

Western Division newsletter

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Produced for landholders in
the Western Division of NSW



Enterprise Based Conservation – three landholders' views

The WEST 2000 Plus Enterprise Based Conservation pilot program provides funding for on-ground infrastructure to manage areas for conservation, and ongoing payments for landholders who meet specific conservation targets.

It is the first program in Australia to conserve uncleared areas through regular payments rather than funding land rehabilitation.

The ten projects range in size from 320–23,000 ha, resulting in a total of over 650 square kilometres of Western Division land being managed for conservation. This is roughly equivalent to the size of Singapore.

The program is described in more detail in the March/April 2004 edition of the Western Division Newsletter.

In this article, three of the ten landholders taking part in the pilot project talk about what they're doing and why:

Churinga

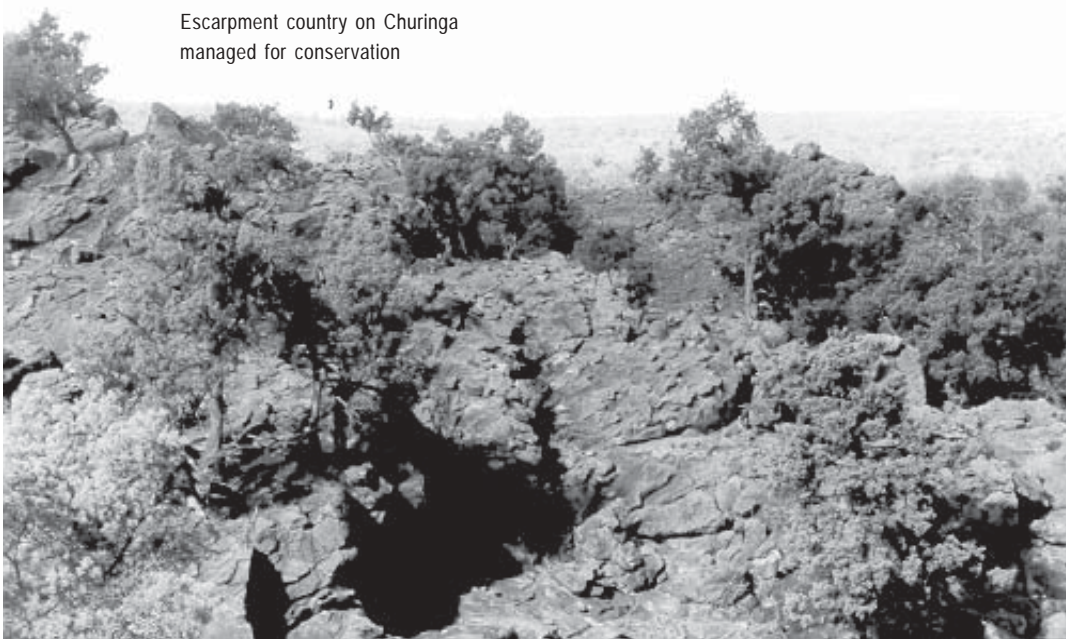
Garry Hannigan of 'Churinga' near Wilcannia will manage approximately 4,000 hectares or ten per cent of his property for conservation rather than production, allowing the escarpment country to return to its natural state. It is home to many valuable native plant and animal species including knobtailed geckos, short-beaked echidnas, threatened pink cockatoos and the endangered 'Nelia' plants.

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Escarpment country on Churinga
managed for conservation





Paul Theakston
Natural Resource
Project Officer
(Landscape Management)
DIPNR, Cobar

Welcome to the May/June edition of the Western Division Newsletter.

As I've been travelling around the Cobar and Ivanhoe districts it is becoming apparent that the drought has not ended and that it continues in many parts of the Western Division. Many people, including myself, have forgotten what good pasture cover looks like.

Many landholders are actively managing the current drought and are preparing for when the season breaks. It is apparent these landholders have a plan and cautiously stick to it, to the benefit of their pasture, bank account and social wellbeing. Articles by Richard Groom and Mark King outline the importance of proactive farm management during drought and during good seasons.

The drought also has impacts on the natural resources of the area. An article by Russell Grant discusses the impact of the current

drought on Bladder Saltbush and Black Bluebush communities using the Rangeland Assessment Program (RAP) Data.

Lack of rain is still causing stress for many people. The articles by Ian Charles and Jim Beach describe some of the social support available in these trying times.

Most editions of this newsletter contain at least one article on woody weeds. This edition is no different; however the article in this edition by Peter Jansen considers woody weeds a renewable resource and not a 'weed' in the pastoral sense. Utilising this resource would be beneficial in more ways than one.

Thankyou to everyone who has contributed to this edition to make it interesting and informative. If you have any contributions, comments or suggestions that might improve the WDN, please contact your local NSW Agriculture or Department of Infrastructure, Planning & Natural Resource office.

A Centenary for the Western Division Newsletter

This edition is the 100th for the Western Division Newsletter — a record in anyone's books! Many thanks to all who have contributed over the years and, of course, to our readers.

No doubt you will have noticed the new format — the first significant change in design since 1993.

The improved design and layout is more attractive and adds to the newsletter's

readability and despite the better quality paper, costs no more to produce. We'd love to hear your thoughts on our new look.

We look forward notching up a double century with your involvement.

