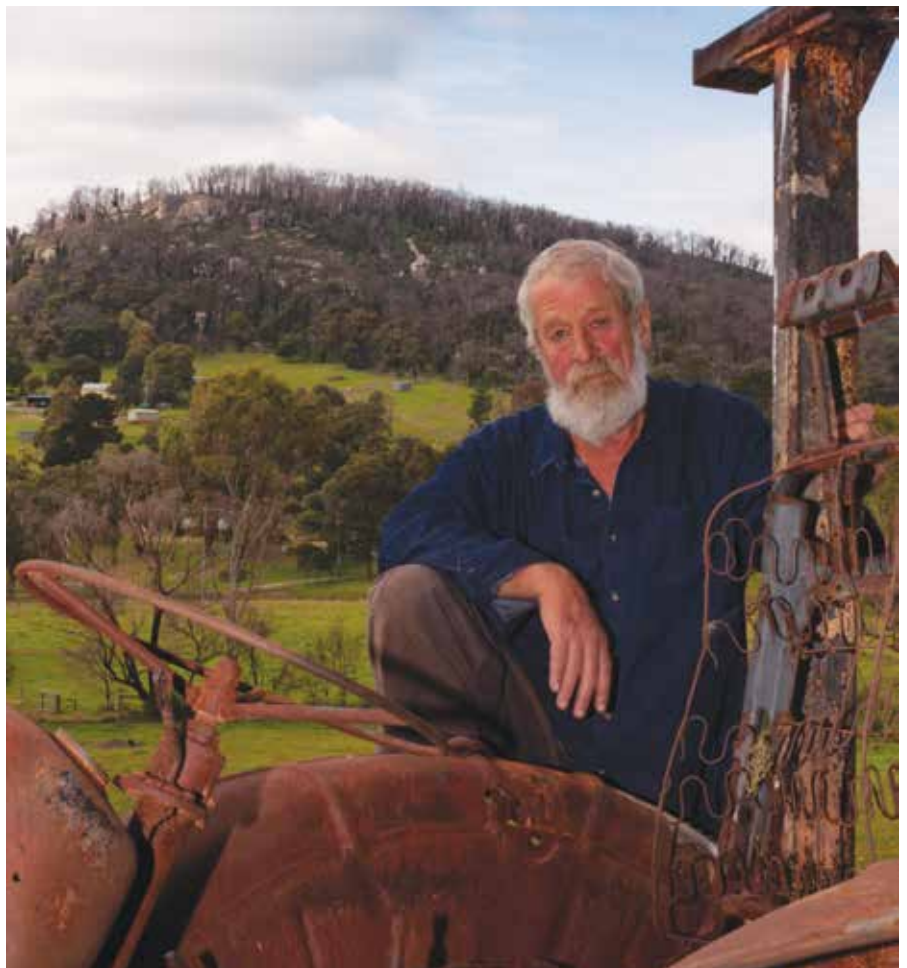


Pam Cunningham, a stalwart in the local community, in front of one of the few remaining gums on her fire-ravaged property. Fortunately, the house was saved.

“

*Like many of her fellow volunteers, Pam is caring, eager and has extraordinary organisational abilities.*

”



Garry Burns with his burnt-out tractor at Garfield North. The view behind him is of Mt Cannibal where some severe hot spots will need planting out. The community rallied around Garry after the fire and helped him to carry on.





A burnt truck in Tynong North sits in green grass – a reminder of the fires.

Armed with his understanding of how the community, standing side by side, helped him to cope physically and emotionally, Garry coordinated a planting day to revegetate the historic Garfield North Outdoor Education Centre.

The nectar feeder garden planting day was widely supported by local organisations including Western Port Landcare Catchment Network, CCCLG and Cardinia Shire Council. The day brought more than 100 volunteers and community members together to revegetate the land in a symbolic gesture of recovery and regrowth. The day was nominated for Cardinia Shire's event of the year.

Marianne Sawyer, Cardinia Shire's Biodiversity Officer and Vice President of the Yarra Valley Equestrian Landcare Group, was one of the volunteers that answered Pam's call to help clean up Garry's property. While helping, Marianne recognised many landowners lacked the knowledge needed to help their land recover from the fires. Marianne used her networks to pull together a group of experts from both government and volunteer organisations to facilitate a coordinated approach to community information and resources.

The experts, which included members from local Landcare groups, the VFF, Port Phillip and Westernport CMA, Western Port Catchment Landcare Network,

Cardinia Shire, Baw Baw Shire, Melbourne Water, Agriculture Victoria, DELWP and Parks Victoria came together weekly. This group evolved into the Natural Environment Recovery Subcommittee, feeding valuable information into the regional recovery arrangements. The subcommittee has delivered community workshops and information to support weed control, fencing, shelterbelt design, soil health and landscaping for fire.

#### **Biodiversity features in recovery**

Involvement on the subcommittee by grass roots volunteer groups such as CCCLG and Bunyip Landcare Group (BLG) had enabled them to secure funding from DELWP under the Biodiversity Response Planning process to allow the Cardinia Creek Catchment Biodiversity Project to continue with weed control, pest animal control, revegetation and fencing over the next 18 months.

Sue Anderson from BLG is an active member of the subcommittee. Sue has championed research into shelterbelt design to reduce bushfire risk and trials of cultural burning. Sue also supported her husband, John Anderson, in coordinating a BlazeAid camp at Bunyip.

John worked tirelessly, often up to 14 hours a day, seven days a week to manage and coordinate 600 BlazeAid volunteers over five months. The volunteers assisted more than 170 landholders clean up

300 kilometres of burnt fencing wire and reinstate 130 kilometres of fencing on fire-affected properties.

Jim Armstrong from Labertouche Landcare Group was another community member who gave his all to fire recovery. Jim worked on 10 local properties for 10 months using his tractor to shift burnt timber, remove wire and clear fence lines. Jim also organised a dozen volunteers from Labertouche Men's Shed to build wildlife nest boxes, letterboxes and even a carport for a local in need.

The fire was and continues to be devastating for many. It has had an emotional impact that will linger. The recovery work and local community involvement will continue for the next 12-18 months and beyond, as needed. Resilience can be hard to find after such an overwhelming emergency, but our community has demonstrated it in spades. Through working together to support each other there is hope that both properties and the local environment will recover.

**Bronwyn Fleming is Emergency Management Recovery Officer for Cardinia Shire, Kirsten Leiminger is Communications Recovery Officer for Cardinia Shire and Marijke de Bever-Price is President of the Western Port Catchment Landcare Network. For more information email Marijke at [outcon.outlook.com](mailto:outcon.outlook.com)**

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*Resilience can be hard to find after such an overwhelming emergency, but our community has demonstrated it in spades.*

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# Act quickly – a fire recovery lesson from South West Goulburn

By Sonia Sharkey



South West Goulburn Landcare Network (SWGLN) is an alliance between eight Landcare groups operating in the catchments running from the Great Dividing Range to the Goulburn River near Seymour.

We have been affected by two fire events since 2009 and our response to them has been very different.

With 450,000 hectares burnt, the Black Saturday fires on 7 February 2009 left a swathe of death and destruction and a community reeling in its wake. Sunday Creek Dry Creek Landcare Group obtained funding shortly after the fires to start critical works protecting waterways and dams with rice straw. Demonstration days were held to show how the rice straw should be placed to reduce debris and sediment washing into waterways. Approximately 16 months after the fires SWGLN obtained a large amount of funding to do the on-ground works needed.

A series of fire recovery workshops were held and various companies sent volunteers to assist with planting and fencing days. This helped the landholders impacted by the fire to get back to some sort of normalcy. Overall a large number of works were completed throughout the region with a positive outcome, but they had a very slow start.

Although all fire-affected landholders were eventually contacted, only 23 per cent responded and many were angry at the late offer of assistance. More than one person asked what had taken so long.

Some of our Landcare members produced detailed notes on the recovery process that were used locally but were forgotten over time.



Volunteers from the Victorian Mobile Landcare Group and local Strath Creek fencing contractor Steve Joblin (kneeling) helping to fence a fire damaged property at Willowmavin in May 2014.

Our next major emergency event was the Kilmore-Mickleham fires on 9 February 2014. More than 23,000 hectares were burnt along with 18 houses, many outbuildings and stock. Thankfully there was no loss of human life. The difference this time was a community determined to bounce back quickly and not be defined by the fire. By 13 February SWG Landcare had organised a meeting of all of the agencies involved in fire recovery.

SWG Landcare came up with strategies for what needed to be done to achieve better outcomes. These included working with the neighbouring Upper Deep Creek Landcare Network and natural resource management agencies to take landholders through the various steps for rebuilding in an organised manner. An 18-month program of information sessions, workshops and field days commenced within weeks of the fire.

