

VICTORIAN

LANDCARE

Winter 10 Issue 49

& CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT



BUSHFIRE RECOVERY FEATURE

Long-range approach to soil conservation

Shelterbelts for fire protection

Landcare connects community in Christmas Hills



Victorian Landcare and Catchment Management

WINTER 10 ISSUE 49

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Most of the physical work of moving the large rice bales was done by hand.

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Care needs to be taken when importing feed for stock after a fire to avoid introducing weeds.

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Linda Minter, secretary of the Boolarra South Landcare Group, meets a wombat in Jean Quick's care.

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Cover photograph

Wildflowers like this Early Nancy (*Wurmbea dioica*) spotted by Michael Williams are quick to return after fire.

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From the Minister

This issue of the magazine features a range of stories about bushfire recovery, giving us a chance to honour the resilience and connections of the Victorian community while highlighting the vital role Landcare plays in bushfire recovery throughout the state.

Learning about how different Landcare groups have responded to the effects of the 2009 fires has increased my respect and admiration for the work and support members provide to the community – even during personally challenging times.

Examples of support include the work of the Christmas Hills Landcare Group, who responded quickly and effectively to the situation and provided members with a place to talk about their experiences, acted as a referral agent for wider support programs and ran activities demonstrating how the natural environment was recovering. Their work is a credit to the group's members and a testament to the social benefit of Landcare.

Bullengarook Landcare Group and the Devilbend Landcare Group are also leading by example with their proactive approach to fire management in their areas. They have started conversations involving group members and local agencies to help strengthen communication channels and links in the community. When things get tough, knowing who your neighbours are and what kind of help they need or can give is invaluable.

Congratulations are due to the Victorian winners of the National Landcare Awards, held at Parliament House in Canberra on 24 June 2010. The Warrnambool Coastcare Landcare Group and the Point Danger Committee of Management won the Australian Government Coastcare Award. The team who collected the award paid tribute to John Amor from DSE who died suddenly earlier this year. John was the Coast Action/Coastcare

Facilitator at Warrnambool and a passionate supporter of the two groups. The Friends of Westgate Park won the Urban Landcare Award.

The ceremony celebrated 20 years of community environmental volunteering in Australia with 88 individual and group projects in the running for the prestigious National Awards.

I hope to spend more time with Landcare groups throughout Victoria, getting to see first-hand the results of your hard work and dedication while discussing the issues affecting you.

Gavin Jennings, Minister for Environment and Climate Change MLC



Don McTaggart, Kate McInnes, John Sutherland, Kristie King, Chris Drummond and David Williams from the Warrnambool Coastcare Landcare Group and the Point Danger Committee of Management display the Australian Government Coastcare Award.



Tony Flude and Naomie Sunner accepted the Urban Landcare Award on behalf of the Friends of Westgate Park.

Strathewen – a community forged by fire



O'Dea's Road 2008.



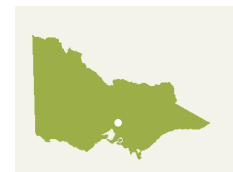
O'Dea's Road 2009.



O'Dea's Road 2010.

Blackberries are the major weed problem in Strathewen. The Strathewen Landcare Group runs a roadside weed control program in conjunction with Nillumbik Shire Council.

By
Bronwyn
South



Ten members of the Strathewen Landcare Group died on Black Saturday, as well as three other residents who were involved in the group at different times over the last 20 years. The loss of these people and the contribution they made to our community and the environment will always be remembered.

Strathewen Landcare Group is the second oldest Landcare group in the Nillumbik Shire. Its area covers the catchment of Upper Arthurs Creek. We have around 48 members and they represent all types of landholdings – primary production, environmental and rural lifestyle. As a peri-urban community most of our members are busy working on their own land with little time for communal Landcare activities. The emphasis of the group has been on grants, supporting agencies working in the catchment and disseminating the huge amount of information available to assist in land management.

The Black Saturday bushfires of 2009 left the Kinglake National Park on our western boundary and destroyed almost 80 percent of our Landcare area. Within the line of the fire the devastation was almost complete. The loss of life and destruction of homes were the worst in the state. The first priority after the fire was the safety of the area for the residents. Roads were cleared, electricity and phone lines restored and the coroner and other experts gathered information.



Strathewen Landcare Group members take great comfort from walking and talking about the devastation and recovery on their properties.

Many groups and individuals were quick to ask how they could help, but the community's needs were difficult to quantify. We needed time to grieve and reconnect with each other, confidence, companionship, information, material assistance, physical support and equipment. Time passed as we worked through these issues and it was soon apparent that our environment was recovering much faster than we were.

Group assists council

As Landcare was the only associated group in Strathewen whose books weren't destroyed, our first funding application was for BBQs and chairs so the community could be together and host visits from others. In the immediate aftermath of the fires the issues around land management and the environment were technically, physically and emotionally too severe for us to attempt to manage them from within the Strathewen community.

In late February 2009 the Landcare group was approached by Nillumbik Shire Council to assist with issues around the extremely emotive issue of tree clearing. The consultations resulted in the appointment of a senior consultant arborist. The use of arborists is still continuing and their presence in the community allows locals to stop and ask what works are being undertaken and, more importantly, why?

Other agencies also approached us with information and offers of support, in particular DPI, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria and the Port Phillip and Westernport CMA. Landcare group members responded generously when asked to host visiting politicians and natural resource management agency staff on their properties. This has been very valuable, not only in placing Strathewen on the map, but also giving visitors a chance to develop a realistic perspective on the challenges facing land managers after the bushfires.

In May 2009 the Nillumbik Natural Environment Recovery Working Group was formed. This group brings together the community recovery committees of Strathewen and St Andrews, with Landcare groups, NGOs and government agencies involved in bushfire recovery. It has been the focal point in delivering bushfire recovery assistance to landholders and the very high uptake of the support offered is an indication of the group's success.

Environment recovery plan charts the way forward

The Nillumbik Environment Recovery Plan is a major milestone for bushfire recovery. The plan examines our natural environment across private and public land. As a result of the plan we will be able to set formal priorities for the first time. The plan will also allow us to demonstrate the public benefit in works done on private land.

In the immediate aftermath of the fires the issues around land management and the environment were technically, physically and emotionally too severe for us to attempt to manage them from within the Strathewen community.

For the executive of the Strathewen Landcare Group 2009 and 2010 have passed in a blur. We've held meetings, applied for grants, run property walks, hosted visiting politicians and others, purchased and maintained new equipment, co-ordinated volunteers, distributed plants and most importantly, kept the land management information flowing.

We've tried not to exceed our limited personal resources and have leant heavily on the support of the Natural Environment Recovery Working Group. We are also developing long-term relationships with other groups so we can call on their energy during the long recovery period ahead.

If the Landcare group is to have a future it is important that we maintain our capacity as a group. This is a challenge as we say farewell to many friends and neighbours who have found the realities of living in Strathewen too overwhelming. We've put together a new resident's information kit – it's a great excuse to drop in on new neighbours and welcome them to our remarkable community.

Bronwyn South is president of the Strathewen Landcare Group.

For further information email
enquiries@strathewenlandcare.org.au

Long-range approach needed for soil conservation

By Craig Turton

In February 2009 the Beechworth fire in north east Victoria burnt 12,446 hectares of private land. Landholders are still experiencing problems with soil erosion, flooding, and debris deposition from the fire and they are expected to continue for many years to come.

Most farms in the fire-affected area are adjacent to, or have boundaries with, catchments that are very steep and incised on erosive alluvial river gravels with a traditional groundcover of remnant vegetation. The high intensity burn during the fires has dramatically altered the hydrological characteristics of these areas.

The burning of vegetation and destruction of ground litter have removed the cover that protects the soil surface and acts to retain runoff. Under a catchment of eucalypt forest the canopy and groundcover act as a buffer to the effects of the rainfall event. The canopy and groundcover absorb and dissipate the energy of the rainfall. The groundcover slows runoff and promotes water infiltration into the soil and protects or armours the soil surface from being eroded by overland flow.

The removal of groundcover means that catchments affected by fire are going to experience significantly increased runoff, peak flows, flooding and erosion and deposition events. These events will continue over the next several years. Experience from the 2003 fires in the north east suggests that it will take around seven years before the vegetation recovers enough to return the rainfall-runoff relationship to a more normal regime.

The key message for private landholders in burnt catchments is to expect an ongoing increased frequency and intensity of flooding, soil erosion and sediment transport and deposition. Fences across drainage lines and dams in drainage lines will be affected.

Landholders need to plan for the fact that these events will continue to occur for some time. Careful consideration should be given to remediation works because of



Debris deposition and soil erosion caused by flash flooding in a fire-affected catchment.

the increased risk of flash flooding. In small catchments with relatively low peak flows, erosion control and prevention treatments have been used very successfully. In large

catchments at risk of high peak flows or flash flooding, the do-nothing option needs to be considered as any works will be at higher risk of being washed away.

Soil conservation in large catchments

- Think carefully about cleaning out farm dams which have been filled with sediment as there is still a high risk that a relatively small rainfall event will cause the dam to fill with sediment again. After the 2003 fires one farm dam was cleaned out seven times – both expensive and frustrating for the landholder.
- If a farm dam suffering from sedimentation is a strategic or key water supply, consider making alternative plans if the dam can't be protected by sediment traps or diversion.
- Construct flood gates or expendable fences in drainage lines where they are continually being washed away.
- Protect drainage lines from gully erosion by fencing to exclude livestock and revegetation to stabilise the banks.
- If physical works on waterways are planned your local CMA and Rural Water Authority may need to be consulted. For further advice contact your local DPI office.

Craig Turton works for DPI Integrated Land Management in Wangaratta.