Western Division Newsletter Editorial Committee: Ron Hacker, Greg Curran, Bill Noad, Matthew Davidson and Maree Barnes.



Department of
Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources

The Western Division Newsletter is jointly produced by NSW Agriculture and the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources with funding assistance from the Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW) and WEST 2000 Plus.



Improved planning for profit

by Mark King
Chair of the
Lower Murray Darling
Catchment Management
Authority



The challenge of managing a successful rural business is increasing with continual changes to commodity prices, climate conditions, the environment and research findings. This has led the Lower Murray Darling Catchment Management Authority to sponsor a project to assist catchment farmers and pastoralists to look at better ways of business planning.

We decided we would try a new way of planning and engaged Mike Krause, of Applied Economic Solutions P/L to help us use computer based programs to assist farmers and pastoralists with planning their business futures.

Over the last 6 months, Mr Krause has conducted a series of training days where farmers and pastoralists can look at their major business decisions and ask the ‘what if’ questions when searching for ways to improve their profitability.

These training days have allowed farmers and pastoralists to actively participate in the development of programs which they can take home for use in the decision-making in the business. The results have been very encouraging.

The program is versatile and allows consideration of alternative enterprises, cropping rotations, intensifying production and placing land in conservation reserves.

Participant Gary Doyle, Petro Station, which includes 12,000 ha of dryland cropping said, ‘The key uses for me would be looking at “what if” scenarios. For instance, what if I introduced canola or

closed rotations on all or part of the operation. Also, it gives me the ability to assess how my business would handle a prolonged drought or even a severe drop in commodity prices. I think it will be a great tool for anyone who wants to expand their enterprise, and make their operation sustainable in the long term’.

Patty Byrnes, Wamberra Station, a beef, dryland cropping and private conservation enterprise, outlined the following benefits to her from attending the training program:

- allows comparisons between crops and livestock breeds without spending any money
- allows long-term planning for profit
- user friendly
- an affordable program that most computers already have installed (no need to buy a new program)
- better decision making — identifies best gross margin per hectare
- provide financial reports and projections for loan applications (ideal for bank manager and lending institutions)
- can introduce poor yields and commodity prices to the program and determine risk factors to the business.

Angus Whyte, Wyndham Station, thought that the two days were fantastic in that he came out of it with a great tool to help manage and make decisions on his property. He said, ‘The best bit was that we were taught how to make templates that are specific to us, while being shown some of the power of Microsoft Excel’.

One of the aims of the project was to see how farmers and pastoralists could use computer-based programs in planning for their business future. The big test was to see how participants with little computer experience would find using these computer based decision tools. We were pleasantly surprised how well the participants took to the planning tools.

Jenny Baird, Coleraine Station, said, ‘As a novice to Excel, I found it an “eye-opener” with its applications. The template will be an important tool for the application criteria for the grants in our industry’.

This project provided both a unique opportunity for various relevant Excel templates to be developed and for participants to become proficient in using them in the comfort of their own office. The results were so encouraging that further training will be made available.

For more information on this project or the training, please contact Lesley Palmer on Ph: (03) 5021 9443 or Mike Krause on Ph: (08) 8396 7122.

Garry Hannigan says:

The project involves excluding grazing domestic stock and the ongoing removal of goats from a 10,000 acre site.

The area is predominantly hilly and has escarpment country with caves, creeks and gorges, and opens into some timbered, saltbush and blue-bush flats.

Four kilometres of additional fencing was done, to include all the area that is to go into conservation. Trap yards for goats have been built on the watering point within the site, and on three watering points within a 2 km buffer zone of the paddock.

The paddock is contracted for five years and the end result should be a major regeneration of native plants. Plant sites will be monitored and the breeding up of native wildlife will also be monitored. Several semi-endangered plant and animal species are already found on the site.

This area of conservation is NOT, however, a kangaroo farm and all current culling systems available from NPWS still apply. I strongly believe maintaining the balance of wildlife will make these areas excel in environmental gains.

I believe this concept has a huge potential for the Western Division. A negotiated payment is made to the landholder for the conservation of their land.

In the hard times we are currently experiencing, where many of us are still in drought and poor wool prices, a guaranteed income from this scheme adds financial security to the landholder.

Enterprise Based Conservation is a concept that is a viable alternative to the purchase of more National Parks. Should this scheme expand in the future it may well change the whole direction of conservation in the Western Division away from more National Parks to a concept that leaves landholders in

control of their land while guaranteeing conservation on a potentially larger, but more balanced scale.

This concept has the potential as an alternative income to keep people on the land, maintaining family structure and slow the conversion of productive grazing land to the permanence of National Parks while still delivering the required conservation outcomes.

Well done WEST 2000 Plus for taking the initiative to trial this project.

Bokhara Plains

The Finlaysons of 'Bokhara Plains', north of Brewarrina, are aiming to maintain a groundcover level of 40%. They will manage the grazing intensity of domestic stock by implementing a cell grazing operation across the entire 6,800 ha property. The property incorporates a number of watercourses, and is dominated by an extensive grass/chenopod landscape.

Graham Finlayson says:

Cathy and I were fortunate and very pleased to be selected as one of the ten submissions in the inaugural trial by West 2000 Plus for 'Enterprise Based Conservation'.