SWG Landcare quickly updated its Landcare notes with information on the situation and

then Victorian Landcare Program staff from DELWP loaded them on to the Landcare Gateway for open access. All of the groups in the alliance were able to add their logos and include critical local information for landholders. Having targeted, relevant and practical notes for landholders was an important part of the recovery process.

The uptake of landholders involved in the recovery phase nearly doubled from 2009. In 2014 we were able to involve 42 per cent of landholders in the recovery phase.

SWG Landcare's fire recovery lessons:

- Be on ground as soon as possible and when safe to do so, to provide critical community support and assistance.
- An expression of interest form sent by mail was an effective way of making contact with people affected by the fire.
- Promise only what you can deliver. We stated up front we had no money for works but wanted to find out what people needed in order to seek appropriate funding.
- Work with the other natural resource management agencies and your neighbouring Landcare Networks – know who is doing what.
- Take the time to listen to people. People need to tell their story.
- Collaboration is the key – we are all on a journey with the community together.

**Sonia Sharkey is the Landcare Facilitator of SWG Landcare. Sonia's position is funded through the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program. For more information email [swg\\_landcare@mitchellshire.vic.gov.au](mailto:swg_landcare@mitchellshire.vic.gov.au)**



Volunteers from National Australia Bank take a break from removing burnt fences on Wayne Potter's property at Kilmore in March 2014.





*Hungry sheep on Kangaroo Island rush to feed on hay donated by PPS members in Victoria's Wimmera region.*

## PPS farmers respond to bushfire affected peers near and far

**By Rob Shea**

Perennial Pasture Systems (PPS), an independent farmer group in the Project Platypus Landcare Network's area in the Upper Wimmera catchment, was quick to respond and assist fellow farmers affected by the 2019/20 summer bushfires in Victoria and South Australia.

PPS initially joined farmers in the Tatyoon district who coordinated the first hay drive to affected areas with hay and straw. The initial donations went to East Gippsland and PPS organised more loads later in the summer.

Many PPS members understood the hardship endured by East Gippsland farmers as several had visited the region on the group's annual study tour in 2018. Having seen the impact of the prolonged drought in the region, many expected even the most resilient farmers to be tested by the fires.

PPS were pleased to be able to assist the recovery effort by sending fodder to affected farmers. As well as using volunteer trucks, PPS assisted local businesses that struggled after the fires by choosing to utilise Gippsland contractors.

A fire in the Lexton area, where most PPS members are more closely located, caused huge problems for local farmers. The members delivered hay and grain to impacted farms after the fire to assist in the management of stock.

Assistance was also given to farms on Kangaroo Island where more than half the

island was severely affected by fire. PPS members had visited Kangaroo Island on the 2017 study tour. Several of the farms visited lost stock, fences and infrastructure in the fires. PPS delivered loads of straw to the study tour host farms and other properties affected by the fires, with the fodder going to sheep in containment areas.

While I managed most of the recovery process, many members put in hours of voluntary time to assist with the effort. Stuart Robinson from Lismore coordinated the Kangaroo Island fodder with assistance from Jason Benson's freight business, who donated

his trucking service for the hay delivery. Corey Price from Eversley also organised five semitrailers to deliver donated hay for the second Gippsland effort in February 2020.

PPS members also donated funds to assist with the transport of fencing material for farms on Kangaroo Island, offset fuel costs and help support a local Lions Club near Lexton who catered for the bushfire recovery crew, BlazeAid.

**For more information contact PPS project manager Rob Shea at [yadin@netconnect.com.au](mailto:yadin@netconnect.com.au)**



*Perennial Pasture Systems farmer group members discuss tactics for getting the donated fodder through to bushfire ravaged East Gippsland.*

# Landcare-led recovery after the 2014 Mickleham–Kilmore fire

By John Robinson



On Sunday 9 February 2014, strong winds and a temperature of 40C (for the second day in a row, and with a statewide Total Fire Ban) saw 78 fires ignite across Victoria. The most serious of these fires started around midday when a sugar gum on the side of Mickleham Road at Mickleham, 30 kilometres north of Melbourne, fell on powerlines causing sparks to ignite the tinder dry grass.

Driven by strong winds the fire travelled 40-50 kilometres north towards Kilmore. I spent an anxious night watching the glowing rim of the out-of-control grass fire from a hilltop on my property at Bylands. Thankfully the next day was much cooler, but the fire had split into two fire-fronts, and during the day it threatened both Kilmore and Wallan townships.

By early Monday afternoon the second fire front had reached Bylands from the south and was racing rapidly across the paddocks towards me. My partner, Farideh, had gone to a friend's home in Kilmore. I felt reasonably well prepared and confident that I could deal with the grass fire. Wearing a firefighting knap sack on my back, as I needed to be agile, I was able to stop the fire burning the house and sheds before it passed, the wind driving it north across the paddocks towards Kilmore.

The next six hours were intense. I worked nonstop putting out burning logs and burning wooden fence posts between sheds, and garden sleepers and embers that were igniting unburnt grass near the house. One pile of logs kept flaring up as I couldn't get enough water on to them. I relayed this problem to Farideh over the phone. She contacted the local police who helped organise a firefighting helicopter which dumped 40,000 litres of water on the pile of burning logs that night – a welcome relief.

After six days the Mickleham-Kilmore fire was declared under control. While no lives were lost the fire's impact on local communities was immense. The fire destroyed 18 houses (some were never rebuilt), many sheds, and public infrastructure including several wooden bridges. More than 16,000 head of

livestock died during the blaze, which also burnt 1670 kilometres of fencing, 9000 hectares of pasture and 2300 tonnes of hay. The economic loss from the fire was estimated to be \$18.9 million.

## Enormous destructive power

Landowners in the Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group's (UMCG) area were left with 17,000 hectares of burnt land – 73 per cent of the group's area. The UMCG is in Port Phillip and Western Port CMA region. It has around 75 members and is one of three member groups of the Upper Deep Creek Landcare Network (UDCLN). To the north, the adjoining Willomavin Landcare Group (WLG) had a further 3000 hectares of its area burnt. WLG is in the Goulburn Broken CMA region and is a member of South West Goulburn Landcare Network (SWGLN).

“

*I spent an anxious night watching the glowing rim of the out-of-control grass fire from a hilltop on my property at Bylands.*

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The glowing rim of the uncontrolled fire seen from a hilltop at John Robinson and Farideh Lashkary's property at Bylands on Sunday 9 February 2014.





*A scorched hillside at John Robinson and Farideh Lashkary's property at Bylands after the February 2014 fire.*

“While no lives were lost the fire's impact on local communities was immense.”

Direct experience of the immense ferocity and destructive power of a bushfire generates enormous respect for fire. The impact and scale of destruction from a bushfire can be overwhelming and soul destroying, and it can take years to recover. I have vivid memories of the fire we experienced in February 2014. While it was nothing like the Black Saturday inferno in 2009 that began 15 kilometres away at Kilmore East, the journey of fire recovery for many of those impacted by these and other fires continues to this day.

Immediately after a bushfire there's lots to process and consider. The human instinct of needing to repair what has been destroyed quickly kicks in. This can include immediate needs such as providing feed for livestock, repairing fences and disposing of dead livestock. It could also include issues such as soil erosion, water quality and burnt trees. Areas of native vegetation and pasture do recover after fires. Waiting and watching how nature responds after fire can sometimes be the best approach.

### **Landcare shares recovery knowledge and experience**

Bushfires, like many emergencies, bring people together to support each other and to assist with the recovery process. Many Landcare groups/networks have played critical roles in natural resource management (NRM) emergency recovery, and have worked with individuals, communities, and government to deal with the impacts on natural and agricultural environments.

Within one week of the Mickleham–Kilmore fire being declared under control the local Landcare groups/networks held a meeting to plan the NRM fire recovery. The Landcare, local government and agency staff at this meeting who were involved in the 2009 Black Saturday fire recovery work, shared their knowledge and lessons learnt about the fire recovery process.

The UMCG and SWGLN then collaborated closely to plan and deliver NRM fire recovery workshops for rural landholders. Community education was critical. Fire-affected landholders wanted to know what to do, when and how to do it, and what they should look out for through the recovery process. Around 450 people attended the 15 workshops that were delivered during the first 12 months.