Nesting boxes urgently needed

By Bridget Clarke

The huge loss of bush and gardens after the Black Saturday fires has meant much of the habitat needed to sustain small animals and birdlife has disappeared.

The Upper Goulburn Landcare Network (UGLN) is co-ordinating volunteers to replant many areas in the Shire of Murrindindi, but these seedlings will not be able to accommodate nests or provide feed or tree hollows for many years.

The UGLN is co-ordinating volunteers to make different varieties of timber nesting boxes in various sizes and with entry holes to suit particular occupants. The project is called Operation Coughing Parrot.

It can take 100 years for hollows to form in trees. As many birds and small animals need hollows to raise their young, it is important that where trees are not in a dangerous position they should be retained. Even dead trees can provide important habitat.

About 120 nest boxes have been installed. In Strath Creek, where they

have been monitored, birds and animals have been making good use of them.

More nest boxes are needed. If your group would like to become a saviour of a sugar glider family or perhaps a parrot or a squirrel glider, please volunteer. You'll be trained in what's needed,

supplied with tools and protective clothing and supervised by UGLN co-ordinators.

For further information please email ugrecovery@gbcm.vic.gov.au or call Chris Coburn on 5797 0104.



CPA Australia volunteers display their stack of painted nest boxes.

Vale Peter Huthwaite

By Kellie Nichols, Paul Speirs, Matthew Stephenson, Lisa Wangman and Roger Hardley

Landcare lost one of its leaders with the death of Peter Huthwaite in June. Peter was the Chairman of the Victorian Landcare Council, Vice Chair of the Bass Coast Landcare Network Board, Past President of Phillip Island Landcare Group and a Victorian representative to the National Landcare Network. He was dedicated to the Landcare movement, a good bloke, a mentor to many and a personal friend to us all.

Peter had an extensive history in Queensland agriculture, farm and property management and journalism; at one stage he was a rural reporter for Brisbane's *Courier Mail*. While Peter lived in the town of Cowes, he was heavily involved in rural and urban Landcare.

Peter loved his politics. On our behalf, he promoted Landcare ideals beyond the paddock, with the bureaucrats in Melbourne, Canberra and beyond.

He pioneered the concept of Parliamentary champions for Landcare, drawing from across the entire spectrum of politics.

In this day and age where everyone is busy and with no time to spare, Peter was always available. His daily drop-in to the office to offer his help or opinion was warmly welcomed. In fact he was hard to miss – decked out in his fluorescent lycra bike shorts and helmet! Peter helped the staff of the Network through some difficult times. They greatly appreciated his expert guidance and the knowledge he was out fighting for them.

Paul Speirs, Bass Coast Landcare Board member, spent time with Peter recently on one of the Network's three-day bus tours.

"Pete and I organised and helped roll out what we humbly proclaimed to be one of the most diverse tours we ever did. We toured, lived and got lost together. Pete was



Peter Huthwaite (left) and Barry Sibby at the International Landcare Conference in Melbourne in 2006.

always good company – at a sausage sizzle with a glass of red wine in his hand, or in a meeting room contributing his knowledge and skills. I feel very privileged to have shared some special time with him."

"Life is mostly froth and bubble. Two things stand like stone – kindness in another's trouble. Courage in your own." – Adam Lindsay Gordon

Bushfire and beyond: Minister Jennings reflects on the events of 2009

Victoria's Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Gavin Jennings, shares his experiences and thoughts about the 2009 bushfires.

Q. How important do you think Landcare is to community resilience?

For over 20 years, Landcarers have brought people together while making significant improvements to our environment. They've also often led the way in developing new ways of dealing with natural resource management challenges, such as bushfire recovery.

The reason for this is simple: Landcare is made up of wonderful people from all walks of life who are dedicated to protecting and preserving our unique environment. Their passion is driven by a personal connection to our landscape through their work, or their commitment to helping others. This makes them an important and crucial part of any community recovery process.

Q. What have been your personal experiences with Landcare as part of Victoria's fire recovery process?

Just after the 2009 bushfires, I visited several firegrounds to spend time meeting

Victorians who'd been personally affected by fires. I also spent time looking at post-recovery activities in areas such as Kinglake National Park, Marysville and Lake Mountain.

Each visit gave me a chance to meet some extraordinary people. And whether I spoke to them in their Landcarer role, or as someone rebuilding their home, I was constantly amazed at their resilience, courage and commitment to move on beyond this tragedy. I was also deeply moved by their ability to think of others, and their desire to help them out – even though their own lives may have been dramatically altered. Movements such as Landcare certainly drive this wonderful community resilience.

Q. Our Landcare groups have a lot of people out monitoring our environment. How do you see this role evolving as Victoria's climate changes, and communities try to adapt to change?

Already, Landcare groups are helping to inform our climate change adaptation through their knowledge of the environment and their on-ground experience as they plant, plan and respond to environmental changes on a daily basis. I see this role continuing, with Landcarers helping to ensure we tackle climate change in a sustainable and effective way.

Q. You've been involved with Landcare since it began, so how have you seen it evolve over time?

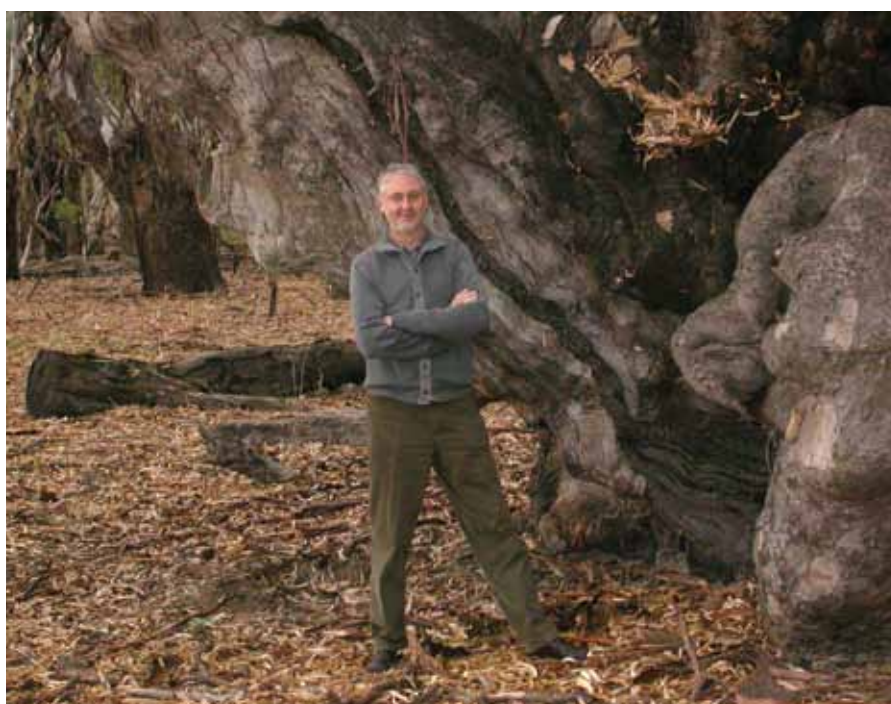
I've been lucky enough to have met many Landcarers over the years, and to watch this wonderful organisation grow from strength to strength. And while these groups may have expanded and spread across the state, there's been a core of determination and dedication that's remained unchanged – inspiring others to join in and lend a hand.

So I see Landcare as being part of the solution to our future challenges in natural resource management. And I'd like to continue to draw on the 'Landcare knowledge base', by working together to develop and implement the strategies we need to benefit our communities and the state.

Q. What do you see as the future challenges for Landcare?

Finding ways to continue Landcare's amazing work throughout Victoria is on everyone's mind – including mine. That's why I was proud to recently announce \$9.9 million funding for Landcare – as part of a Victorian Government investment of \$25.2 million over the next four years. The \$9.9 million will be mainly spent on funding a Regional Landcare Co-ordinator in each CMA region.

Apart from resourcing, Landcarers must also find enough time to commit to their passion, while working in a constantly changing environment – especially with drought and climate change. These are indeed big challenges, but I'm confident Landcarers are up to the task!



Minister Jennings inspects giant River Red Gums on the banks of the Murray River in north west Victoria.



Kelly Castelleti with Yarra Valley Grammar students planting trees on a property in Steels Creek.

Yarra Ranges on target for 25,000 trees

By Kelly Castelleti

With around 20 per cent of the Yarra Ranges shire area impacted by the February 2009 bushfires, the personal and economic cost to those who were affected has been enormous – so too has the cost to the environment.

As residents of bushfire-affected areas continue to rebuild their lives, work has begun to rebuild the natural environment. Yarra Ranges Council has set a target of 25,000 trees to be planted in 20 days during June and August 2010.

So far the project is right on schedule. About 11,000 trees have already been planted and crews of volunteers are ready to assist with further plantings.

The project is the culmination of more than 12 months of volunteer work clearing, cleaning, transporting, fencing, sorting and building in the region. Another legion of volunteers, including schools and large

corporate groups, has been engaged to help with the planting days.

The council is committed to the replanting as it will help address potential problems with erosion, landslip, water contamination and sterile and water repellent soils. It also acknowledges it will help residents feel at home in the landscape again.

According to Steels Creek resident Malcolm Calder projects such as Target 25,000 are assisting the local community to get back on its feet.

"While we didn't lose our house, we lost all of our sheds, farm and winery equipment, fences and trees and the pastures were badly burned along with large patches of topsoil.

"We are thankful to all involved in this replanting project for recognising the need for a program to assist in property recovery," Malcolm said.

Volunteers embody the spirit of the Lorax – who speaks for the trees

By Bridget Clarke

The Upper Goulburn Landcare Network (UGLN) supports 15 Landcare groups in the Murrindindi Shire. Seven of those groups were burnt out on Black Saturday. The scope of the recovery effort for these groups is enormous. It quickly became clear that local volunteers were exhausted so the network co-ordinator set to work sourcing external volunteers.