We took the option within the program that focuses on maintaining the ground cover, particularly during the drier years. We decided to put the whole of the property into the program as I believe that by taking this approach to our land then our business will also benefit in the longer term.

To maintain and actually improve our ground cover requires a dramatic change in our grazing management to one in which we use the sheep / cattle as a tool. This is done by intensively stocking paddocks followed by long periods of rest allowing perennial pastures to rejuvenate and establish.

To do this we needed to change our paddock structure from nine paddocks to twenty seven to allow grazing to be tightly controlled. This also requires a

different system of stock watering as previously we had all open ground tanks which were not efficient enough or suitable for our new paddock structure.

So far (this summer) we have managed to put in a water system involving 24 km of Poly Pipe, eight 5,000 gallon tanks and seven concrete troughs. The troughs are set up so that we can water four different paddocks from each, as we only use one paddock at a time, giving us a big cost saving.

We have also put up almost 40 km of fencing which has consisted of three wires (two electric) with 30 metre panels using 'Westonfence' poly droppers which also double as insulators. This fence tends to allow for a little conventionality with the cost effectiveness of the electric systems.

Our five year goals for this program are to not only maintain 40% ground cover regardless of the rainfall but to actually improve the type of pasture and increase the biodiversity of our whole ecosystem.

We believe that this can be done at the same time as increasing our stocking rate to match the improving carrying capacity and ultimately making our business more profitable. We also believe that by being involved with this program then our success will be monitored and documented and will hopefully encourage other landholders to change their approach and be proactive in making the rangelands more ecologically and economically sustainable.

This program fits 'hand in glove' with our management plans for Bokhara Plains, and has allowed us through help with infrastructure costs to set up the paddock and water system as it should be from the start.

Corella

Ben Mannix of 'Gumbook', 60 km north east of Bourke is also participating in the

program. The 4,400 ha project site on nearby 'Corella' incorporates a mature stand of the Brigalow vegetation community. The aim of this project is to improve groundcover, reduce soil erosion and undertake selective woody weed control.

Asked why he became involved, Ben said 'if you don't put your hand up and have a go, you don't have a right to criticise'.

Ben Mannix says:

It's easy to sit back and whinge, but I wanted to be involved so that I can see first-hand if using that area for conservation rather than production can work and to be able to have a knowledgeable opinion on it.

As one of the other blokes in the program says: 'If you're not on the edge then you're taking up too much room' I just wanted to get in and have a go.

We have totally de-stocked an area, roughly 11,000 acres originally designated as a goat paddock. It is fenced with 8/9/30 ringlock fencing with 2 strands of barbed wire. This paddock includes many old brigalow trees and unfortunately an intense growth of woody weeds on the sand areas. Fortunately, this weed seems to have been somewhat diminished by severe drought.

With the removal of domestic animals we would hope to see less compaction and trampling of the soil around watering points. This should also minimise wind erosion around these areas, allowing seeds to settle and germinate.

With help from Terry Mazzer from the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, we will endeavour to monitor the ground cover in the conservation area. We hope to see regeneration of native bushland, natural grasses and other vegetation such as old man saltbush and other varieties of saltbush which originally grew here. At very worst we would see woody weed regenerate in the area. Terry will observe bird life and animal habitat as well as vegetation.

There have been sightings of very large goannas, sand lizards and other smaller lizards. A large variety of insects live in the bark of the trees.

Outside the designated conservation area is similar soil, country and vegetation. Over the five years of the program, we will compare the results inside the destocked area with the outer area where sheep grazing will continue.

Envirofund grants soon available



by Caroline Sandral,
Regional Natural Resource
Management Facilitator,
DIPNR, Bourke

Do you have a small project aimed at conserving biodiversity and sustainable resource use?

If so, you may be eligible for up to \$30,000.

Envirofund is the local action component of the Australian Government's \$2.7 billion Natural Heritage Trust. It helps individuals and communities undertake local projects aimed at conserving biodiversity and promoting sustainable resource use.

Envirofund enables community groups and individuals to apply for grants of up to \$30,000 to carry out on-ground and other actions to target local problems.

The next round of applications for Envirofund grants will open later this year, following announcements of the successful projects in Round Two of 2003–2004.

So far the Western Catchment has successfully obtained over \$380,000 in Envirofund grants for on-ground works,

including fencing off parts of the Warrego, Paroo, Culgoa, Cuttaburra and Barwon-Darling. Managing total grazing pressure has been incorporated into many of the projects, as has the relocation of water points.

Envirofund will generally provide up to one dollar for every dollar or in-kind equivalent contributed by the applicant.

To be eligible you must be either a legal entity (such as an incorporated organisation) or an individual proposing activities that have a very high public benefit, such as improved water quality or native vegetation retention.

For more information about Envirofund please contact the Regional Natural Resource Management Facilitators, Caroline Sandral at Bourke on (02) 6872 2144 or Jason Cody at Cobar on (02) 6836 1575.

National Parks and Wildlife Service part of new agency

by Jacki Roberts,
Senior Public Affairs Officer
Department of Environment
and Conservation, Parks
Service Division

In September 2003 a number of separate agencies within the NSW environment portfolio were consolidated to create the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). The department brings together the Environment Protection Authority, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Resource NSW and Botanic Gardens Trust. It also has strong links to the Sydney Catchment Authority (SCA).