*continued...*



*Greg Bekker from DELWP demonstrates the use of sediment barriers for siltation and erosion control at Karen and Peter Ivory's property at Darraweit Guim in March 2014.*

“

*Bushfires, like many emergencies, bring people together to support each other and to assist with the recovery process.*

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*Neville Prince from Waratah leads an interactive fencing training session at Thelma and John Castles' property at Bylands in April 2014.*

There was a thirst for knowledge among landholders with some attending every workshop. Venues convenient for the fire-affected landholders were chosen and takeaway pizzas made catering simple.

The first workshop, held less than a month after the fire, was on pastures, soils, animal health and farm water. Other workshop topics included fencing, whole farm planning, weeds, care of soils and pastures, native vegetation and fire, direct seeding, gorse control, and a farm chemical user course.

Darraweit Guim township, where two homes were lost in the 2014 fires, is at the centre of UMCG's area. The Darraweit Guim community organised a fire recovery picnic concert a month after the fires. This brought the community together to recognise its strength and survival following the fires, and to enable locals to re-connect and share their experiences.

The UMCG received great support from Darraweit Guim's community with the delivery of the fire recovery workshops.

The Darraweit Guim Memorial Hall Committee donated the use of the hall for workshops. The monthly community newsletter, *Guim Tales*, included details about each workshop, and Loraine Dalton, the local postie, distributed workshop flyers on her mail run to 150 local landholders.

### **Losses and gains**

DELWP staff helped plan and deliver several workshops and organised aerial property maps for whole farm planning and soil tests.

Siltation of dams and waterways and erosion are major issues after many bushfires. Landcare Australia funded a truck load of rice straw bales for distribution to fire-affected landholders for use as sediment barriers. Melbourne Water's Rural Land Program provided 370 coir logs to manage sediment in the UMCG's area.

The UDCLN provided their Landcare Facilitator to support fire recovery efforts, and part-funded a reprint of the *Weed Detection and Control on Small Farms* booklet, for fire-affected landowners. The SWGLN developed five new Landcare after the Fires information notes, that were loaded on to the new fire recovery pages on the Victorian Landcare Gateway, which was developed by DELWP's Victorian Landcare Program staff. The UDCLN's Landcare Facilitator also created a UDCLN Facebook page to share fire recovery information.



*Weed control after fire is critical. A gorse control field day was well attended in February 2015 at Darraweit Guim.*





*Alpacas look for feed in a charred paddock at Bylands a few days after the fire.*

To assist landholders with their fire recovery revegetation efforts, the UMCG subsidised and made available to group members 5000 indigenous plants for 20 cents each.

Subsidising the cost of the plants minimised the financial burden for members and maximised the number of plants going in the ground.

### **Scrambling for funds**

Funding for NRM fire recovery is very ad hoc. Hopefully this will change with the advent of Bushfire Recovery Victoria. While the Mickleham–Kilmore fire had a massive impact, it was not a big enough fire to attract large amounts of much needed funding for NRM fire recovery projects.

The fire had burnt across two CMA regions. Goulburn Broken CMA was able to provide some funding to support on-ground fire recovery projects in the SWGLN area. The UMCG secured \$51,000 in Australian Government National Disaster Relief and Recovery Authority funding to reinstate fencing along waterways and off-stream watering systems damaged in the fires where there had been previous Victorian Government investment. A \$30,000 Victorian Landcare Grant tackled a major gorse infestation across nine fire-affected properties.

One of Landcare's strengths is its ability to be agile and adapt to changes in circumstances and conditions, and still get

things done, even after emergencies such as bushfire. The 2014 fire's impact has been much more than economic. The UMCG gained 10 new members by demonstrating its relevance to the local community through its fire recovery work. SWGLN and UMCG won Community Fire Recovery Awards at the 2015 Fire Awareness Awards. The award judges noted that UMCG's fire recovery work demonstrated great community outcomes and was really forward thinking in delivery.

The success of the fire recovery workshops demonstrated a strong appetite among local landholders, many of them lifestylers, for land management information and knowledge. In response the UDCLN secured Australian and local government grants to deliver five three-day Property Management Planning Courses in 2016 and 2017, which were attend by around 90 landowners. The courses were delivered by small farm consultant David Stewart and soils specialist Chris Alenson. Two of the courses were delivered with SWGLN. The collaborations fostered between the Landcare organisations across CMA regions after the 2014 fires continue to enrich our Landcare and NRM work.

After bushfires some things can be repaired and replaced, but others, such as the huge remnant trees that were hundreds of years old, cannot. Their loss is felt acutely across the landscape.

*John Robinson is Secretary of the Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group. For more information email [upper.maribyrnong.landcare@gmail.com](mailto:upper.maribyrnong.landcare@gmail.com)*

“

*One of Landcare's strengths is its ability to be agile and adapt to changes in circumstances and conditions, and still get things done, even after emergencies such as bushfire.*

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# A community response to drought in Millewa-Carwarp

By Ian Arney



**I joined the Millewa-Carwarp Landcare Group 28 years ago. It's the oldest Landcare group in the Mallee region and was formed in 1989 after the community recognised the need for all land managers to start working together to manage their limited natural resources rather than doing so in isolation.**

I have long believed that Landcare is about more than pest plants and animals and planting trees. To me, Landcare is about maintaining and improving biodiversity in our natural habitat, but also about maintaining and improving our communities on a human level. The healthier people are in a community the more likely they will show interest in improving their natural environment, which in turn positively influences their personal health and wellbeing. It's all about perspective.

In July 2019 I was fortunate to hear the Victorian Minister for Agriculture, Jaclyn Symes, address a group of farmers about the ongoing drought in East Gippsland. As I sat listening to the description of conditions in East Gippsland I realised how similar they were to my own home in the Millewa, in the far North West of Victoria, and of how I needed to speak with the Minister to inform her of the very dry conditions in my district. I felt uncomfortable speaking on behalf of my community but was determined to do so. Minister Symes was very accommodating and said she would like an opportunity to visit the Millewa at some time.



*A water trough in a paddock on the Lambert's property at Meringur after a fierce windstorm on 19 February 2020.*

## Severely stressed crops

The next day I arrived home to severely moisture stressed crops. At that time the Millewa area had received about 40 millimetres of rain for the year, compared to our average of approximately 131 millimetres (for the first 28 weeks of the year). I started to graze some of my crops in an attempt to reduce the biomass and hopefully the rate of water consumption. Some neighbours and others in the community did similar, providing feed for livestock, but also hoping to carry the plants through to a major rain event, that we hoped was not too far away.

Unfortunately, the rain didn't eventuate. Weather conditions were not in our favour. As the President of the Millewa-Carwarp Landcare Group I started a conversation with the group's Landcare Facilitator and so began the time consuming but beneficial activities to create recognition of our situation so that we could then ask the State and Federal Governments for assistance.

A Millewa-Carwarp Community Group was formed under the auspices of the Landcare group to work together on the drought. The group has met many times, volunteering thousands of hours to meet with politicians, government agencies, local council and other beneficial parties including Lions, Rural Aid and Sunraysia Drought Relief Group. We work from the Landcare Office/Resource Centre, located in the old lawn tennis club rooms at Cullulleraine, kindly provided to us at a nominal fee by Mildura Rural City Council.

## Group tackles grants on behalf of landholders

The group members are all volunteers and much of our time and work is spent applying for grants, on behalf of individuals in need. We have sourced and been provided with donated hay, which is allocated to the community members registered with us. The hay is essential for maintaining a healthy diet for cattle and sheep that need to be available as breeding stock.



*Suzie Jacobs, a member of the East Loddon Food Share Program Inc stands on a strainer post in front of a paddock that was in crop for the 2019 season at Meringur.*





Members of the Renmark and Mildura Lions Clubs combined to organise a hay drop at Meringur in January 2020.

Our Landcare projects continue to run in the background, including the use by members of our five and seven tyne rippers for ripping lines across paddocks. Ripping brings large soil clods to the surface that trap drifting sand and reduce wind speed. We also have two grader boards that will be used extensively this year to drag drifted sand back on to blowouts on the hills and away from fence lines.

The advocacy work continues and has provided significant benefits to community members, including rate relief through the Mildura Rural City Council. We have been very fortunate with our Landcare Facilitator, Annette Lambert, who has provided great service beyond the scope of her employment.

### **Mental health a major concern**

One of the issues that we often consider, and Annette has dealt with directly, is mental health. Having low or no income for several years creates significant challenges and detrimental effects for farm families. Watching a family farm wither and slide into a poor state takes a personal toll. Most farmers have a significant emotional tie to the land. To watch the land that you love suffering is difficult to bear.

The pressure on individuals can be overwhelming. I reflect daily on the adage, 'don't judge someone until you've walked a mile in their shoes.' Most people are supportive of each other, our community and our difficulties, but occasionally a comment on social media or in the local

news blaming the situation on farming practices can be taken personally and only adds to the psychological and emotional pressure.