The revegetation project the volunteers have been working on is called the Lorax Project after the popular Dr Seuss book. The book is a fable about the plight of the environment – the Lorax is the character who speaks for the trees.

Volunteers have now treated more than 150 hectares of woody weeds and are launching into the planting of trees and understorey shrubs. More than 28,000 seedlings have been grown from locally collected seeds. Rotary clubs have produced 10,000 seedlings, the Tasmanian

Understorey Network another 3000. The Euroa Arboretum, assisted by Landcare Australia funding, has come up with 15,000 seedlings. The seedlings represent 20 indigenous varieties of groundcover plants, understorey and trees. After a few years in the ground they will do much to restore the natural beauty of the area.

All landholders in the fire-affected areas have been offered 300 free plants. This year's stocks are fully allocated and the UGLN is now planning for next year's plantings.

Recently 150 volunteers from local hang-gliding clubs worked with UGLN president Terry Hubbard and his wife Janet on planting out the slopes of the Three Sisters at Flowerdale. The hang-gliders will be able to survey their work from above in years to come.

Eighty volunteers from National Australia Bank have recently returned to the area



Volunteers from National Australia Bank participate in the Lorax Project.

to plant trees after earlier work weed clearing and fencing.

More volunteers are always needed. It's a fun day for members of a group or corporation who can donate one day during the week.

For further information email ugrecovery@gbcm.vic.gov.au or call Chris Coburn on 5797 0104.



The fire approaches Watsons Track.



Landcare is still healthy in the burnt out Christmas Hills.

Landcare connects the

This is the story of how one Landcare group responded to the bushfires

On 7 February 2009, I was at home in Christmas Hills with my wife, Pip Charlton, preparing to defend our home. The large column of smoke from the Kilmore East fire was clearly visible high in the sky overhead, the fire plan was in full swing and the radio, CFA website, and CFA scanner were being monitored closely.

At around 4pm in the afternoon I sent an email to David Allan of the neighbouring Steels Creek Landcare Group about a joint project to control sweet pittosporum along a road that forms the boundary between the two groups.

At about the same time the bushfires that had started in Kilmore some 40 kilometres

Flexible group meets community needs

A survey conducted by an RMIT student has confirmed the social benefits the Christmas Hills Landcare Group provided to the community after the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires. Nicole Noy is an RMIT Social Science (Environment) student and a member of the Christmas Hills Landcare Group.

Nicole decided to focus one of her research projects on understanding what benefits, if any, Landcare provided within the Christmas Hills community in the wake of the bushfires. Nicole posted an online survey on the group's

website. Eleven of the group's thirty members responded, many of them providing detailed comments in response to Nicole's questions.

"As a group member I'm well aware of the environmental benefits of Landcare, but I was interested in getting a broader understanding of the role that community groups can play within their local area, especially in the event of a natural disaster or other such tragedy," Nicole explained.

Nicole's research concluded that

while advice on bushfire recovery and property management was seen as beneficial, the greatest benefit the group provided was a space to talk to each other, share experiences, and find ways of helping each other.

"The fires really showed a different side of the Landcare group. While the group remained true to its environmental roots, it had the flexibility to provide for the social needs of its members in allowing them an outlet to share their experiences and help with community recovery," Nicole said.



“

“You’ve got to love the lyrebirds! They were back on day two and gave us hope the animals would return.” Jo Hayter

”

community in Christmas Hills

By Doug Evans

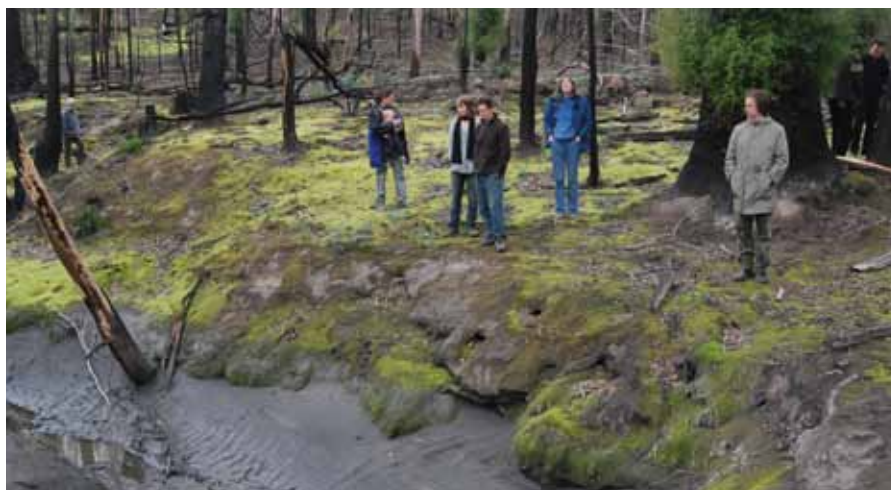
of Black Saturday.

away were arriving in Strathewen and parts of St Andrews and were soon to burn through parts of Christmas Hills, on through Steels Creek and beyond.

More than 390 hectares of Christmas Hills was burnt in the fires, affecting 38 properties along Skyline Road and Wallace Road. Eighteen homes were lost, although not all properties had houses to start with. Fortunately no lives were lost in Christmas Hills, unlike the communities either side in St Andrews and Steels Creek. Of the affected properties in Christmas Hills, ten are owned by members of the Landcare group, including two who lost their home, and another whose home was badly damaged.

An immediate response

An almost immediate response came from two families in the Landcare group, Jo Hayter and Adrian Dyson, whose home survived the fires, and Jan Cranwell and Phil Styles, whose home narrowly escaped. These two families stepped forward to host a social gathering two weeks after the fires for fire-affected people to share their experiences. They also provided a communication conduit for circulating



In April 2009 a walk around several properties demonstrated how the environment was recovering.

recovery information to people, many of whom were now displaced.

Originally planned in late 2008, the first event programmed for our Landcare group in February 2009 was to be a weed control demonstration on Darren Bennett and Vanessa Reid’s Wallace Road property. Darren and Vanessa were away for the Black Saturday weekend. They didn’t learn until the following day that the fires had burned through their property, and that their home had survived undefended, but all the bush on their block was burnt.

The focus of this first event was quickly changed to become one of sharing experiences of the fires and helping each other out. With Darren and Vanessa’s place lacking power and a working toilet, the venue was changed to another property, and then changed again on advice from the local fire brigade due to continuing fire activity in the area.

On 22 February over 40 people, mainly Landcare group members, gathered at the Christmas Hills North fire station.

continued ►

Over a couple of hours we shared our different stories from the day. Some had made lucky escapes driving through flames, some had been aboard fire trucks fighting the fire, some were contemplating what next after losing their house and possessions, some had been at home wondering when they were going to be hit, some were now wondering about the adequacy of their fire plans, and at least one left a fire truck to find his house alight, arriving just in time to prevent its complete loss.

Offers of support and assistance were being circulated by agencies and councils almost immediately after the fires. The Port Phillip and Westernport CMA compiled the offers related to land management and circulated them to Landcare group contacts. I received these as the primary contact for the group and passed them on to Jo Hayter and Jan Cranwell to circulate to the fire-affected folk.

Erosion and revegetation

The first land management issue to emerge was the threat of serious soil erosion. The group changed the topic of the next event in its 2009 program to focus on basic erosion control.

In early April eighteen group members gathered at Darren Bennett and Vanessa Reid's property for a session on simple post-fire erosion control and recovery monitoring. We heard a basic explanation of the impact of fires on soils and were shown how to recognise different fire intensities by looking at the impact on the tree canopy – green, brown, or gone.



A photopoint was set up on a group member's property to record the gradual return of the bush. This photograph was taken in April 2009.



The same site in April 2010.

The session included a walk through the burnt bush across several adjacent properties. As we walked, we observed the signs of different fire intensity, noting the impact on the soil as well as examples of soil accumulating behind fallen branches. We turned larger pieces of fallen timber around to align with the contours – a simple method of slowing down the movement of the erosion-prone soil after rain. A photopoint was set up on one of the properties to monitor the gradual recovery of the bush.

In May, the group received an offer of indigenous plants from the North Warrandyte/Osborne Peninsula Landcare Group. The offer was not only for the plants, but also included people to help plant them.

According to Jo Hayter the offer was gratefully taken up by many locals.

"They came out to our place loaded with plants, grasses, tree guards and tools and got stuck into it. They were kind and sympathetic to the burden we faced in reconstructing our property and getting over the years of work landscaping and planting having gone up in smoke.

"Our roadside verge, lower dam area and front garden area were revegetated. One year later these little saplings have taken hold and are a constant reminder to us of the goodness of people in times of need."

Recovery – looking small

By August, after months of being told that the bush would recover with time, yet with little to show for it, some landholders were questioning whether or not the recovery would actually come.

In response, the group held a session on observing early post-fire recovery at Jo Hayter and Adrian Dyson's property. We practised 'looking small' to observe the early signs of recovery of many native plant species that were regenerating from tree trunks, sprouting from root stock or underground bulbs, or germinating from seed that had dropped into the ash bed or was already stored in the soil.

The recovery of people is equally complex. Jo Hayter found the day upsetting.

"More experienced members were in awe of the tiny new shoots, buds and mosses along the creek and in the forest.

“

***"The walk around at Darren and Vanessa's place was a real eye-opener, showing us the simple things that can be done to prevent post-fire erosion. The August gathering was an education – we learnt about the different plants and trees that were springing back to life."** Brigid Bell.*

”

Wurundjeri people visit burnt traditional country

By Carrie Tiffany

Parks Victoria organised a bus tour for Wurundjeri people to visit bushfire-affected areas on their traditional country around Christmas Hills in June 2009.