The department builds upon the individual successes of the agencies by combining their scientific knowledge, innovation, credible regulation and field experience to tackle priority environment, conservation, sustainability and cultural heritage issues for NSW. It means improved service for the community, industry, farming sector and conservation groups. For councils and other government agencies it means a single point of contact on a range of issues.

The DEC leads an ongoing environment reform program to:

- Protect the state's natural and cultural heritage;
- Achieve a healthy environment;
- Continue to improve the state's world class reserve system;
- Increase collaboration and focus the state's world class policy and scientific capability on priorities across the environment portfolio;
- Streamline and strengthen pollution, biodiversity, cultural heritage approvals and regulation;
- Champion business and community sustainability programs; and
- Ensure cost effective and efficient administration.

Purchasing land for the Public Reserve System

by Terry Korn
Director Western Branch NPWS, DEC

The Western Branch of National Parks and Wildlife Service is continuing its commitment to further developing the public reserve system in western NSW.

Benefits?

Conservation:

Prior to 1996, only a tiny percentage of western NSW had been held in conservation reserves with many ecosystems and samples of our cultural heritage not represented in protected areas. This situation has been changing, in a concerted effort by the Department of Environment and Conservation and state and federal governments. Designated funding has seen some large scale additions to the reserve system in the west, resulting in substantial additions to existing parks, as well as creating magnificent new areas such as Paroo-Darling National Park in the Far west and Oolambeyan National Park in the Riverina.

Even with large additions such as these, just 3% of western NSW is presently held in the public reserve system and the commitment to increasing the amount of these unrepresented landscapes continues.

The priorities now turn to lands associated with water, including terminal wetlands and riverine corridors, lands which contain a mix of different landscapes, lower slopes and flats with relatively large areas of remnant vegetation and lands of high Aboriginal cultural significance.

Economic:

We know that national parks contribute to the economies of regional communities. This occurs in two important ways — expenditure in the ongoing management of

national parks and reserves (wages, materials, contracting); and attracting visitors and tourists who buy a range of goods and services.

For example, in the case of Sturt, Kinchega and Mutawintji National Parks, expenditure made by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and park visitors in the region contributes an estimated \$5.5 million per year to the economy of far west NSW. This includes \$3.9 million paid to households as wages and salaries annually, and represents the equivalent of 162 additional jobs in the region.

How are purchases made?

An important mechanism for building the reserve system in the west is through purchasing private properties that are available for sale.

Not all private properties that are available for sale would add value to the public reserve system and in any one year more properties are offered to us than can be afforded. For these reasons priorities for land purchase are determined along two general lines — the current status of parks and reserves within different bioregions and the likelihood of lands with suitable natural and or Aboriginal cultural importance being available in the future.

Negotiations on land sales are undertaken with willing sellers on the basis of fair market value. The value is determined for NPWS by the State Valuation Office and the seller may also obtain an independent valuation to assist the negotiation process. All negotiations are confidential and the seller may withdraw at any time up until the date when the contracts are exchanged.

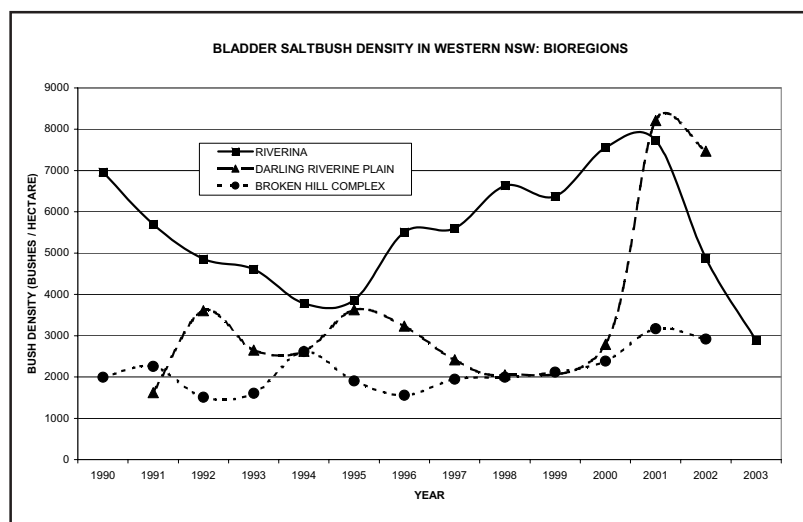
Changes in saltbush and bluebush density: Results from monitoring in western NSW

by Russell Grant,
Rangeland Assessment
Program, DIPNR

Articles in previous Newsletters by Matt Davidson and Deb Bate have highlighted the dieback of bladder saltbush (*Atriplex vesicaria*) due to ongoing drought both in the Hay and Broken Hill districts. Monitoring information gathered in cooperation with landholders through the Rangeland Assessment Program (RAP) demonstrates the changes in saltbush country and the level of current dieback. It also indicates changes in the numbers of other important chenopod shrubs such as black bluebush (*Maireana pyramidata*).

Monitoring data

Numbers of live shrubs are counted along pegged transects during routine RAP site measurements on saltbush and bluebush country. The following data has been averaged from a selection of RAP sites having a good density of bush and with consistent records over the thirteen-year period 1990–2002. These sites are about two kilometres away from waterpoints. Some 2003 data is still being processed and is not included.