Like every committee, you cannot please everyone all of the time. The Millewa-Carwarp Community Group chose to try to improve our community's circumstances, rather than hoping someone else would do it for us.



The Karween North Road at Meringur. More than 30 roads were closed in the district during 2019 and 2020 due to sand drift.

Personally, the more that I heard 'no', the more I tried to get people to say yes to providing the Millewa-Carwarp community with much needed help, the help that I am very grateful for.

**Ian Arney is President of the Millewa-Carwarp Landcare Group. For more information email [millewalc@outlook.com](mailto:millewalc@outlook.com)**

### **The community says thank you**

Andrew and Megs Kay from Meringur wrote to the local newspaper thanking the Millewa-Carwarp Community Group:

*Our family would like to thank Annette Lambert and the other volunteers of the community group for all their hard work helping to support our farming community. The endless hours attending meetings with Government agencies alone to support our community is huge, not to mention the hours sourcing the many truckloads of donated hay to help feed our hungry stock and give our farmers some relief.*

*The work put into securing funds to pay for fuel for the volunteers who transported the hay, the granting of rate relief and our registration with Rural Aid has been invaluable. The group has also worked to facilitate food hampers, Christmas packages, household funds and grants for maintenance, emergency water and infrastructure.*

*Your hard work hasn't gone unnoticed in our household as I'm sure there are plenty of others that feel the same. As a community fighting this drought, we all need to band together and support each other.*

“

*The first Australians did not fear fire like we do, instead they learnt from childhood how to master it.*

”



*Ngarigo Elder Uncle Rod Mason shared his knowledge of cultural burning at a workshop run by the Wooragee Landcare Group in autumn 2019.*

## Spreading the lesson of cultural burning

*By Gib Wettenhall*

**Aboriginal mosaic burning once patterned the entire continent, as intricate and connected as the scales on a crocodile's back or the feathers on an eagle's wing. The first Australians did not fear fire like we do, instead they learnt from childhood how to master it.**



*Uncle Rod Mason lights up.*

I believe it's time for us to replace our fear of fire with a more thorough and nuanced understanding, including how local topography, climate and different vegetation types will affect the fire regimes delivered. We need to put aside the prejudice of the past towards Indigenous knowledge and collaborate with our neighbours in trickle burning our forests and vegetation.

Repetitive pattern work is integral to Indigenous design whether in a dot painting, clan symbolism or digging yam daisies. Fire is no different. Large scale 'hazard' burning is antithetical to the Aboriginal approach of building a mosaic pattern, slowly and incrementally, until eventually a whole landscape has been burnt and remade.

### **Burning Country makes it fresh**

At an Aboriginal-style cultural burn organised by the Wooragee Landcare Group in autumn 2019 a group of 30 participants prepared a patch of grass and weeds for firing.

The workshop was under the direction of Uncle Rod Mason, a Ngarigo Elder from the high country, who had studied with a firestick in his hand from a young age. Uncle Rod relishes fire as an agent of renewal: "You got to fire it! When you burn Country, it makes it brand new fresh," he said.

Under Uncle Rod's gaze, we built small pyres of leaves and twigs. When these were regularly spaced throughout the patch to his satisfaction, Uncle Rod tested wind direction and advised us to trickle burn backwards into the wind.

Lighting the first pyre, Uncle Rod stood in the centre directing traffic. He'd wave an arm: "Light more fires over there!" When the fire crept over a marked boundary, he'd send a group to beat it back. He lay on the ground so he could feel wind flows and predicted from cloud patterns that we could expect a wind change that evening.

The pyres burnt low and slow into each other. A cloud of moist white smoke rose and enveloped us. It was a wonderfully gentle process accompanied by much laughter, chatter and no fear.





*The fire crept low and slow as it trickle-burnt backwards into the wind.*

### Training needed

Workshop participants discussed the need for a fire master's course where people could be trained to use fire proactively to prevent wildfires as well as to optimise our nation's biodiversity. Ideally the course would incorporate the best of both worlds – Indigenous traditional knowledge on mosaic burning combined with the results of evidence-based scientific research on fire's impact on native flora and fauna in differing ecotypes.

This is underway in the widescale burning of the northern savannah across Arnhem Land where Indigenous traditional knowledge has been integrated with the techniques of western science. Indigenous ranger programs describe this hybrid as a 'both ways' approach.

It is critical that we do not take over from Aboriginal people or speak for them when adapting their traditional knowledge of fire. According to Yorta Yorta woman and environmental scientist, Minda Murray, self-determination is at stake.

"Cultural burning is done by our mob not only as a physical practice, it is deeply entwined in culture and Aboriginal lore. Aboriginal people should always remain at the forefront of protecting our culture and our land – that's part of self-determination," Minda said.

There are a number of complex issues that need to be considered before cultural burning can be rolled out more widely. There has been a lack of monitoring of the

impact of cultural burns and western fire reduction burns on vegetation and wildlife. More research is needed. There are also issues around identifying Aboriginal people with knowledge of cultural burning and how the next generation is trained. Poor training could lead to further devastation of land and wildlife.

### Who burns and speaks for Country?

Richard McTernan, the coordinator of the Wooragee Landcare Group, has worked extensively with Traditional Owners in north-east Victoria and facilitated 10 fire workshops led by them.

"Burning Country is not learnt overnight and I believe local knowledge of the environment is essential," Richard said.

There are questions regarding who has the right to speak for Country and who has the cultural fire knowledge for that Country. Respect for Aboriginal leadership is critical. Although Uncle Rod is a ceremonial fire man he argues that it is his peers – other elders from each local language group – that determine his right to teach and burn in their Country.

Training of new practitioners could provide another culturally appropriate employment pathway for Aboriginal people. At the Wooragee cultural burn, a young Wiradjuri man, Dean Heta, spoke passionately about the wish of many of his peers to get back on their land, managing Country.

"It's about connecting Aboriginal people back to their cultural identity," Dean said.

The desire to protect biodiversity and to live safely in the landscape is front of mind for all Australians. It's time to stop and listen to the locals – to learn from their 65,000 years of land management experience before we arrived.

*Gib Wettenhall is an author, publisher and farm forester from Mollongghip, near Ballarat. For more information visit [www.empresspublishing.com.au](http://www.empresspublishing.com.au)*

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*It is critical that we do not take over from Aboriginal people or speak for them when adapting their traditional knowledge of fire.*

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# Drought Employment Program a win for the community and the environment

By Tess Grieves and Tracey Harbridge

The social and economic impacts on communities and individuals who live, sometimes for months on end, with little or no rain can bring even the strongest to their knees. That's when Landcare and the North Central CMA Drought Employment Program (DEP) steps in to help.



Brett Hawting planting trees at Dumosa in 2017 as part of the DEP.

With funding from the Victorian Government, the North Central CMA has hosted four DEP programs since 2008. The programs are a win for farmers and for the environment. They provide local employment opportunities for drought affected farm workers, tradies and community members to undertake a range of natural resource management activities.

Planning is critical to ensure each program is a success. Drought affected farmers, farm workers, farm service providers or rural community members adversely impacted by the drought submit an expression of interest to be part of the program. Flexible employment arrangements are available to suit the needs of individuals who have ongoing farm work and seasonal commitments.

All employees are fully inducted and trained to North Central CMA requirements, including occupational health and safety, chemical and manual handling, and first aid training. Specialist training on chemical usage and chainsaw operation is undertaken by crews using these skills. Fencing crews with skills and experience are also established to complete works according to agreed standards.

All employees are provided with the equipment they need to do the job including full personal protective equipment, project materials, tools, work vehicles and mobile phones. A work crew leader is appointed to help coordinate employees, project partners and the North Central CMA.

## Links to Landcare

Landcare has been a steadfast and successful DEP project partner. Landcare groups and networks are a first point of call when a DEP program starts. Many important local Landcare projects involving weed control, fencing to protect habitat, and revegetation have been assisted by DEP work crews.

DEP replicates the Landcare model – local people deliver local projects. It also allows people facing times of uncertainty and crisis to stay within their communities without having to seek work elsewhere. DEP helps to build the capacity of individuals and the community through training that can provide future employment options. It supports the wellbeing of participants and has a flow-on economic benefit to drought-affected communities. The on-ground works also achieve positive natural resource management outcomes.

The Buloke Northern Grampians Landcare Network, located in St Arnaud, is a frequent DEP project partner. According to the network's Landcare Facilitator, Kevin Spence, when the DEP is on his phone starts ringing.