The Wurundjeri people were keen to meet some Landcare people who share their interest in caring for the land. A country-in-common gathering was held at Doug Evans and Pip Charlton's property. Around 20 members of the Christmas Hills Landcare Group had afternoon tea with 17 Wurundjeri people. This was their last stop on the bus tour, but the informal meeting established a connection where both groups agreed to come together again, and to allow more time.

Jo Hayter from the Christmas Hills Landcare Group believes the meeting would have been meaningful at any time, but linking it with the fires made it more significant.

"On a personal level I was able to share my fire story with some of the women

who were compassionate in response. It was also intriguing that most of the Wurundjeri we met are no longer living in the area and hadn't had the opportunity for connecting with their bushland until this disaster came along."

Wurundjeri elder Alice Kolasa said the trip was a good opportunity for members to connect with each other and to connect with their traditional country.

"Going back to look at country is very important. Our country is our cultural heritage that exists through our land and waters. It shows us who we are. The land has spiritual values to us because it is our birth region."

Alice said the trip was also a very emotional experience.

"It was shocking – the closer we got to the burnt areas the more devastation we saw. All of us felt huge sympathy for the people in those towns and communities who lost so much. The suffering and loss of people and homes was very upsetting.

We just wanted to reach out and help them. The scale of it all was really beyond words. None of us have ever been through a fire like that so we could only imagine the horror of it. We went up a very steep hill and when we got to the top all we could see were blackened trees stretching for miles and miles into the distance."

The participants on the trip included two representatives from Parks Victoria, four senior elders, the CEO of the Wurundjeri Council, other elders and members of the next generation and their children.

Alice said the group didn't want to invade the privacy of people after the fires, but they were welcomed warmly by everyone they met.

"The afternoon tea at the local Landcare group was a very positive way to end the day. Like us, Landcare people are interested in taking care of country. Doug and Pip were lovely. We hope to come back and see how the Landcare group members are rebuilding their lives and perhaps to plant some trees and help them along the way."

Alice said the day was a memorable experience for the Wurundjeri.

"Any opportunity to go back to these areas is very important. We need to look after these places. When we go back to country we feel the spirits of our ancestors welcoming us onto the land – we feel them around us, when we are out there. The ancestors left the country for us for our future – we all have to respect the land and that means looking after it."

Alice thanked the Christmas Hills Landcare Group and Doug Evans and Pip Charlton on behalf of the Wurundjeri Council, elders and community members.



Members of the Christmas Hills Landcare Group held a country-in-common gathering for Wurundjeri people on a bus tour of their bushfire-affected traditional country. From left, Winnie Bridges, Di Simmonds, Ross Coupar, Nicole Noy and Vicki Nicholson-Brown.

All I could see was the devastation, our trees gone, blackness and a feeling of overwhelming labour ahead of us to get our vegetable gardens and native gardens started again.

"It has taken another year for the comments from that day to realise themselves. Now we understand bush regeneration and the explosion of nature that occurs in the aftermath. In fact the bush would seem to be a lot more resilient

than people. The fires exposed a lot more than just views of the valley or suburbs in the distance."

The work of the Landcare group continues side by side with the task of recovery. The fires have shown us that the group has been able to pull together in a time of crisis and to strengthen the bonds of the community.

In closing, I'm pleased to report that our sweet pittosporum eradication project on

Skyline Road has been a complete success. There is no sign of any pittosporum over a year later!

Doug Evans is the secretary of the Christmas Hills Landcare Group and the Regional Landcare Co-ordinator for the Port Phillip and Westernport CMA. For more information visit: portphillipwesternport.landcarevic.net.au/Christmashills Or email: welcometoCHLG@landcarevic.net.au

Landcare attracts strong interest at city festival

By John Robinson

Landcare had a high profile presence at Melbourne's Sustainable Living Festival at Federation Square in February. For the first time the three-day festival featured a Landcare precinct with 11 themed Landcare marquees.

The Landcare precinct occupied a prominent position on the steps leading into Federation Square. There were marquees on Landcare education, junior Landcare, urban Landcare, waterways, biodiversity and threatened species, volunteering, sustainability and climate change, connecting communities, coasts, Landcare farming, and Landcare Victoria.

The Landcare precinct was organised by the Community and Engagement

and Landcare Team at DSE with the aim of displaying the diversity and breadth of opportunities open to everyone interested in getting involved in Landcare.

More than 4,800 people visited the Landcare displays at the festival and met with over 70 community Landcare volunteers and regional and local Landcare co-ordinators who staffed the displays.

The Landcare education marquee was especially popular among the kids as they

were able to get close to a range of small and scaly bugs. This was the first exposure to Landcare for many of the city visitors. More than 430 people registered to volunteer with Landcare and Coastcare or to stay informed about future opportunities to get involved.

The Sustainable Living Festival was a great way to bring landholders and communities together in a fun and informative way. For a wrap up of the festival visit www.youtube.dse.vic.gov.au



Usually more at home in the paddock or rural hall, Landcare makes a mark in the centre of Melbourne.

The Junior Landcare displays were a big attraction for city kids at the Sustainable Living Festival.



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This was the first exposure to Landcare for many of the city visitors.

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Most of the physical work of moving the large rice bales was done by hand.

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The ash and soil that builds up behind the straw can be used later as a planting bed. The bales can also be broken up and spread across an area to introduce much needed cover.

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Rice straw for erosion control

by Dianne Dixon

In May 2009 the Rotary Club of Southern Mitchell, supported by the Pretty Sally Garden Club, had loads of rice straw baled and transported out of Deniliquin. The straw was donated by local farmer Colin Bull and made available free of charge to property owners in fire-affected areas on steep country to help with erosion and siltation control.

Rice straw doesn't harbour pasture weeds and holds together as a mat so it doesn't blow away in the wind. The rice straw takes around a year to decompose and generally animals do not find it palatable. During our unseasonably wet summer a number of property owners reported that rice had sprouted, but of course it was short lived.

The bales are broken up into biscuits about 10-20 centimetres thick. The biscuits are packed close together across slopes and drainage lines to create low barriers. These barriers take the velocity out of the water flow and restrict the movement of soil and gravel. Ring lock fencing and posts salvaged from the fire are placed down slope from the straw, with the netting folded back under to help hold the straw in place.

On slopes, the contours are followed to avoid channelling the water. Fallen branches and small burnt trees can also be placed across slopes to slow water.

The lowest point in the barrier must be in the middle of the drainage line so that water spills over the barrier rather than going around the side and creating a new line of erosion. Several barriers can be placed in series down a drainage line. Solid structures like stumps and old machinery are not recommended in drainage lines – water will bypass them creating more erosion and they may cause water pollution.

The ash and soil that builds up behind the straw can be used later as a planting bed. The bales can also be broken up and spread across an area to introduce much needed cover from heavy rain and build up biomass on the soil. The straw needs to be thinly spread – if it is too thick it may prevent plants from growing.



A fairly typical silt trap made from rice straw and old wire not long after installation.

A demonstration site has been established at Clonbinane in partnership with GreenCorp and Mitchell Shire Council. Rice straw, fallen branches and ring lock fencing recovered from fences damaged by the fires have been strategically placed to slow down and spread out water flow from rainfall, preventing further ash and sediments entering Sunday Creek.

A demonstration day on managing erosion after fire was held in August 2009. The day included a demonstration of rice straw techniques and fire-affected landholders were encouraged to collect rice straw from a nearby stockpile.

The Sunday Creek-Dry Creek Landcare Group has assisted in delivering the rice straw program, together with a GreenCorp team. Landcare Australia came on board in June 2009 which meant two more truckloads of straw could be purchased and delivered. One load of straw was provided to the Baynton Sidonia Landcare Group for use in the Redesdale fire area.

The rice straw program, trial site and demonstration day have created a greater awareness of what Landcare is all about. Our group has made some new friends and gained a substantial increase in membership.

Fire talks productive at Devilbend

By Carrie Tiffany

The meeting at the Moorooduc CFA was progressing well – then they set fire to the table. Susan Todd from the Devilbend Landcare Group explains that DSE officers had brought a special fire table to the meeting.

“The table was a replica landscape with toy people, houses, farms, sheds, fences and livestock. We each chose a house similar to our own – in my case a place close to the bush. Then they lit the table and we stood back to watch it burn.

“It was remarkable to see the fire progress. Once it was well ablaze one of the CFA guys used a fan to create a wind stream and we were stunned at how quickly the fire moved and how erratically – it didn’t just go in one direction but formed a number of different fronts, sometimes surrounding houses in the way we have heard Black Saturday survivors speak of.”

The meeting at the CFA was part of an ongoing conversation about fire which the

Landcare group is having with DSE and the local CFA. There have been three meetings to date and more are planned for the spring.

Susan Todd says that group members have been greatly concerned since the tragedy of Black Saturday.

“We were told it could happen on the Mornington Peninsula. About 20 locals came to the first meeting at the Moorooduc Hall and we were like sponges – wanting to learn as much as possible. The meetings have involved experts from DSE, Parks Victoria and the local CFA. There was a lot of knowledge shared and it was great to hear from some of the oldtimers in the CFA.

“We’ve been lucky in recent years with fire in this area, but that doesn’t mean we’ll continue to be lucky. There was a small fire in 2008 in the Devilbend Reserve when a power line fell on pine trees. The Landcare group has been a strong advocate for firebreaks in the reserve to protect neighbouring landholders. The meetings were a good forum for raising these practical, local issues.”

Susan has lived in the area for 18 years. Half of her 12-acre property is lowland native forest. A contractor she met at the meetings has since assisted with clearing the forest away from the house under the newly introduced 30-metre rule.