The information has been grouped in terms of ‘bioregion’ in order to compare the trends in saltbush and bluebush densities on broadly different types of country:

The Riverina bioregion includes the flat saltbush plains extending from Deniliquin to Ivanhoe (27 saltbush sites, 17 bluebush sites).

The Broken Hill Complex bioregion includes the undulating stony plains centred on the Barrier Range (12 saltbush sites, 13 bluebush sites).

The Darling Riverine Plain bioregion includes the floodplain country between Nyngan and the Queensland border (5 saltbush sites, black bluebush uncommon).

The Murray Darling Depression bioregion includes the country between Mildura, Wilcannia and Ivanhoe (26 bluebush sites, bladder saltbush less common).

Bladder saltbush density

The saltbush chart shows that bladder saltbush density has remained relatively stable in the Broken Hill area over the past thirteen years. However, shrub density has varied up to 100% in the Riverina bioregion

The Riverina bioregion experienced dieback due to caterpillar attack and other factors in the mid-1990s, recovered to a peak in 2001, then suffered a rapid decline in density with the recent drought. Shrub populations are presently the lowest for the monitoring period.

In the northern areas of the Darling Riverine Plains, saltbush populations showed some seasonal variation until a dramatic increase in density probably as a

result of the good rainfalls of 2000 (evident on three of five sites).

Records of the presence of seedlings suggest that saltbush germinates in most years. In the Riverina and Broken Hill Complex bioregions, seedlings were present in 10–20% of site recordings in most years. However, little germination was evident in the dry years of 1991–92 and 2002–2003. In the Darling Riverine Plains bioregion, germinations were higher but more variable. Seedlings were present in over 30% of records in 1993, 1995 and 1998 but only 10% in 2000 when they may have been difficult to see amongst other growth.

Black bluebush density

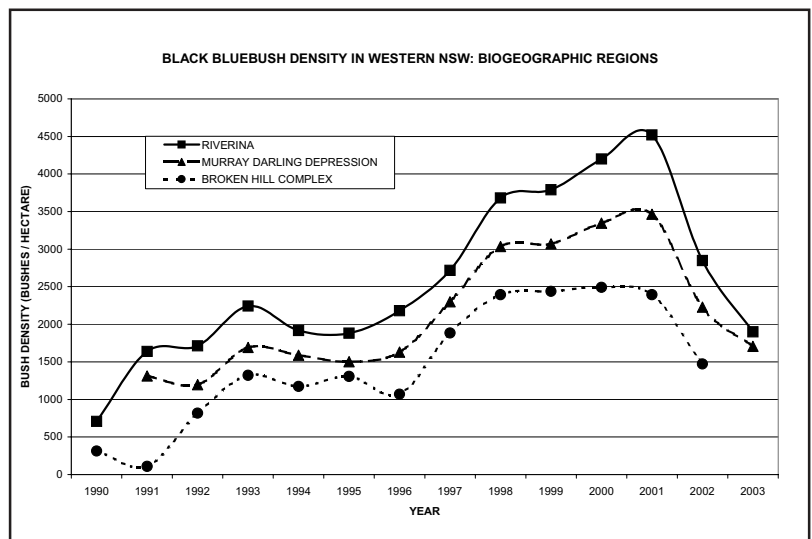
Black bluebush is a widespread, robust shrub that may persist for more than 100 years. It is less palatable to stock than bladder saltbush, but assists in maintaining landscape stability during drought.

The bluebush chart shows a substantial increase in shrub cover over the period 1991 till 2001, then a decline with the onset of the drought. The trend is similar for the three bioregions considered. The major increase in density happened after 1996, perhaps a consequence of the reduction in grazing pressure following the spread of rabbit calici virus in late 1995.

A greater than 100% increase in the presence of bluebush seedlings was recorded in the Riverina and Murray Darling Depression bioregions from 1997 until 2001. However, only a minor increase was evident in the Broken Hill area and probably in response to the 2000 rains.

Key points

- Monitoring information for the Riverina bioregion confirms that average bladder saltbush densities are now the lowest recorded since 1990. However, the shrub does have an ability to recover given favourable seasons and management.



- Average saltbush densities are lower and less dynamic in the Broken Hill area. Prior to the drought in 2001, densities were at a peak for the period since 1990. The 2002 densities would still have to decline 50% to reach the low levels recorded in 1992.
- Black bluebush densities have also declined significantly during the start of this drought and have returned to levels recorded between 1992 and 1996.

Rural property protection Lower Western Zone Fire

Although the declared fire danger period is over, it does not mean there is no longer a risk of fire. Due to low rainfall, many areas are still drought declared, the dry conditions means the fire danger risk is high.

The fire brigade task can be made easier and more effective if they are able to have access to all parts of the property. Brigades have in the past experienced difficulties because they can not get the truck into the area of the fire due to narrow driveways and gates, overhanging trees etc. The provision for extra water supplies from tanks, dams, or a swimming pool is a great benefit. The task of pumping from water tanks is sped up with a fitting that is compatible NSW Rural Fire brigade coupling (stotz fitting). 65 mm on Ball or gate outlet

There are many ways that individuals can reduce the risk of fire and improve property protection. Some examples are listed on page 15.