"Landowners start calling because farmers and landowners know the resources are available and they know from experience that it works. When the drought crews come they're a real catalyst for farmers who are really struggling as they see people coming out from the CMA which motivates them to do some work themselves. They don't feel like they are all alone. I don't

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*Drought affected farmers, farm workers, farm service providers or rural community members adversely impacted by the drought submit an expression of interest to be part of the program.*

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DEP crew members tackle boxthorn on the Avoca River at Quambatook in 2017.





Members of the Barapa Barapa Indigenous Works Crew undertaking cultural site assessments along the Loddon River, from Appin South to Kerang in 2009.

know how you measure it, but I wonder what the multiplying effect is."

Kevin said really positive relationships form with each crew and working with DEP gave him a personal sense of achievement.

"I absolutely loved it – it allowed me to achieve things, it justified my existence. It was great to see so many people on the ground. I'm so supportive of these programs."

### Connecting to culture

DEP was given a further boost in 2009 when one of its crews, the Barapa Barapa Indigenous Work Crew, won the Victorian Indigenous Landcare Award. The crew's work focused on Aboriginal cultural heritage and river health assessment.

The Barapa Barapa Indigenous Work Crew assessed flora and fauna, pest plants and animals, river condition, deep river pools, riparian vegetation, fish habitat, rubbish build-up, bank erosion and waterway and boundary fencing in need of repair as they moved along a 26 kilometre stretch of the Loddon River.

The work undertaken by the crew helped the North Central CMA staff better understand Indigenous issues within the region. Cultural site information collected by the crew was made available to Aboriginal Affairs Victoria for inclusion on the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register.

In 2015 the Barapa Culture Team also won the Victorian Indigenous Land Management Award.

### DEP assists financial, physical and mental recovery

Dairy farmers Colin and Bev Domasche from Kerang were on track for a stable financial future until the millennium drought threatened their livelihood. Further dry conditions in 2015 took them to the edge. The 2016-17 DEP program arrived just in time.

According to Colin and Bev the DEP has been valuable both financially and mentally.

"We would have been alright if the milk prices didn't go down. But the drought came and the water sort of fizzled out, we couldn't afford it. We were getting 18 cents per litre and we had to get 21 cents per litre to break even, so we were just going backwards. When I saw this in the paper, we jumped on it and it really helped us," Colin said.



A DEP crew member injecting wheel cactus at Buckrabanyule in 2017.

*We worked hard over the years, and with the drought, we hadn't yet recovered properly. It will take some years to recover financially, physically and mentally.*

The program offered off-farm paid employment and involved works such as tree planting, fencing, spraying weeds, rubbish removal and pest control. Like most crew members, Bev and Colin said the program helped them to connect with other people who were also in difficult financial circumstances.

"As well as attending to farm work I was also working at the piggery to make ends meet and that was really tiring work. We worked hard over the years, and with the drought, we hadn't yet recovered properly. It will take some years to recover financially, physically and mentally. The program really helped us with having to get up each morning. We met a lot of people like us, in the same boat," Colin said.

According to Bev the program also enhanced her and Colin's appreciation of the natural surroundings.

"We can see the difference in what we are doing, particularly at the lakes and in the Gunbower Forest. We probably didn't appreciate the environment in the past but when you're involved in something like the DEP you do look around and say, 'well that is beautiful' and take care of it."

**Tess Grieves is Regional Landcare Coordinator at North Central CMA. Tracey Harbridge is the Drought Employment Program Project Officer at North Central CMA. The North Central and Goulburn Broken CMAs are running DEP in 2020. For more information go to [www.nccma.vic.gov.au](http://www.nccma.vic.gov.au)**

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*On day three my neighbour commented on how lucky we were – to be sitting around together sharing stories, having a whinge and a laugh.*

”



Landholders revegetating bushfire affected private land at Clarendon as part of the Scotsburn Phoenix Project in 2018.



From left, landholder David Wells discusses fire recovery with Neil James from DELWP at a community get together at Scotsburn Hall organised by the Upper Williamson's Creek Landcare Group on Christmas eve 2015.

## Leigh Catchment Group shares its

**On Saturday 19 December 2015 a major bushfire burnt out 4570 hectares of the Scotsburn area and severely affected the community, assets and the natural environment.**

**Compared to the summer 2019/20 fires ours was short, sharp and quickly contained, but every disaster is personal and traumatic to those in the front line.**

As the fifth anniversary approaches the fire is still impacting our lives – although some of it is for the better.

In the days immediately after the fire, my family, some neighbours and friends, formed a small fire crew to take care of the mop up process. At the end of each day one of us would host the evening meal – sharing our food resources to feed all of the tired and grubby crew.

On day three my neighbour commented on how lucky we were – to be sitting around together sharing stories, having a whinge and a laugh. It occurred to us that even more people could benefit from this sense of connection. In the next two days a team of us from Upper Williamson's Creek Landcare Group had sourced donations from local businesses,

harnessed helpers from the community, support workers, agencies and the council and put a call out for a community get together on Christmas eve at the local hall. Approximately 100 people attended, and the emotion was palpable.

We continued these events on a monthly basis. A team of community, Landcare and agency staff was formed with support from the State Government and Moorabool Shire Council to manage the events and other recovery initiatives.

Our next priority was the recovery of the natural environment. Many of our Landcare projects had been destroyed, with waterways spoiled. As Chair of the Leigh Catchment Group (LCG) – a network of eight Landcare groups in the Ballarat area –





An emotional community get together on Christmas eve 2015 – just six days after the fire.

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*Landcare is community. A community knows itself. Support offered by friends and neighbours is more likely to be accepted by traumatised fellow community members.*

”

## Lessons from the Scotsburn fire

By Andrea Mason

I sought advice from the wider Landcare community. Landcare staff from the Goulburn Broken CMA region supported us by sharing information and resources that helped us step up to the challenge of the disaster.

I represented our community on two regional fire recovery sub committees. This enabled me to influence the delivery of the agency outreach operations and communicate community priorities around losses to vegetation, existing Landcare plantings and opportunities to undertake significant recovery actions into the overall Scotsburn Response Plan. This proved critical to our recovery outcome.

During this time we were also working with the Corangamite CMA and DELWP on an action plan to restore and revegetate bushfire affected private land. In 2016 this plan became the Scotsburn Phoenix Project to be delivered by the LCG with State Government funding.

The project supported landholders to undertake works including environmental assessments, revegetation of indigenous plants, weed spraying, rabbit control, fencing of environmental features, protecting remnant vegetation, erosion control and pasture redevelopment.

Four years on, the Scotsburn Phoenix Project is drawing to a close, with many successful projects completed. The bimonthly community get togethers are now an ongoing event. They demonstrate that we are closer and stronger after the fire than before.

Landcare can be critical in emergency recovery, for the following reasons:

- Landcare is active. Landcare networks and groups can be the most relevant, resourced and operational community group within the fire zone. When some of our members were directly affected by the fire other members stepped in quickly to support them.
- Landcare is community. A community knows itself. Support offered by friends and neighbours is more likely to be accepted by traumatised fellow community members.
- Landcare is local. We have a clear understanding of the impact on the natural environment in our local area. With the Scotsburn fire, it was Landcare that raised concerns about the impact on native bushland and Landcare projects on private land which were not being considered under the emergency management plans.

- Landcare is established. Landcare groups can offer a point of contact for the local municipality that leads the recovery processes.
- Landcare is a buffer. Landcare can help streamline and coordinate the extension activities of agencies. Traumatized community members can be overwhelmed when dealing with numerous agency staff and requests. We coordinated joint property visits to reduce the number of interactions.
- Landcare is a broker. Landcare can be a conduit for discussions by providing safe community events where agency staff can attend to field questions from community members.

**Andrea Mason is a long-standing Landcarer and former Landcare facilitator. She has undertaken numerous local, regional and statewide roles in Landcare and is the current Chair of Australian Landcare International. For more information email [andrea.mason@findingnorth.net.au](mailto:andrea.mason@findingnorth.net.au)**

# Collaboration the key to network response in the South West

By Geoff Rollinson



**On St Patrick's Day (17 March) 2018 four major fires in Terang, Gazette, Garvoc and Camperdown burnt more than 24,000 hectares of Victoria's South West. The fires primarily affected farmers with more than 90 per cent of the fire footprint on private land.**

According to the *2018 South West Fires Community Report*, the fires destroyed 26 residences, 66 outbuildings and nearly 3000 livestock. Fortunately, there were no human deaths or serious injuries. In the hours and days immediately following the fires there was a sense of chaos and disorder that was also felt at Heytesbury District Landcare Network.