Meet the Devilbend Landcare Group

The Devilbend Landcare Group at Moorooduc on the Mornington Peninsula formed in 2007 when Melbourne Water decommissioned the Devilbend Reservoir and handed it over to Parks Victoria.

The 1000-hectare Devilbend Natural Features Reserve contains the largest

inland waterbody on the peninsula and provides habitat for 155 species of birds including more than a dozen threatened or vulnerable species and a number of rare migratory birds. The neighbours and local community who live around the reserve were keen to be involved in its future.

By forming a Landcare group they were able to stay informed about the planning process for the reserve and to have a say in its development. They were then able to develop policies for sustainable land husbandry and wildlife preservation on their own properties.

The group has around 35 active families and Susan Todd says members share knowledge, education and advice.

“This area is a rural community, of mainly hobby farmers. There are a lot of people in the equestrian industry, also vineyards and orchards. The group is a great way to get funding for projects, get to know our neighbours and be a collective voice for our community.”

Devilbend is a very active group. Much of its work focuses on restoring the Devilbend Natural Features Reserve with a regular program of



A planting day at the Devilbend Natural Features Reserve attracted helpers from six weeks to around 80 years of age. More than 2000 trees and shrubs were planted in a maze fashion at the site.



Susan believes the fire meetings have encouraged everyone in the group to prepare a fire plan and the group has learnt that the fire risk is something that needs to be worked on all year.

Fire table demonstrator Greg Harry discusses fire behaviour with members of the Devilbend Landcare Group, the Moorooduc CFA Brigade and Parks Victoria.

"We have a very thick understorey and while we want to preserve the bush as much as possible – for instance by removing the invasive sweet pittosporum – we need to be fire safe."

Susan believes the fire meetings have encouraged everyone in the group to prepare a fire plan and the group has learnt that the fire risk is something that needs to be worked on all year.

"We are all a lot more clued up now. At our next meeting we'll be talking about the approaching fire season and discussing the findings of the Royal Commission – making sure we are up to date with all of the latest knowledge."

weeding and planting. Members have also done birdwatching courses, learnt to propagate native plants from seed and developed their bushland management techniques.

Last year they held a Christmas tree hunt in association with Parks Victoria – a thinly disguised plan to remove young invasive pines from an improving area of wetland. This activity helped to get rid of the pines and spread the news about the work of the Landcare group in the community.

Regular activities include Clean Up Australia Day and involvement with the rescue of injured wildlife. The group's next event is a major planting at the reservoir reserve – in an area where sea eagles nest. This is the third year that this event has been held and the results of the earlier years are now visible.



Matt Ray and his sons enjoy the planting.

Shelterbelts for fire protection by Rod Bird

The role of trees in providing shelter on farms is well known. Shelterbelts generally improve the productivity from pastures and crops while providing many other benefits. Modelling studies have indicated that when 10 percent of a farm is planted in belts and blocks of trees, with no further grazing on that land, there is an overall long-term improvement in farm productivity.

Shelterbelts can play an important role in fire protection on farms. Shelter reduces wind speed, the most important factor driving the speed of a fire. Shelter can also assist in protecting buildings.

Shelter reduces wind speed

On open land the passage of a firefront is largely dependent on wind speed and the amount of dry grass on the ground. At high wind speeds a small increase in wind speed results in a proportionally greater increase in fire speed. The opposite is the case where the wind speed can be reduced and this is where the benefit of a shelterbelt arises.

The use of shelterbelts to reduce wind speed will enable the speed of the firefront

to be reduced. A good windbreak like the shelterbelt at Helm View shown in the photograph on page 20 (bottom) can reduce wind speed to 30 percent of that in the open – this will decrease the fire speed to about 20 percent of that in the open. Even a very poor windbreak might still reduce the wind speed to 70 percent of that in the open – reducing the fire speed to about 60 percent of that in the open.

Aerial photographs clearly show the sheltering effect of shelterbelts. This is illustrated in the photograph on page 20 (top) taken after the 1982 fires. It should be noted that the area behind the shelterbelt is often burned after the firefront has passed,

either by a slow flanking fire or by fire creeping through the belt.

Designing a multi-purpose shelterbelt

The best shelterbelt design for fire protection on a large property has four or more rows. This layout is achieved by putting short and medium height species in two rows (rows one and two in the illustration) on the southern side of a belt aligned east-west, or on the eastern side for belts aligned north-south. The tall trees are together in rows three and four.

The layout can be varied for belts on western and northern boundaries, when the tall species would be put on the



paddock side of the belt to allow part of the belt area to be grazed once the trees are established. At that time the fence on the windward side may be moved to a permanent position below rows two and three, allowing stock access beneath the tall trees to reduce fine fuel levels there. This is a good agroforestry design that is multi-purpose, with the tall trees high-pruned to produce timber free of knots. The structure of the shrub rows is preserved by keeping stock out of that section. The function of the low shelter is to prevent burning debris blowing through the belt.

Consideration should be given to planting some species which are less flammable in the belt. Blackwood (*A. melanoxylon*) is a good choice for row two (*Casuarina glauca*, *Casuarina obesa* or *C. cunninghamiana* for wet sites). Sticky boobialla (*Myoporum viscosum*), saltbush (*Atriplex nummularia*), most acacias, Hop Goodenia (*Goodenia ovata*), Moonah (*Melaleuca lanceolata*) and other species of low flammability could be used in the shrub row. In a fire, the shrubs in row one may ignite, but there is less danger of the taller trees catching fire if the second row is resistant. Clean-limbed species, such as spotted gum (*E. maculata*), or sugar gum (*E. cladocalyx*) in rows three and four would reduce the danger, as would high-pruned pines or cypress.

The ends of shelterbelts are critical points. Wind speed is accelerated at these points and this could allow a breakaway. Shelterbelts that have lost the lower level of branches, or the shrub layer, pose another problem. Wind speed under such belts may be 30 percent greater than in the open. This would allow burning debris to blow through the belt, across a firebreak, and against or under buildings.

While the wind speed further away from such a belt is much reduced the fire can burn out beyond the shelter and break away again. While efforts should be made to remove fine fuel from the edge and from under shelterbelts, removing the lower limbs or shrubs will markedly reduce the value of the belt as a windbreak and degrade its appearance.

Paradoxically, shelterbelts which are open at the base (perhaps because the fences have been removed to allow stock access) do not readily burn – fuel levels are low and the fire sweeps through quickly. Where there are more than two rows the leeward rows are more likely to be damaged.

continued ►





A grassfire was deflected by the shelterbelts in this photograph taken in the western district after Ash Wednesday 1982. The areas behind the shelterbelts provide important shelter for livestock.

Shelterbelts for protecting buildings

Shelterbelts can be planted to protect buildings from windblown embers, direct flame contact and radiant heat. The shelterbelt acts as a filter to reduce ember attack. Direct flame contact can be reduced when species with low flammability are used as they are less likely to catch fire and the shelterbelt may act as a physical barrier to radiant heat.

Shelterbelts to protect buildings need be only two rows in width if space is limited. Experience has shown that grass

fires, at least, are deflected over such belts, leaving an unburned island of buildings or paddock behind the belt.

The short species should have low flammability while the tall species should be clean-limbed or deciduous species. The belt should, ideally, be placed about four to six heights from the building, the point of maximum shelter. This would also reduce the danger from radiant heat if the belt catches fire.

Shelterbelts are one of a number of tools landholders can use to reduce fire risk

on their properties. Shelterbelts will have their effectiveness reduced, or may not be effective at all, in extreme weather conditions.

*Rod Bird is a retired DPI officer from Hamilton. The material in this article was drawn largely from *Trees and Shrubs for South West Victoria (1996)* by PR Bird, GA Kearney and DW Jowett (*Agriculture Victoria*) and from *Farm Forestry in Southern Australia – a focus on clearwood production of specialty timbers (2000)* by PR Bird (*Agriculture Victoria*).*

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Shelterbelts can play an important role in fire protection on farms. Shelter reduces wind speed, the most important factor driving the speed of a fire. Shelter can also assist in protecting buildings.

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A shelterbelt of eucalypts and casuarinas on the western district property, Helm View. This is an average type of shelterbelt common to many farms. While the belt doesn't look particularly dense it substantially reduces wind speed. Belts that are taller and more dense (but with no gaps) will provide even better shelter close to the belt and for a much greater distance across the paddock.

Firebrand research reveals the cause of spotfires

by Andrea Wild

Australia is a hotspot for spotfires due to the nature of our eucalypt trees which readily release firebrands – burning pieces of material such as bark – during bushfires.

Firebrands and the spotfires they create are the most unpredictable aspect of bushfire behaviour. They can cause uncontrollable bushfires and produce hazardous conditions for firefighters and anyone caught in a bushfire.

Firebrands are also the main cause of house loss at the urban-bush interface. Days of extreme fire weather will be more common in Australia's future climate and understanding how spotfires start, how they behave and their effect on firefighting efforts will increase in importance.

According to bushfire behaviour researcher Dr Peter Ellis of CSIRO multiple spot fires are harder to predict and control than a firefront burning in one location.

"Spotfires can trap firefighters, jump fire breaks and create other spotfires in a chain reaction. Black Saturday was a classic example of firebrands creating multiple spotfires, up to 35 kilometres ahead of the main fire and sometimes causing mass ignition of whole areas."

Wind alone can usually only carry a firebrand about 100 metres. Spotting to

greater distances occurs when firebrands are lofted by the convection of a hot bushfire, sometimes thousands of metres high. When the firebrand falls out of the convection column it is transported ahead of the main firefront by the prevailing wind, falling toward the ground at the firebrand's terminal velocity. Whether a firebrand will start a spotfire where it lands depends on many factors, including how long it will burn during flight, its combustion characteristics at its terminal velocity and whether it will be flaming when it lands and therefore able to ignite leaves or grass.