Stotz fitting

Western Division Rural Support Service

Jim Beach,
Rural Support Coordinator
Ph: 0428 271133

The Western Division Rural Support Service is entering its third year of service to landholders in the Western Division. The primary focus of the service is providing personal and family support, which may include counselling, family facilitation, referral and information on various services along with seminars/workshops which centre on relationships and the people aspects of business.

During the remainder of 2004, the Rural Support Service will be focusing on delivering several programs and workshops throughout the Western Division.

The initiatives are:

1. RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) program – TAFE Rural Campus
2. Men's well-being programs – Neville Brady
3. Personality profile and Succession Planning workshops – Lyn Sykes / Jim Beach
4. Family Communications – Relationships Australia

RPL

The RPL program is under way with ten landholders participating. The courses available are certificate IV in Rural Business Management and certificate IV in Agriculture. The initial property visits by John Polain (Orange TAFE) to assess prior skills has been completed with very positive results. The Participants were pleasantly surprised by the number of skills they possessed that could be put towards credits for the relevant certificate and it is anticipated that there will be minimal Gap subjects required for completion to enable students to obtain their certificate. John Polian said he would visit all students at least twice to provide help where needed and he indicated that TAFE will endeavor to run Gap subject courses in Broken Hill.

Men's Workshop

The services of Neville Brady who is renowned for his work with community groups conducting parenting programs for men, men's health programs and family mediations will conduct several Men's health programs at various locations in the Western Division. The key aspects that Neville will cover:

- Stress, the modern day killer
- The common killers of men and what you can do right now to extend your life.
- Being fit to be with. Controlling your anger and stress.
- What is a healthy diet and how to include one in your life-style.

Personality Profile and Succession Planning

There have been several of these workshops throughout 2002/2003 with positive feedback from a large number of participants. Encouraging farming families to embrace the facilitation process and understanding individual communication styles is a positive move in protecting the longevity of the rural industry.

Family Communications

Relationships Australia conducted two family communications workshops during 2003 with a very good response. As a result of feedback, further programs will be made available during the year. These days everyday life is so demanding that it can be hard to find the time and energy to invest in keeping our closest relationships strong. The workshops provide opportunities to learn about things like stress, resilience, self esteem, communication and relationship skills.

If you have any queries or interest in any of the above workshops, please do not hesitate to give me a call.

Water wakens wildlife in Narran Nature Reserve

by Michael Heinze,
Ranger, Narran Lake Nature Reserve

January's heavy rainfall in Queensland has provided a timely flow of water into the previously parched Narran Lake Nature Reserve, resulting in a boom in aquatic wildlife. Dry for most of the past four years, both Clear and Back Lakes now resemble small inland seas, with waterbirds, fish and aquatic invertebrates taking advantage of the brief respite from the drought. Birds such as Grey Teal and Spoonbills are abundant while less common species such as Marsh Sandpipers and Australasian Shovelers have appeared in smaller numbers. Smaller inhabitants of the waterways have also re-appeared. Tiny Shield-shrimps which have hatched from eggs lying dormant in the silt are providing food for wading birds while pelicans, cormorants and terns are taking advantage of large numbers of juvenile Spangled Perch and other fish species found in the western waterways.

Whilst the amount of water entering the lakes system will not be enough to trigger a major bird breeding event, the inflow has accelerated the field work of a research team on site. The Murray Darling Basin Commission has funded the 4 year study by a diverse team of scientists and experts from the Co-operative Research Centre for Freshwater Ecology, the University of Canberra, Monash University and NPWS. They are trying to determine the flooding regimes needed to maintain the ecological values of the reserve. While there will be a lot of direct scientific methods used in the field, the team are also keen to talk to interested stakeholders including neighbours, Aboriginal communities, local graziers and anyone else who is affected by altered flow regimes along the Narran River. It is hoped that the results and outcomes of the study of the Narran Lake



floodplain area will provide a clearer understanding of the dynamics of the system. This should in turn lead to improved management of the whole river and floodplain, enabling the amazing diversity of water-dependent wildlife in this arid area to continue to flourish.

For further information on this research, people should contact the Senior Community Scientist, Janey Adams on (07) 4671 4650.

Footnote:

Department of Environment and Conservation (of which NPWS is now a part) is working collaboratively with DIPNR to develop a whole of government submission on the impacts of the Condomine/Balonne water sharing plan, which potentially effects not only the Culgoa National Park and Narran Lake Nature Reserve, but also the general ecology of the flood plain.

Fresh water spreading across Clear Lake in the Narran Lakes Nature Reserve

Drought relief rural visits



by Ian Charles with his Pajero 4WD

In November 2002, Cobar Drought Relief Committee was formed to coordinate relief efforts within the Cobar Shire. The Committee consists of representatives of the Churches, Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul, Red Cross, CWA, Rotary, Apex and Shire

Council. I have been on that committee from the start, and am currently the President. The committee has been responsible for distribution of food hampers, toiletries, spring water, toys, other necessities and for assisting people financially through gift vouchers(\$28,000) or payment of essential accounts such as fuel, phone or electricity (over \$50,000).