The CFA, Victoria Police and other government agencies including DELWP, the CMAs, Environment Protection Authority, Parks Victoria and Forest Fire Management Victoria all have defined roles in the response and recovery phases of a fire event. This is not the case with community-based Landcare groups and networks. Each network responds in an entirely different manner as there is no script or policy that applies for Landcare in a post-fire period.

## **Each fire emergency is unique**

Some of us at the Heytesbury District Landcare Network have had direct experience with fighting fires, including

as CFA volunteers or Parks Victoria employees. For others it was their first fire. Irrespective of experience, each fire emergency triggers a set of responses that are unique to the setting and circumstances that exist at the time. What is common with all fire events is they draw attention to the crisis at hand and business-as-usual activities recede into the background.

Our first response as a network was to venture into the landscape to see how landholders were impacted and to make calls to check in on people. We encountered a devastated landscape. Seeing people pick through the remains of their burnt-out properties was tragic to behold.

Downed electricity poles were still smouldering days later and in the absence of boundary fencing stock were wandering freely across roads and from paddock to paddock. Three days after the fire struck various agencies had already attended many properties to deal with stock that were beyond saving and BlazeAid had

established a centre at Cobden to install fencing.

Several Landcare staff in our region have had recent experience with fire-affected communities. Nick McKinley was involved in the Leigh Catchment Group's response to the 2015 Scotsburn fires and Libby Riches was involved with the Southern Otway Landcare Network during and after the 2015 Wye River-Jamieson Track fire. We called Nick and Libby to ask how we could respond to the fires as effectively as possible. Further discussions with John Robinson (see John's article on pages 8–11 about his experience after the 2014 Mickleham fires), Ross Martin from DELWP and Nerissa Lovric from Agriculture Victoria led us to the idea of applying the collaborative model adopted by our network for projects.

We learned from our enquiries that the recovery effort post-fire can be complex depending upon the varying capacity of land managers to engage in the process of restoring the landscape.



*The peat fires at Lake Cobrico burnt and smouldered for weeks.*





Staff from Deakin University and other volunteers working at the ReGreen4FireAid event at Lake Cobrico..

## Heytesbury Landcare Network leads collaborative approach

In the weeks after the fire the sense of chaos and uncertainty in the farming community and townships increased. Stories were emerging of distressed, fire-impacted landholders encountering up to 10 phone calls or visits in one day in the response and recovery effort.

The network offered to take the lead in a more collaborative approach – encouraging providers to work across organisational and geographic boundaries for the benefits of landholders. We invited government agencies to join us in multi-purpose team site visits. This model led to some fantastic outcomes, including securing funding

through the CFA's Safer Together program to run a series of workshops, community gatherings and planning sessions for the mutual benefit of fire impacted landholders and others in the community.

The Corangamite CMA partnered with us to deliver riparian fire recovery projects and we secured significant support from DELWP's Community and Volunteer Action Grants and emergency funding for on-ground works through a Victorian State Government Treasurer's Advance.

Landcare was also represented on the DELWP-led Natural and Built Environment Recovery Pillar, the appointed multi-agency group coordinating the natural resource management aspect of the fire recovery effort. We reported in on our on-ground activities alongside local and state government agencies.

### Community shines

A dedicated Fire Recovery Officer role was created at the Heytesbury District Landcare Network, leading to the employment of Paul Hartrick. Our other staff members Lyndell Driscoll and Jeremy Pike pitched in to assist with community activities. Everyone involved in the network has been heartened by the extraordinary capacity of people to work together in a crisis.

Barbara Cowley was one of a number of landholders adjacent to the peat fire at Lake Cobrico near Cobden who were evacuated for several weeks due to the threat of carbon monoxide poisoning and the inhalation of small particulate matter.



Exposed water in the peat swamp shows the extent of the fire damage at Lake Cobrico.

Despite this Barb was instrumental in setting up a donation system through the Uniting Church to receive contributions for those affected by the fires.

The network-led collaborative team met with other landholders bordering the peat swamp and were able to achieve a swifter result for them in responding to the fire impacts.

The community-based ReGreen4FireAid group, including more than 90 staff from Deakin University's Warrnambool campus, held a working bee on the farm of John and Joy Errey at Lake Cobrico seven months after the fire struck. The group planted trees, built fences and put together fire donation kits for other landholders. It was a great example of a community working together.

**Geoff Rollinson is Landcare Coordinator at Heytesbury District Landcare Network. For more information email [geoff@heytesburylandcare.org.au](mailto:geoff@heytesburylandcare.org.au)**



Geoff Rollinson (right) and volunteers at the ReGreen4FireAid event at John and Joy Errey's farm at Lake Cobrico in October 2018.





Volunteers watch a demonstration on the construction of an electric fence to exclude deer from lyrebird habitat at Garfield North.

## Deer fence protects biodiversity after Bunyip fire

By Gerard and Pam Cunningham

In 2018 members of the Cannibal Creek Catchment Landcare Group (CCCLG) visited Alan and Angela Forte's property at Garfield North. Lyrebird expert Alex Maisey gave a talk on lyrebird breeding cycles, calls and habitat. This was followed by a walk up a fern gully to see lyrebird habitat and nesting sites.



An endangered butterfly orchid (*Sarcophilus australis*) flowering after the fire.

When we arrived at the site we discovered that the habitat had been largely destroyed by fallow and sambar deer that had created wallows, browsed and trampled the vegetation. There were no intact nests and no leaf or stick litter essential for nest building. Then, in March 2019, the Bunyip fire burnt almost all of the bush on the property, only a small area of the fern gully surrounded by granite boulders escaped the flames.

The idea of building a fence to protect the site from deer was raised in discussions on how to best use funds donated through the community bushfire appeal coordinated by the Bendigo Bank. Alan and Angela Forte were keen to proceed with the project. Geoff Lockwood, project manager for the Cannibal Creek Catchment Biodiversity Project, helped with the application for funds.

### Electric deer fence on steep terrain

The funding application was successful and they were also able to get support from the Gallagher Group Limited for materials and advice on the best option for the site – a new type of electric fence. A route for the fence was planned by the landholders and Geoff Lockwood using GPS coordinates. The project kept increasing in size due to the difficulty of the terrain. Fortunately, neighbours Peter and Lyn Link were happy to allow the fence to deviate into their property. The exclusion area eventually covered close to three hectares.

Prior to the construction of the fence the Forte's had to remove a number of fallen trees to allow a clear line of sight. By December 2019 we were ready for a fence construction working bee. Members of CCCLG plus a group of younger people from Intrepid Landcare, Windana, and St Vincent de Paul Pakenham attended.



A number of fencing contractors came along to help, while also learning to construct the new electric fence. Our Facebook page also brought people from Upper Beaconsfield and Melbourne Water.

Building the first section of the fence was time consuming due to the steep terrain and the inexperience of some of the helpers, but it was a great day for learning and friendship. We walked down to the unburnt section of the gully and were delighted to see that several rare butterfly orchids (*Sarcophilus australis*) were flowering.

### Protecting biodiversity benefits whole community

As the size of the fence kept extending we exhausted all of our bushfire recovery funds before it was completed. The Cannibal Creek Catchment Biodiversity Project was able to allocate some funds from its DELWP Biodiversity Response Planning project and many costs were met by Alan and Angela Forte to make sure the fence could finally be finished.

We wait to see if the biodiversity of the site with its lyrebirds, ferns and endangered orchids will return to its former glory now that deer are excluded. The whole community will benefit from the improved biodiversity at this site. We thank Alan and Angela Forte and all of our hardworking members for their commitment to a healthier future for this valuable landscape.

*Gerard Cunningham is President and Pam Cunningham is Secretary of the CCLCG. For more information email [cannibalcreeklancare@gmail.com](mailto:cannibalcreeklancare@gmail.com)*



*A section of the deer exclusion fence constructed around the fern gully.*



*Tom Croft tackles some Landcare work at home in March 2020.*

## Tom Croft's farewell to Landcare

**It's time for me to retire. I've seen many changes in my 25 years of Landcare in the North East. For the past 18 years I have been the Regional Landcare Coordinator with the North East CMA.**

It has been a privilege to work with so many passionate and committed people in the natural resource management sector, particularly Landcarers who put so much volunteer time into their community and environment.

I have watched Landcare move from being a great idea in Victoria to a national program, a recognised environmental ethic and ultimately a global movement. Landcare has been a consistent educator, sharing knowledge broadly all this time.

What started as a way for farmers to protect soils, increase shade, shelter and productivity has expanded to include biodiversity, schools, lifestyle, coastal and urban communities, sustainability, equine groups, Intrepid Landcare, Friends groups and much more.

However, in many ways Landcare hasn't changed. Groups have always been a collection of committed local people working together to address important issues. This remains the core basis and greatest strength of Landcare.