The CSIRO Climate Adaptation Flagship has been using a purpose-built vertical wind tunnel to study the combustion characteristics of different types of eucalypt bark.

"We can't just light a piece of bark on a skewer and see what happens," explains Dr Ellis.

"The wind tunnel experiments simulate the conditions a firebrand will experience during its travel and allow us to study how a firebrand and its aerodynamics change as it burns, and for how long it remains alight under those conditions."

Eucalypts are the most common vegetation type associated with catastrophic bushfires. According to Dr Ellis stringybark



A piece of eucalypt bark flies in the CSIRO wind tunnel.

trees appear to be the main culprit for concentrated shorter-distance spotting up to around three to four kilometres.

"The bark ignites readily, is easily detached and lofted by a fire and remains flaming at its terminal velocity for a long time. Spotfires that occur at distances of 10, 20 or even 30 kilometres are associated with streamer-like gum-bark eucalypts, such as candlebark. We are yet to figure out how these types of firebrands keep burning for the 10 to 30 minutes needed to travel such long distances."

The research is part of ongoing work looking at firebrand behaviour, how spotfires ignite and what conditions are likely to result in the hazardous situation of mass spotfires.



A bushfire in a eucalypt forest – firebrands are being released which can cause spotfires many kilometres away.



Care needs to be taken when importing feed for stock after a fire to avoid introducing weeds.

Managing pest plants and animals

The risk of infestation by pest plants and animals dramatically increases during and after an emergency such as fire. The cover that protects pest animals is removed and many pest plants regenerate rapidly after fire.

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The post-bushfire environment provides a unique opportunity to reduce the impact of pest plants and animals on the landscape.

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Unless action is taken invasive species populations can increase rapidly and further damage the viability of rural businesses.

The problem is often compounded when the spread of pest plants and animals is overlooked as people are dealing with more pressing response and recovery issues.

The post-bushfire environment provides a unique opportunity to reduce the impact of pest plants and animals on the landscape. There are some simple actions that land managers can take to minimise risks which may also save money, protect environmental values and avoid stress in the long term.

It is also an ideal time for home gardeners to think about what to replant in the garden and ensure they are not introducing invasive species.

Pest plants

Importing hay and grain as stockfeed and reintroducing livestock onto farms poses a significant risk of spreading weeds. Be especially careful of feed imported from interstate which could potentially carry new weeds into Victoria.

Stockfeed on farms should be checked for origin. Has it come from a known weed-infested area? Ask the supplier for written certification on any potential weed content. Where possible source locally grown feed to reduce the chance of introducing weeds that are not already present and known in your locality.

Keep records of purchased hay or grain. These should include content, source location, producer, date purchased, transporter and feed-out area. Feed out in a confined area away from drainage lines (stock containment areas) to reduce the likelihood of invasive plants being spread



New growth will be tempting for rabbits, but the removal of cover by the fire provides a good opportunity for destroying warrens to prevent rabbit breeding.

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Rabbits will also be stimulated to breed with the influx of new growth so it is critical that control action is timely and well targeted.

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after a fire

By Katie Le Blanc

throughout your property. Monitor feed-out areas regularly and be suspicious of any unfamiliar plants that germinate.

Take care to avoid the spread of pest plants onto road reserves and adjacent land when transporting hay or grain. Vehicles should be cleaned down after deliveries. Vehicle cleaning should occur in a designated area to prevent weed dispersal and to make the management of new infestations easier.

Building up stock numbers when recovering from an emergency is also another high risk activity. Quarantine new stock for up to 14 days, allowing time for viable seed to pass through the animal. Check for weed seed in fleece and continue to check for weeds in areas with new stock. Purchase shorn sheep where possible. Try to avoid areas of known weed infestations when moving stock along roadsides.

Pest plants may also be spread by fire-fighting activities. Monitor burnt areas for weed germination. Vehicles entering and leaving your property to replenish water supplies, rehabilitate fire breaks, clear fence lines and re-establish vegetation also pose a risk. Ensure all vehicles are clean and free

of weeds before they enter or leave the property. Where possible use contractors who are accredited in vehicle/machinery hygiene.

Weed seeds can also be spread easily by water flow across bare ground during rain events.

Home gardeners should seek advice from local plant nurseries before re-establishing gardens to ensure new species are non-invasive and suitable to the region. Consider carefully before accepting plants or offcuts from friends and relatives to guarantee the species is appropriate for, and not restricted in, your area.

Pest animals

The potential impact of pest animals such as rabbits, foxes and wild dogs increases after fire. With reduced levels of available food and the removal of protective vegetation and fencing there is likely to be higher predation by these animals as they recolonise and potentially move to new areas. Landholders need to remain vigilant. Advice on any concerns or options for management can be sought from DPI.

The removal of vegetation after a bushfire

provides a window of opportunity to target rabbit warrens for destruction as there is little or no cover. The warren is the key to the rabbits' ability to re-establish in bushfire-affected landscapes, so destroying their warrens is the key to long-term rabbit control.

Rabbits are preferential feeders and will target newly germinated vegetation communities after a fire which will impact heavily on the rate of regeneration. Rabbits will also be stimulated to breed with the influx of new growth so it is critical that control action is timely and well targeted.

Equally important to controlling rabbits is the need for a soft footprint on the landscape. Landholders must be careful to avoid further damage to the environment when using machinery. It is also important that the necessary permits and approvals are obtained for works in culturally sensitive areas, alongside waterways or where the control effort may impact on native vegetation. For information and advice contact DPI on 136 186 and your local council.

Katie Le Blanc is a Community Engagement Officer with DPI in Echuca.

Bullengarook group reaches out to its community



By Carrie Tiffany

Located midway between Bacchus Marsh and Gisborne, the Bullengarook Landcare Group is made up of 65 local families. Many of them work outside of the area, but enjoy living on small holdings, running horses and cattle and having an opportunity to connect with the land.

Norris McCarthy, the president of the group, explains that Landcare got underway in the area with the rehabilitation of the Waterloo Flat Reserve.

"The reserve was badly overgrown with willow and blackberries. Over a number of years the reserve was cleaned up and planted with native grasses and other indigenous plants.

"Along the way the group identified a need to work on weed control on roadsides and individual properties. Blackberries, gorse and English broom are the main offenders."

A grant from the Federal Government together with support from the Port Phillip and Westernport CMA and the local council enabled the group to purchase weed spraying equipment which has been used to greatly reduce large weed infestations in the area.



The local scout group helped the Bullengarook Landcare Group with a streamside planting day.

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Our local CFA already does the technical stuff well. These conversations are an opportunity for the wider community to come together under the umbrella of the Landcare group to talk about fire.

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The spraying program is now used to help recruit new members.

"We offer to assist people with their weed problems, but we also leave them with an application form for the group and suggest they join up and help others in return," Norris said.

Family fun day for AGM

Community awareness is one of the group's priorities. All of their events have a whole-of-community feel. A series of Friday night community evenings with a guest speaker and a BBQ have been well attended. Speakers of note have included Rob Gell, who came out to speak on climate change, while Dr Lindy Lumsden spoke about bats.

The group works with a local nursery to propagate indigenous native plants and around 1000 plants are given away to the community every year. An annual

flora walk in the Pyrete State Park run in conjunction with the Ballarat Field Naturalists is always well attended.

The whole-of-community feel is being extended to this year's AGM. Committee member Cherie Salmon and secretary Juli Robinson have been keen to reach out to the many young families that have moved into the area. The group has planned its AGM as a big family fun day. The children's environmental theatre group Vox Bandicoot is booked to perform, the CFA will run a sausage sizzle (with food provided by DSE) and the local playgroup is putting on afternoon tea. The group is advertising the day with a real estate board, a letterbox drop and through the local press.

According to Cherie the day will also be an opportunity to talk about fire. Bullengarook is in a wildfire overlay area



Bullengarook Landcare Group members preparing to plant at Waterloo Flat Reserve.

and the Landcare group has been involved in a series of community conversations about fire that started just after the fires in February 2009.

Cherie explains that the conversations aren't lectures or technical sessions.

"Our local CFA already does the technical stuff well. These conversations are an opportunity for the wider community to come together under the umbrella of the Landcare group to talk about fire."

Fire conversations cathartic

Matt Campbell from DSE helped to organise and facilitate the fire conversations. The first meeting took place not long after Black Saturday and according to Cherie Salmon many people found it cathartic.

"Emotions were running high and it gave people a chance to talk about their fears."

The conversations have helped to open up the communication channels between the different agencies – the sessions were attended by DSE, the CFA, the local council, Parks Victoria and DPI, as well as the local community.

Cherie believes they have also been important for building contacts and connections at a local level.

"We've been able to plan things like telephone trees. And getting to know who is in our neighbourhood is really positive. If we know who everyone is we can look out for each other in an emergency."

The response to the conversations has been positive and Cherie says they are set to continue.



Volunteers from National Australia Bank assisted with fence removal at Buxton.

Fencers go beyond boundaries

By Bridget Clarke

The Black Saturday bushfires destroyed more than 3500 kilometres of fencing in the Shire of Murrindindi. The Upper Goulburn Landcare Network (UGLN) has been supporting the Fencers Without Boundaries project since March 2009.

The project has seen volunteers pull out almost 250 kilometres of burnt-out fencing and rebuild more than 200 kilometres.

Allan Stafford, a volunteer with the Uniting Church in Benalla, has been one of the stalwarts of the project in Murrindindi. Allan has trained and co-ordinated countless volunteers and been on site to operate heavy equipment.

Around 1400 houses were destroyed in Murrindindi and many residents have not yet rebuilt. To assist people to clean up debris, to define their land and

to keep livestock in or out is a very tangible way of helping them.