My main role has been that of visiting landowners on their properties, which has proved very worthwhile. Although I sometimes travel alone, others have accompanied me, and I would like to pay tribute to those people — Rev Ken Foley (early in 2003), Committee Secretary Melinda Mosenthal, Red Cross Representative Nel Merritt and my wife Heather.

So far we have covered nearly 35,000 km and visited some 120 families, some of them up to 5 or 6 times. The response from landowners has been overwhelming — almost always a big welcome and a cup of tea, or lunch, and even a baked dinner on one occasion. A number of people asked for us to come back again, and some said ‘even when the drought is over’. Typical responses have been: ‘When are you coming back again?’ ‘you are more beneficial to us than Rural Financial Counsellors’, ‘we have been wondering when you would come again.’ I would like to say a big thank you to all those who have made us so welcome.

Given the large nature of properties in this area, sometimes there can be 50 km

between each, and we generally only visit 4 or 5 families a day, and often less. Initially I started using our Camry, but quickly discovered that it wasn’t suitable for the rough roads, so I purchased a 1990 Mitsubishi Pajero 4wd which has served us well.

I have certainly gained an appreciation of the road conditions which the rural people have to endure continually. Fuel costs for this work have been met by donations which are specifically designated for that purpose — no general drought relief donations have been used. Registration and Insurance costs have been met by the local Baptist Church and the Baptist Churches of the Western Districts. We also received a donation for a UHF Radio.

The purpose of property visits has been fourfold — to offer support and encouragement, distribute goods which have been donated, be a listening ear or shoulder to cry on, or simply just to show that other people care about what is happening in the Rural Area. We have also tried to keep people informed of the various avenues of assistance that are available to them.

As a Baptist Minister, I always wear ‘two hats’ as it were, and there have been occasions when I have prayed with people or offered spiritual counsel. It has also been my privilege to visit some whose health has required a visit to hospital.

We try to visit properties once every 3 months, although of late visits seem to be taking longer and it may take more time to get around the Shire. Special visits can be arranged at any time, simply by ringing myself on 6836 2616, or Melinda Mosenthal on 6836 3292. There are also still some properties where we have not found anyone — if you have not received a visit and would like one, just give us a ring on one of those numbers.

Utilising woody weeds

by Peter Andries Jansen

I come from the Netherlands and in partnership own Jansen International, a group of three companies:

- Jansen International (indoor furniture and products)
- Livingstone Terrasso (outdoor furniture and products)
- Billings (giftware)

We have sales offices in Asia, Europe and North America with everything being produced in Asia. Unfortunately this production is having a big impact on the environment. To help reduce this we established J.I. Hampton, the environmental division of Jansen International.

Our target is to make the Jansen International group of companies emission free world wide by producing renewable energies through an independent industry, which creates jobs and makes profit.

We purchased a property south of Cobar four years ago, and discovered that by buying the property we also bought a woody weed problem. It is estimated on our property (24,000 ha) there is a total of 1.5 million woody weeds of 15 kg per plant. We had to solve the problem without any financial cost to the property. Also we did not want to have any permanent negative impact on the country. I feel the only way to solve the problem this way is to make a product out of the woody weed.

This was the perfect opportunity for J.I. Hampton to develop a new industry. Given the size of the problem in the Cobar Shire, we believe there is potential for a profitable company working in conjunction with landholders to control the woody weed without any costs.

We started trials 3 years ago on our property. Last year we developed the following method, which we hope to optimise by February 2005.



The fieldwork

We cut the bush 20 cm above ground level using a modified cane harvester (see photo), without disturbing the topsoil. This method controls the spread of the woody weed in the short term. It gives better access to the paddock, more visibility and better grass growth. The woody weed will not be a problem for 3 to 5 years, after which we will repeat the harvesting, depending on plant growth rates. Where there is no other timber we will cut the bushes in rows of 20 metres wide to avoid wind erosion and after enough regrowth has occurred we cut the other rows.

The product

After the plant is cut into pieces it dries for at least 4 weeks. We then hammermill it into pieces of 10 mm, separate the bark and leaves from the wood and grind the wood into sawdust. The wood is pelletised into a wood pellet ready to burn.

At this moment we have permission from the appropriate government departments for 3 trial areas which we are planning to cut this year. This gives us the opportunity to optimise our field equipment and refine the wood pellets for the most efficient burning.

We hope to be ready for production by February 2005.

Drought management and recovery – not a rabbit’s foot approach

by Richard Groom, RCS, Ph (02) 6658 0775
Email: rgroom@rcs.au.com or visit our website www.rcs.au.com

There’s an old saying that says, ‘Depend on the rabbit’s foot if you must... but remember it didn’t help the rabbit.’ Any successful drought management and recovery program can’t be reliant on the rabbit’s foot approach.

In all aspects of farming life it is important to have goals to aim for. We have goals for reproduction rates, crop yields, kg of wool cut per head, micron, weight gain in lambs and cattle, genetic improvement, income after tax etc. How many of us have goals and strategies that will enable our properties to come out of a drought both economically and ecologically viable?

In 2002 Resource Consulting Services (RCS) gathered 2000 man-years of drought experience across NSW from 10 workshops. As well as sharing strategies for effective drought management, these workshops addressed the three critical aspects of:

1. Drought proofing the business
2. Management of threats and looking for opportunities during the dry; and
3. Recovery strategies after rain

At each workshop participants identified areas of potential risk toward their business e.g. drought feeding, procrastination due to fear, fall in livestock values, stress on people, reduction in equity.