My only criticism of Landcare groups has been the tendency to not tell their story, or completely undersell their achievements. This is thankfully changing with increasing use of social media, but more is always needed.

I may be retiring from the CMA but doubt I will be retiring from Landcare activity. Thank you to everyone I have worked for and with. I have learnt so much and hope to be able to continue to share some of this. It has been a privilege and a pleasure.

# Landmate prisoners provide valuable support to landholders

By Andrea Mitchell

**Prisoners from the Landmate Environment Program have supported local farmers for many years. Crews of up to nine prisoners have been specifically trained to provide recovery works and restore the environment after natural disasters.**

Neil Marriott from Black Range Landcare Group near Great Western called on the Landmate crew from Ararat Prison after his property was impacted by bushfire in 2005.

The fire started on the morning of 31 December 2005 at nearby Deep Lead. Neil and his wife Wendy's two children were visiting for Christmas. They spent the day practising their drills and teaching them how to prepare for a bushfire, filling tanks, testing sprinklers and fuelling up the generator. Neil and Wendy were confident that the north wind would send the fire past the whole Black Range, so they settled down to their New Year's Eve dinner.

"We were sitting down to relax when the wind suddenly turned to the south west and the fire front, which had been a narrow finger heading well to our west, immediately widened. We were shocked to see a massive glow crowning the top of the Black Range," Neil said.

Within minutes the whole property was igniting as spot fires began in all directions. The family of four spent the night fighting to save the house, nursery and sheds. The CFA were busy building firebreaks to protect Stawell. They arrived to assist at 1am and by 4am the fire front had passed.

Neil explains that while the house was saved all of the rabbit-proof boundary fencing which spanned several kilometres was destroyed along with most of the gardens which were used for seeds and cuttings for the nursery, as well as a thriving cut flower plantation.

"Worst of all for the wildlife was the loss of all our big old hollow trees; these were used extensively by a host of birds, possums and sugar gliders. As the property recovered, green shoots were rapidly eaten out by incursions of rabbits. It was essential to rebuild the fencing as soon as possible. This was years before BlazeAid so we waited in limbo for the insurance assessors to come and make decisions," Neil said.

Neil and Wendy have a conservation covenant on the property. They were supported by Trust for Nature, Greening Australia and Project Platypus. The Northern Grampians Shire Recovery and Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water were also helpful.

"It's a bit of a blur who did what. We were supplied with nest boxes by the Nhill Men's Shed and the Hopkins Correctional Centre Landmate program crews from Ararat removed and rolled up the kilometres of fencing and wire damaged in the fire. The burnt out and fallen trees along the boundary were also piled up ready for winter burning. It would have been months of work for us.

"Within weeks our neighbour had helped with the installation of new corner and strainer posts, and then the Landmate crew erected brand new rabbit-proof fencing. It took a while, but I truly don't know how

we could've got back on our feet without the mighty help of the wonderful Landmate crews," Neil said.

Terry and Annette May from Jallukar Landcare Group also had a positive experience with Landmate after the 2006 Mt Lubra fire burnt 90 per cent of their property with the loss of many kilometres of fencing.

"Landmate became an important cog in cleaning up damaged fences and building new ones. They were here for many days over the next couple of years. We found them efficient and excellent workers with a good work ethic. They gave us inspiration to keep going and to rebuild," Terry said.

**Andrea Mitchell is Local Landcare Facilitator at Project Platypus. Andrea's position is funded through the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program. For more information email [LLF@platypus.org.au](mailto:LLF@platypus.org.au)**



A burnt fence post on the property Teran Park at Jallukar after the 2006 Mt Lubra fires shows the severity of the fire damage. Landmate crews have experience at both removing and re-installing fences after fire.



# Northern Bendigo Landcare Group loses years of planting in Huntly fire

By Aldo Penbrook



**For the last 10 years Northern Bendigo Landcare Group has been restoring the Creekline Grassy Woodland habitat within Huntly Streamside Reserve, just north of Bendigo.**

The group had worked hard undertaking extensive weed control, rabbit warren surveying, revegetation, nest box installation and monitoring flora and fauna.

The site had been a major focus for awareness, education and community collaboration. We had provided many environmental educational opportunities for local primary schools, produced brochures and held community events to raise awareness of the many values of this riparian corridor.

Over time we were seeing good results. Ecological connectivity along the Bendigo Creek had improved and close liaison with Parks Victoria was seeing positive low impact use of the site by the local community.

On the afternoon of Saturday 4 January 2020, a watch and act bushfire emergency warning was issued for the reserve. A fire had started near a power pole and fanned by strong winds it was tearing through the group's planting sites. Thanks to an outstanding response from emergency services the fire was contained quite quickly without loss of life or property.

Unfortunately, several thousand of our young plants were lost including their corflute guards and stakes and a number of nestboxes. The planting represented three years of community effort.

A few weeks later when conditions were safe group members rallied together with Parks Victoria staff to clean up the melted tree guards. We were confronted with a bare, blackened, scorched earth. Every seedling was brown and shrivelled – completely dead. It was very upsetting, especially as many of the grasses, shrubs and trees had been planted by the community on National Tree Day last July and at a Trees for Mum event in May 2019.

The good news was that some of our nestboxes in the mature trees had survived even though the entire tree had been scorched. A small patch of early planting had also survived as it was located close to where the fire began where the fire was less intense. Dead spiny rush that had been sprayed eight months earlier was also completely burnt which removed rabbit harbour.

After assessing the damage, we started to plan for the future. In the months before the fire the group had fenced some rabbit exclusion plots and kept them weed free by spraying. The fire burnt around these plots and we will now direct seed them as the first step in habitat recovery. Weeds in the burnt area will be monitored over the coming months and we will spray any spiny rush that regenerates. Nestboxes will also be monitored to assess the recovery of wildlife after the fire.



*Northern Bendigo Landcare Group volunteers worked with Parks Victoria staff on clean up after the fire.*

The group will continue its replanting in collaboration with Parks Victoria and we will work with Huntly Fire Brigade to carefully assess how we can move forward in a way that enhances habitat values along Bendigo Creek while minimising the risk of fire.

**Aldo Penbrook is a member of the Northern Bendigo Landcare Group. For more information email [aldopenbrook2@gmail.com](mailto:aldopenbrook2@gmail.com)**



*One of the small areas of planting that survived the Huntly Streamside Reserve fire in early January 2020.*

*The good news was that some of our nestboxes in the mature trees had survived even though the entire tree had been scorched.*

# Around the State – News from the Regional



Sean Hunter from Wurundjeri Narrap Team leads a walk discussing Traditional Owner aspirations at a Wurundjeri owned property in Healesville in January 2020.



Landcare at home involved propagating some native plants for my garden – Tess Grieves.

## Aboriginal Landcare Facilitator

Members of the Mt Toolebewong & District Landcare Group (MT&DLG) and the Wurundjeri Narrap Team were reconnected after an on-Country meeting in January. Karen Garth from the Landcare group hosted the meeting. Narrap Team manager Sean Hunter then led a tour of a Healesville property that was recently returned to its Wurundjeri Traditional Owners.

Representatives from Yarra Ranges Landcare Network and the Port Phillip and Westernport CMA also attended. The meeting was a great way to find common ground and discuss future projects. I encourage more groups and networks to take the initiative and talk Landcare on Country.

Wurundjeri are now members of MT&DLG and have committed to working together to care for Country.

For more information email [jackson.chatfield@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:jackson.chatfield@delwp.vic.gov.au) or call Jackson on 0419 504 451.

## North Central

It's been a very challenging time for Landcare. Groups have respected social distancing but still managed to remain active in the region through coordinating bulk tubestock purchases, private property plant outs, online planning sessions, camera monitoring and data entry and mapping their previous project work. It's a good time to think of innovative ways we can keep our communities, wildlife and environment healthy during this time.

For more information visit [www.nccma.vic.gov.au](http://www.nccma.vic.gov.au) (Landcare) or contact Tess Grieves on 0438 357 874.

## Corangamite

The Corangamite Rural Women's Network gathered together at Mount Elephant on 12 March to share their stories and celebrate International Women's Day. The network is supported by the Regional Agricultural Landcare Facilitator and the National Landcare Program.

The Upper Barwon Landcare Network held a facilitated workshop with its members to collaborate on their shared vision for the future and develop a new strategic action plan.

The CMA has developed a sustainable agriculture future directions paper to inform planning for future investment in sustainable agriculture in the region. Friends of the Barwon was established

recently with the aim of restoring and protecting the health of the Barwon River and its tributaries.