Many clubs and large companies have come forward with volunteers who are trained in the tasks to be performed, supplied with tools and protective clothing and supervised by Allan and UGLN co-ordinators. So far more than 500 volunteers have helped, but the enormity of the task means that many more are needed.

If you can help please email ugrecovery@gbcm.vic.gov.au or call Chris Coburn on 5797 0104.

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Jean was despairing when she returned to the blackened landscape after the fire. As she normally released wildlife on the property it was important that the cover be replaced as soon as possible.

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Linda Minter, secretary of the Boolarra South Landcare Group, meets a wombat in Jean Quick's care.

Habitat restored at wildlife shelter

By Peter Newgreen

Jean Quick has been caring for injured and orphaned wildlife for more than 20 years. Working from her wildlife shelter at Boolarra she is tireless in her attempts to save a joey removed from the pouch of a kangaroo killed on a road, or a fledgling magpie that's fallen from a nest. Any animal needing care is taken in and gets the best of treatment.

In February 2009 the Delburn complex fire raced through Jean Quick's property. Although her house was spared the understorey plants and animal pens were burnt to the ground.

Jean was despairing when she returned to the blackened landscape after the fire. As she normally released wildlife on the

property it was important that the cover be replaced as soon as possible.

Rotary volunteers stepped in to rebuild the animal enclosures and the Boolarra South Landcare Group decided to do something about the burnt-out landscape. The mature eucalypts were soon sprouting from the trunks, but many of the understorey species were killed by the intense heat and fire – leaving little cover for wildlife.

In August 2009 about 20 members of the Boolarra South Landcare Group along with a number of volunteers from the adjacent Yinnar-Yinnar South Landcare Group got together to replant the understorey plants at Jean's wildlife shelter.

Landcare group members plant understorey at Jean Quick's wildlife shelter to provide cover for injured animals when they are released.



The plants selected were indigenous to the area and by planting out tubestock the group hoped to speed up the revegetation of the property. A deterrent, Sen-tree, which consists of egg powder, an adhesive and silica carbide grit was applied to the tubestock before they were planted to protect them from browsing animals.

The group got busy and soon had 550 plants planted over a substantial part of the property. After planting we got to meet some of Jean's patients. Kangaroos, wombats, wallabies, a possum and a magpie were all getting a chance to heal before being returned to the wild.

Nine months down the track the understorey plants have established well with over 75 percent surviving. Some are flourishing. In addition natural regeneration has been extensive and it won't be long before the property will provide suitable habitat for the release of wildlife.

Jean Quick lives for her animals. She is extremely independent and doesn't like to ask for help. The local Landcarers have been there for her consistently and will continue to help into the future.

For further information contact Peter Newgreen, Latrobe Catchment Landcare Network Co-ordinator, on 0429 808 411.

Volunteers contribute to speedy recovery after Bunyip Ridge fire

by Bridgette McCallum

The communities of Labertouche, Jindivick, Drouin West and Tonimbuk were devastated by the Bunyip Ridge bushfire on Black Saturday 2009. We were fortunate that no lives were lost; however, many families lost houses, farms, livestock, fencing, fodder, shelterbelts and shedding.

The area that was burnt is home to many commercial dairy and beef farmers along with smaller lifestyle holdings. The commercial farmers were unable to sit back and take stock of what had happened as livestock had to be cared for and fences rebuilt – life had to go on. For many, rebuilding began the day after the fire front had passed; for others it took many months before they were able to start rebuilding.

Immediately after the fire the Baw Baw Shire established a drop-in-centre at the local hall where people could go to register their details and receive assistance. It was also a place where people could talk or just have a cuppa.

Westernport Catchment Landcare Network Project Officer Peter Ronalds enlisted the help of the local Warragul Community Church to begin the huge task of cleaning up and re-erecting fences.

According to Peter the support from the local church has been remarkable.

"It's hard work and long hours. Some days they had three teams of up to 50 people working on several farms at once. They have been providing support to fire-affected people from day one and they are still out fencing two days a week 18 months after the fires," Peter said.

Other volunteers came forward to assist with rebuilding. VisionStream donated two weekends of fencing. They supplied tractors and rammers just a couple of weeks after the fires when this equipment was difficult to source, along with 43 volunteers and much expertise.

The Bass Coast Landcare Network along with VisionStream had a team of 50 volunteers for a planting weekend on eight properties. They were able to replant over 6500 indigenous trees and shrubs. It was a huge effort and one that didn't go unnoticed by the local landholders.

In late July 2009 over 200 volunteers gathered at the Labertouche Hall to help replant on six properties. In just over three hours more than 8000 indigenous trees and shrubs were planted. It was a remarkable morning's work that helped to change the blackened landscape. This funding came through Landcare Australia.

Support for the rebuilding process also came from the Australian Government through the Caring for our Country program. This was administered by the Port Phillip and Westernport CMA who employed a project officer to assess each property. Funding was used to assist landholders to protect their environmental and biodiversity assets such as remnant vegetation and waterways, and to control weeds. This funding allowed some financial stress to be lifted from landholders, helping them to rebuild their properties and protect their assets.

More than 40 local farmers and farm employees who lost their jobs because of



Rebuilding got underway quickly after the Bunyip Ridge fire – fences are being replaced while silage still burns nearby.

the fires were employed through the DSE Drought Employment Project. This created some additional income for farmers who in some cases didn't receive any other income for many months.

Although the recovery process is well underway there is still much to be done. The success of recovery can be measured by the hard work of the volunteers, the determination of local landholders and the resilience of our local community.

Bridgette McCallum is the Westernport Catchment Landcare Network Co-ordinator and Bushfire Recovery Officer. She can be contacted on 5941 8446 or by email at bmccallum_cec@dcsi.net.au



This large plume of smoke was visible looking northwest towards the town of Labertouche just before the fire hit.

“

The Landcare group has never been busier. The gardening program has helped to bring people together. Stories have been shared and children have played together while cars and utes are loaded up with plants.

”



The Sunday Creek-Dry Creek Landcare Group set up a plant donation scheme after the fires to help landholders re-establish their home gardens and farm trees.

Gardening after the Fire

By Elyse Kelly

The Black Saturday bushfires burnt through much of the Sunday Creek-Dry Creek Landcare area. All of the group members were affected in one way or another.

The Gardening after the Fire program was set up to help people who lost their gardens and farm trees in the fires. While we acknowledge that gardening and revegetation may not be a high priority for some people, these activities are part of the fire recovery process for many.

The Landcare group discussed the risk of weed and disease spread, especially when there were no other plants to out-compete the weeds. We developed simple guidelines for the donation and propagation of plants. They included not supplying plants that have the potential to become environmental weeds, disinfecting all pots prior to potting and only using potting mix, rather than garden soil.

Donations of plants came from local native nurseries, the Pretty Sally Garden Club, neighbouring Landcare groups (such as the Upper Maribyrnong Catchment Group) and backyard gardeners, including lavender struck by a 94-year-old grandmother from Brunswick.

The first round of plant donations were mainly to people who lost their gardens and farm trees, but not their homes. Gradually more people who are either rebuilding or have completed rebuilding are turning to re-establishing their gardens. So far over 7000 plants, as well as guards and stakes, have been distributed. The guards and stakes were purchased with assistance from the Mitchell Community Health Bushfire Relief Program.

Building on the plant donation scheme, the Sunday Creek-Dry Creek Landcare Group hosted a free garden workshop, generously run free of charge by Sustainable Gardening Australia. More than 50 people listened and laughed along with presenter Helen Tuton who spoke about sustainable gardening practices, soil condition after fire and fire-smart gardening techniques.

Helen both educated and entertained at the workshop. One participant said it was great therapy. The day was topped off

with plant donations from the Pretty Sally Garden Club and advanced tree donations through a program delivered by the Rotary Club of Southern Mitchell.

The Rotary Club's advanced tree program is running alongside the gardening program. The supply of advanced trees to fire-affected landholders has seen very generous donations from Mount William Advanced Tree Nursery, Naturelinks and Metro Trees. The Rotary Club has been assisted by funds raised by the Rise above the Blaze activities in Kilmore.

The Landcare group has never been busier. The gardening program has helped to bring people together. Stories have been shared and children have played together while cars and utes are loaded up with plants. The work speaks volumes for the strength of our community.

**For further information contact
Elyse Kelly on 5781 0155 or
cambankke@bigpond.com**

By Susi Johnson

AGM

More than 45 members and guests gathered at the 2010 AGM of the Farm Tree & Landcare Association (FTLA) in Melbourne on 7 May 2010. The keynote speaker Kim Chance, chair of the reconstituted Australian Landcare Council, asked those assembled to tell the council how to take Landcare forward.

Attendees raised a range of issues including: local priorities being valued and funded; access to facilitators who have a well-defined role; administrative and IT support for groups and networks; and recognition of unfunded work by landowners and other volunteers. The importance of working together as groups rather than individuals was also emphasised.

Attendees also participated in sessions on the proposed reforms to natural resource management organisations under the Land and Biodiversity White Paper, community engagement, engaging alternative funding and pest plants and animals.

The 2010-11 committee of management is Susan Campbell, President; Alex Arbuthnot, Vice President; Peter Berrisford, Treasurer; Richard Jamieson, Secretary; Artur Muchow and David Clark, ordinary members, and Andrew Stewart, Immediate Past President. Two ordinary member positions are currently vacant.

Survey

In order to ensure FTLA services are appropriate to members' needs, more than 1100 surveys have been sent out to groups and office bearers. In the results received so far, members report using a range of FTLA services including the governance training program, advice, information bulletins and hiring agreements.

Members reported a high interest in the ideas of the FTLA on developing services in grant assistance, devolved grants for member groups, training programs and property insurance.