Are any of the above potential areas of risk in your business?

If you are interested in discussing your drought strategies or registering for a course, please contact me.

The next Grazing for Profit™ course will be held at Dubbo 2–9 June. These courses are eligible for WEST 2000 Plus funding.

Do you have this cactus on your place?

by Melinda Fletcher,
Community Support Officer,
DIPNR



Cyllindropuntia fulgida

If you do, and you’d like help to get rid of it, please let me know.

I’m trying to identify all small, medium or large populations in the Western Division so that one joint funding submission can be written by the Western Catchment Management Authority.

The cacti in these pictures belong to a group named *Cyllindropuntia* (common names include devil’s rope, tiger pear, boxing glove cholla). They originated from Arizona and Mexico and were introduced to Australia as a garden plant back in the early 1900s.

Over the last few dry years, populations have rapidly increased in density and area, affecting the pastoral and biodiversity values of the land.

In Australia, these cacti do not regularly flower or seed, but drop ‘buds’ which are spread by wind, water flow and native and domestic animals.

I am currently aware of five populations in the Western Division: two outside Broken Hill, one near Menindee, one near Coombah (South of Broken Hill) and a



Devil's rope pear (*Cyllindropuntia imbricata*)

large population around Lightning Ridge.

Herbicide application is the most effective means of control. I am currently preparing a submission which will apply for enough funds to purchase chemical and also to contribute towards labour costs.

If you’ve got cactus, I would like to know:

1. where your population is
2. its approximate size, and
3. the number of adult and juvenile plants growing.

Please call me on (08) 8087 8400 by the end of June.

Aboriginal art site plan wins prestigious Planning Institute of Australia awards

The plan prepared to protect the Mulgowan Aboriginal Art Sites at Gundabooka National Park, south west of Bourke has won both a state and national award for excellence from the Planning Institute of Australia. The Site Management Plan, Interpretation Plan, and Interpretive Materials Plan were prepared by Gondwana Consulting for the Department of Environment and Conservation and the Gunda-Ah-Myro Aboriginal Corporation, representing the local Ngemba people. The plan received the President's Award, which is awarded for nationally significant projects that make an outstanding contribution to planning.

The Mulgowan Cultural Site is a place of tremendous cultural importance, and a source of pride, for the Ngemba and Paakantji Aboriginal people of north-western NSW. Located within traditional 'Stone Country', the site features arrays of evocative and highly personalised rock art images considered to be of national significance.

In anticipation of increasing visitor numbers to the Art Sites the Parks Service Division and the site's Aboriginal Custodians were

together seeking to better protect, present and interpret the site's more accessible rock art galleries.

Gondwana Consultants Alan and Andrew Ginns, together with specialist interpreter Cath Renwick and landscape architect Catherine Brew were engaged to prepare the Site Management Plan, Interpretation Plan, and Interpretive Materials Plan.

The resulting plan, which was developed in close association with members of the Gunda-Ah-Myro Aboriginal Corporation and other local community members, incorporated a number of special features including:

- a traditional on-site 'gathering day', to review the project's directions;
- a visitor movement strategy;
- the development of unique interpretation signs for the site; and
- a creative boardwalk and barrier devised to protect the main art gallery from the impacts of increasing visitor numbers and damage from feral animals.

Implementation of the planning directions outlined in the plan will begin in mid 2004 with re-routing of the existing track and installation of the viewing platform, protective barrier and interpretive signs.

A copy of the Plan can be viewed at the Bourke Office of the NPWS at 51 Oxley Street, Bourke. Further inquiries can be made by contacting Angela Seymour at the Department of Environment and Conservation office in Bourke on ph: (02) 6872 2744 (formerly National Parks and Wildlife Service).

Ways to reduce fire risk on your property

- Reduce grass, dried leaves, branches, thick undergrowth around buildings.
- Clear all gutters of leaves and debris.
- Prepared a firebreak between the property boundary and the property.
- Store flammable liquids (e.g. petrol and diesel) in an area separate from home, or equipment sheds.
- Check LPG gas cylinders vent away from buildings.
- Ensure the building is sound with no significant cracks or gaps around doors, windows or brickwork.
- Use roof vents screened with fine mesh to prevent sparks entry.
- Enclosed under-floor area to prevent entry of debris and sparks.
- Install hoses that when attached to taps will reach all sides of the building.
- Have a minimum 5000 litres of water available for fire protection.

For further information please contact your local fire brigade or fire control centre.

Western Division Newsletter

NSW Agriculture
PO Box 865
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To the Landholder



Western Division newsletter

The editors of the WDN welcome contributions

Issue	Editorial Office	Deadline	Issue	Editorial Office	Deadline
July–Aug	NSW Agriculture PO Box 62, Dareton 2717 Fax: (03) 5027 4319 Phone: (03) 5027 4409 Email: peter.jessop@agric.nsw.gov.au	28 May	Sep–Oct	DIPNR PO Box 363, Buronga 2739 Fax: (03) 5021 3328 Phone: (03) 5021 9400 Email: pixie.jonasson@dipnr.nsw.gov.au	30 July