For more information visit [www.ccma.vic.gov.au](http://www.ccma.vic.gov.au) (Get involved/Landcare) or contact Elisia Dowling on 0418 397 521.

## East Gippsland



Here I am doing some Landcare at home! My family has been working for the past seven years to restore the landscape of our Fernbank property to create a sustainable farm – Carolyn Cameron.

For more information visit [www.egcma.com.au](http://www.egcma.com.au) (What we do/Landcare) or contact Carolyn Cameron on 5150 3682.

## Glenelg Hopkins



It's been great to see our Landcare facilitators and members improving their IT skills to keep the communication channels open as we work from home – the animals love it too! – Tony Lithgow.

For more information visit [www.ghcma.vic.gov.au](http://www.ghcma.vic.gov.au) (Get involved/Landcare) or contact Tony Lithgow on 0418 180 996.

## Goulburn Broken

Landcare has been turned upside down over the past few months with drought, fire and now COVID-19. It is amazing to see how local communities continue to evolve and demonstrate resilience.



# Landcare Coordinators

Landcare has always been about face to face social interactions and community gatherings but now we have had to find another way. The CMA is using Microsoft Teams to hold meetings, deliver training and share information. Much of our Victorian Landcare Grant delivery has been put on hold. Family priorities and the age of many of our members has driven this decision.

We are all learning to deal with this new socially distanced environment and many of us are gaining new skills. Electronic meeting might be the way of the future, although personally I'm looking forward to the time we can all get together again over a cup of tea.

**For more information visit [www.gbcma.vic.gov.au](http://www.gbcma.vic.gov.au) (Community natural resource management) or contact Tony Kubeil on 0408 597 213.**

## Mallee

Landcare in the Victorian Mallee is taking the opportunity to do things a little differently.

Mallee Landcare facilitators have recently completed a successful training program on written communication and project management. The program was delivered by video conferencing. This has broadened the IT skills of our Landcare facilitators and helped us to better articulate the value of our projects when applying for grants.

Online governance training was undertaken in May 2020 and was available for executive members of the broader Landcare community.

**For more information visit [www.malleecma.vic.gov.au](http://www.malleecma.vic.gov.au) or contact Nelson Burand-Hicks on 0427 540 468.**

## North East

In spite of the interruptions from COVID-19 some Landcare activity continues in the region. The Upper Murray Landcare Network has been assessing the needs of landholders affected by fire in their area and applying for a range of funding programs to deliver recovery works.

Landcare facilitators have been training for and testing a major update to the Landcare Work Health and Safety system developed by the CMA. The CMA also hosted a series of Mental Health First Aid Virtual Training sessions for Landcare employees and committees.

The region farewells coordinator Tom Croft in early July when he retires from the CMA after 18 years (see page 23). Richard Dalkin has commenced as Tom's replacement.

**For more information visit [www.necma.vic.gov.au](http://www.necma.vic.gov.au) (Landcare & community groups) or contact Richard Dalkin on 0409 683 467.**

## West Gippsland

As all the normal rhythms of Landcare have been disrupted our groups and networks are adapting to new ways to do Landcare in the region. Several groups have moved their community meetings to online forums, utilising Zoom and Google hangouts. It's been a good way to check up and see if anyone needs a hand. Many have also been busy on social media.

Bass Coast Landcare Network created short videos capturing stories of what their staff were up to during the working from home period. Many events have been cancelled, but several networks such as the South Gippsland Landcare Network moved their events online using webinars and training videos.



*A Zoom meeting with Landcare staff assisted by my daughter Maggie – Kathleen Brack.*

**For more information visit [wgcm.vic.gov.au](http://wgcm.vic.gov.au) (Getting involved/Landcare) or contact Kathleen Brack on 0428 619 671.**

## Port Phillip and Western Port

The Nillumbik Landcare Network signed a partnership agreement with the CMA in February. The agreement is a shared commitment to further the work of achieving environmental outcomes in their region. The CMA is seeking to enter into partnership agreements with all networks in the region.

A new look Landcare Report Card for the region for 2018/19 has been produced. The report card highlights the work of Landcare groups, networks, environmental friends and other non-Landcare groups, as well as documenting Indigenous

engagement and return on investment figures for Landcare in the region.

The use of case studies draws a more detailed picture of the real impact of environmental volunteering in the region. Thanks to DELWP for its work mapping non-Landcare groups in the region through its Victorians Volunteering for Nature process.

The CMA hopes to reschedule several cancelled events due to COVID-19 and variations are being put in place for the delivery of Victorian Landcare Grants projects.



*The Campaspe River – close to my new home office at Kyneton – Barry Kennedy.*

**For more information visit [www.ppwcma.vic.gov.au](http://www.ppwcma.vic.gov.au) (What we do/Landcare support) or contact Barry Kennedy on 0447 821 559.**

## Wimmera

Junior Landcarers in the Wimmera enjoyed getting close to Chris Humfrey's wild action zoo during the annual Horsham Fishing Competition on 8 March. A photography competition with local kids submitting a picture of themselves in the environment was popular in the lead up to the day, with the winning family getting a private meet and greet with Chris and his animals.

All scheduled community events have been cancelled or postponed until further notice, but we are looking at ways of using technology to keep working and share information and ideas.

Ray Zippel is retiring in June after many years working in Landcare in the region. Most recently Ray was the Regional Agriculture Landcare Facilitator. He is well known in the Landcare movement right across the state. We thank Ray for his immense contribution and wish him well relaxing on his beautiful northern Grampians farm.

**For more information visit [www.wcma.vic.gov.au](http://www.wcma.vic.gov.au) (Get involved/Landcare) or contact Joel Boyd on 0429 949 196.**

# In brief

## Volunteering Naturally 2020 – be counted!

Last year DELWP collected and collated data about active environmental volunteer groups in Victoria for the *Volunteering Naturally 2019* report. The report included a geographic location, and where possible, the number of volunteers and/or volunteer hours contributed over the 2018/19 financial year. Our aim was to showcase the amount of work undertaken by environmental volunteers across our state. The 2019 statistics captured data from 60 per cent of Victoria's groups.

The results revealed 2100 groups with 134,244 volunteers gave more than 1.5 million hours of time, which adds up to an economic contribution of more than \$50 million.

We know that the 2019 numbers were an underestimate. For the 2020 report we are seeking to obtain data from as many groups as possible so we can improve our understanding of the wonderful work that is being done.

Groups that complete the Victorian Landcare Program 2019/20 Group



Health Survey will automatically have their information included in *Volunteering Naturally 2020*. A short survey to obtain the following information will be available for all groups in early July:

- Name and location of group
- Number of active volunteers for the 2019-2020 financial year
- Number of hours contributed for the 2019-2020 financial year
- Current facebook/website contact details to assist people wanting to join.

Data is required by Friday 31 July 2020.

The *Volunteering Naturally 2020* report will be available in September 2020.

Please contact us at [environmental.volunteering@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:environmental.volunteering@delwp.vic.gov.au) to ensure you get a copy of the survey.

## Early Invader Update – weed management after fire

In February 2020, the DELWP Weeds at the Early Stage of Invasion team produced a bonus issue of the *Early Invader Update* on weed management after fire. The update includes information on the influence of fire on weeds, and weeds on fire and the benefits of fire for weed management. There are also tips to reduce weed spread after fire, and links to useful weeds and fire resources from Australia and overseas.

The update is available from [www.environment.vic.gov.au/invasive-plants-and-animals/early-invaders](http://www.environment.vic.gov.au/invasive-plants-and-animals/early-invaders) (then early invader update).

To subscribe to the *Early Invader Updates* newsletter email [bianca.gold@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:bianca.gold@delwp.vic.gov.au) with the subject heading, subscribe to early invader newsletter.

## Next issue

The next issue of the magazine, to be published in Spring 2020, will feature stories on roadsides, rail reserves and walking trails.

We are interested in how Landcare and environmental volunteer groups and networks are managing roadsides in their areas and planning, constructing and maintaining linear reserves and walking trails. Our readers are keen to learn about the success of different projects, as well as what hasn't worked, and the insights and reflections of your group or network along the way.

The magazine fills up with stories very quickly so please get in touch with the editor well before the copy deadline.

Contributions for the Spring 2020 issue should be sent to the editor by 17 July 2020.

Email: [editorviclandcare@gmail.com](mailto:editorviclandcare@gmail.com)

The *Victorian Landcare & Catchment Management* magazine is published by the Victorian Government Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and distributed in partnership with Landcare Victoria Incorporated and the Victorian Catchment Management Council. The magazine aims to raise awareness of Landcare and natural resource management among Victorian farmers, landholders, the Victorian Landcare community and the wider community.



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