Renewals

Renewals were due on 30 June 2010. The FTLA has made every effort to keep the membership fees down while continuing to provide high levels of service. If you aren't sure whether your group has renewed please call the FTLA on 9207 5527 or email ftla@vff.org.au. Some groups assume they are covered by FTLA insurance when they are actually non-financial.

New people

Welcome to Joanne van den Broek who started working with the FTLA in April on a part-time basis.

New on the Gateway

The Victorian Landcare Gateway is the statewide community portal for information on all Landcare regions, groups, networks, newsletters and events.

The Gateway provides the opportunity to share information, knowledge and experiences, as well as contacts, resources, links and discussions on issues affecting Landcare groups and members.

The Network Readiness project was a social research project designed to support Landcare networks to be more effective and influential in landscape change. The project generated a lot of useful material that is now available on the Gateway. Reader-friendly booklets have been prepared which summarise the theoretical and research findings, the tools created and the implications for planning and knowledge sharing. Go to: www.landcarevic.net.au/vslt/network-readiness

The new Volunteer Management Manual helps groups engage, recruit, retain and get the most out of volunteers. Go to: www.landcarevic.net.au/vri/volunteer-action

DSE in partnership with the University of Melbourne have piloted a social network analysis tool with Landcare groups. Go to: www.landcarevic.net.au/vslt/social-profiling

Landcare groups and networks, support staff, regional co-ordinators, the DSE Community Engagement and Landcare team and Charles Sturt University have been busy collecting and reporting Landcare data over the past couple of years. Go to: www.landcarevic.net.au/vslt

To find the latest statewide resources on the Gateway go to a new search page that lists all the new content added to the Resources, Volunteering, and Victorian State Landcare Team sections sorted by date. Go to: www.landcarevic.net.au/resources/latest-resources



John Cable and FTLA secretary Richard Jamieson chat at the AGM in May.

Around the State – News from the

Wimmera

Wimmera Landcare Network Facilitators completed their contracts on 30 June 2010 and the support model for groups and networks now looks very different. While some groups and networks might be uncertain of the future they remain determined to continue the good work for which they are renowned. The CMA is committed to Landcare support through the Regional Landcare Co-ordinator role and delivery of programs where Landcare fits with regional, state and national priorities.

The enthusiasm of volunteers is evident again in this year's community plant-out projects. Project Platypus, Grampians Little Desert Biolink, Yarrilinks and Hindmarsh Landcare Network have large community activities planned throughout July and August. The events will help plant another 100,000 trees across the Wimmera.

*For further information contact
Max Skeen on 5382 1544.*

Corangamite

Landcare in Corangamite has faced many recent challenges, with uncertainty of funding for projects and support roles and an increasing need to seek investment from alternative sources to government. However, the dedication of volunteers and staff has seen many outstanding achievements across the nine networks and associated groups.

With support from several incentive programs and corporate investors an estimated \$2.35 million worth of projects has been implemented in the region.

Five Landcare networks will implement promotional projects such as welcome packs for new landholders, interactive displays at local events and support for

Landcare champions with funding from the Victorian Government's Volunteer Recruitment Initiative. This funding also supported the Otway Agroforestry Network who held a very successful expo on trees for conservation and profit.

*For further information contact
Tracey McRae on 5232 9100.*

Goulburn Broken

Over the past few months we have been working at a network level to secure funding for facilitators through the provision of community engagement services to existing programs and individual projects.

More than 120 people attended the Shepparton Irrigation Region Landcare and Local Area Planning Celebration. The Gecko CLaN hosted the Victorian Parliamentary enquiry committee into soil carbon and a delegation from the European Union, these groups being interested in the impact of pasture cropping on soil carbon and sustainable farming.

The Recycling for Recovery program has been keeping the South West Goulburn and Upper Goulburn Landcare Networks busy. Substantial planning resulted in 39 expressions of interest in the program. Success in obtaining funding here will further cement Landcare as a significant deliverer of environmental recovery works.

*For further information contact
Tony Kubeil on 5761 1619.*

Port Phillip and Westernport

An application to the Federal Government for Landcare facilitator funding, and potential funding from other sources, are all part of pre-merger discussions the CMA is holding with Melbourne Water to

negotiate the re-establishment of a suite of positions to support community-based natural resource management groups across the region.

Landcare groups and networks are being invited to participate in natural asset identification workshops for different parts of the region, to contribute to the next Port Phillip and Westernport Regional Catchment Strategy.

*For further information contact
Doug Evans on 9296 4662.*

North East

More than 120 landholders attended the recent Soil Carbon – Myths and Facts Forum. Speakers included Dr Jeff Baldock from CSIRO, David Griffin from DPI and three land managers. A range of soil carbon and soil health issues was covered. More than 200 landholders are completing soil tests and starting training under the soil carbon project.

Five groups received Volunteer Action Grants through the Victorian Government's Volunteer Recruitment Initiative. Groups have also submitted applications for the Second Generation Landcare Grants for 2010/11.

A collective proposal including all four Landcare networks in the region was developed for the Caring for our Country Landcare Facilitator funding. If successful, the Ovens Network will act as host.

CD and DVD versions of the dung beetle resource kit are now available.

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

East Gippsland

The five-year Landcare report card was launched at Lakes Entrance in May.



Regional Landcare Co-ordinators

The report details the activities, the participants involved and the on-ground works Landcare has completed over the past five years. For example, more than 400,000 trees, shrubs and grasses have been planted by groups, networks and volunteers.

Congratulations to the groups who have renewed their five-year action plans. These documents are central for groups planning on-ground works and capacity building projects in the region.

I have recently moved to another position at the CMA in catchment planning. My thanks to all of the wonderful people who have supported me as the Regional Landcare Co-ordinator. I look forward to catching up with you in my new role.

The Victorian State Landcare Team and the Editorial Committee of the magazine thank Becky Hemming for her contribution to Landcare and wish her well in her new role.

For further information contact the Regional Landcare Co-ordinator on 5150 3577.

Mallee

Most groups have implemented their Victorian Government Second Generation Landcare Grants for 2009/10 and have completed their on-ground works. Rabbit ripping has produced mixed results as rabbit numbers have rapidly increased due to summer rain. Recent reports of a renewed outbreak of RCD could prove timely.

Most groups have now updated their Environmental Management Action Plans and are using them to target different programs and funding opportunities. Groups are adjusting slowly to their reduced capacity and increased workload.

The Kulkynne Way Landcare Group has received a Victorian Government Volunteer Recruitment Initiative grant to produce Environmental Management Plans for up to four Junior Landcare groups. These plans will outline the activities and projects that the groups can focus on over the next 12 to 18 months.

For further information contact Kevin Chaplin on 5051 4344.

West Gippsland

GippsLandcare had the support of the Richmond Tigers during the round 14 AFL clash at the MCG between Richmond and Sydney. The game was a Landcare-branded match in a partnership between the Richmond Football Club and the West Gippsland CMA.

The Landcare message went out to 40,000 plus Richmond members and the wider football public. Richmond CEO Brendon Gale said the club was proud to be in partnership with the West Gippsland CMA.

"We hope that we can help to raise awareness of Landcare in Victoria, leaving our landscape in a better condition for upcoming generations," Brendon said.

For general information contact Phillip McGarry on 1300 094 262

Glenelg Hopkins

Gateway training has been taken up by 25 group members in the region. With the upgrading of broadband availability and an increase in the number of landholders using the web the training held in Ararat, Hamilton, Portland and Warrnambool has been very useful.

Members of the Great South West Walk celebrated 25 years of conservation work in the Cape Bridgewater area. The dedication

of long-serving members such as Bill Golding and Gordon Page, along with many others has seen important work completed in this beautiful corner of the country.

Good steady rain on most of the catchment means the planting season got underway with a feeling of optimism. The Victorian Government's Second Generation Grants have funded 20 projects with many more unfunded works planned as part of landholders' normal practice.

For further information contact Tony Lithgow on 5571 2526.

North Central

Congratulations to the Echuca Landcare Group who launched their Native Birds of the Echuca-Moama District brochure at Echuca in May. More than 60 people attended the evening. The City of Greater Bendigo hosted a biolinks forum in Bendigo for community members, Landcare groups and networks and industry to discuss biolinks in the region.

The North Central CMA continues to produce *Groundcover*, a monthly newsletter for Landcare groups. Each month the newsletter features regional news, events and funding opportunities. We are always interested to hear what groups are up to and to feature them in the newsletter.

Thanks and farewell to Melanie Taube, we wish her well in her new role as a parent. We welcome Jodie Odgers to the position of Regional Landcare Co-ordinator

For further information contact Jodie Odgers on 5440 1883.



In brief

Fire ecology resources

The DSE fire ecology web pages have recently been updated. The pages include a range of information on fire ecology principles with new resources on fire recovery. A set of posters, featuring seven stories on fire ecology, is also available. Each poster focuses on a different theme – a great resource for group field days and displays. Go to www.dse.vic.gov.au/fireecology

Regrowth

Parks Victoria and DSE have a bi-monthly publication called *Regrowth* about rehabilitating and reopening public land. To subscribe to *Regrowth* go to www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/fire

Next issue – biolinks and biodiversity

The next issue of the magazine will feature stories on biolinks and biodiversity. We welcome your contributions on these issues as well as your general Landcare news and views.

Contributions to the next issue should be sent to the editor by 15 October 2010.

Carrie Tiffany, editor
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Neville Ragg from the Christmas Hills Landcare Group noticed this golden orb spider was soon back at work in an area burnt by the Black Saturday bushfires.

The Victorian Landcare & Catchment Management magazine is published by the Victorian Government Department of Sustainability and Environment and distributed in partnership with the Farm Tree & Landcare Association 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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www.dse.vic.gov.au/victorianlandcaremagazine