



Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc Annual General Meeting 2022

President's Annual Report

Acknowledgements

I begin this report by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Gundungarra and Darug peoples and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

In reflecting upon the past year, I would like to thank all of our members for supporting the work of the Society. Our voice comes through our strength in numbers and our collective efforts. Our membership number continues to be over 900 despite the challenges of COVID, which is a positive.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge the Management Committee, which has coordinated and conducted much of the Society's work over the past year, adapting to meetings via 'zoom' and working in a very positive and energising way. I would especially like to recognise those leaving the Management Committee: Alan Page, for his outstanding and creative work as webmaster as well as administrative support and general brains trust, Caroline Druce, for her fabulous work as Administration Officer and particularly her ability to reply and coordinate emails, Cathy Cavanagh for her role as Education Officer and work with students at Katoomba North Primary school and Gordon Fell as Threatened Species Officer and his contributions there. I would also like to thank those who have served in the following roles throughout the year: Madi Maclean, Senior Vice President and Gardens of Stone Project Officer; Susan Crick, Second Vice President and Hut News Editor; Elizabeth Howard, Treasurer; Heather Hull, Meetings Secretary; Rebecca Knight, Publicity Officer; Ross Coster, Membership Secretary; Paul Irwin, Nursery Manager; Angela Langdon, Landuse Officer; Clare Power, Sustainability Officer; Adam Curry, National Parks Officer; Paul Vale, Bushcare Officer and Andrew Solomon, Events Coordinator.

This year, a positive development was the running of Planning Day facilitated by Pip Walsh, which helped the Management Committee and some subcommittee members begin planning more proactively.

Activities

Our nursery volunteers continue to put in a massive amount of work. The nursery has continued to function well even with the challenges of COVID. Whole different ways of operating were enacted, with volunteers often having to work alone during lockdowns. Online sales have increased, and the markets have done very well. The nursery truck was replaced and we implemented a payment system using Square. Please see the Nursery report for more details.

The bushwalkers and plant group also coped with the restrictions and continued to run programs allowing people to get into the bush. Doug Nicholls and the team of bushwalking leaders have grappled with COVID restrictions and the weather, which impacted the number of walks. Despite this, we still have approximately 300 members registered as walkers. Helen Yoxall has coordinated the plant study group and Paul Vale has worked as the Society contact for the Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group.

COVID restrictions limited the number of events run by the Society in the past year, but we were pleased to run the Sunset Gathering at the Conservation Hut, as well as hosting 'Mining the Blue Mountains' and 'The Pilliga Project' at Mount Vic Flicks.

Sub Committees and Campaigns

The Society's work is largely undertaken through sub-committees comprising at least one member of the Management Committee and several ordinary members. Additionally, we have representatives and Project Officers working on specific issues.

Gardens of Stone

On 13 November 2021, the NSW government announced the creation of a new Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area (SCA) in response to a 20-year campaign to protect the spectacular forested area north of Lithgow full of pagodas and endangered upland swamps. The new State Conservation Area comprises most of three state forests (Newnes, Ben Bullen and Wolgan) plus Crown reserve land near Mount Piper. The campaign was led by the Gardens of Stone Alliance, made up of the Colong Foundation for Wilderness, Lithgow Environment Group and the Society, with support from the Nature Conservation Council and National Parks Association. The achievement of this goal was a significant milestone in 2021. The work to continue to protect the area will continue. Recent cracking in Muggi Murum-ban State Conservation Area due to underground coal mining highlights the need for vigilance.

Warragamba Dam and Protected Areas

Opposing the raising of the dam wall has been an ongoing priority for the Society. In the past year, we continued our opposition and supported the work of the Colong Foundation in this area. The Society also supports opposition from Aboriginal organisations such as the Gundungurra Aboriginal Heritage Association and elders committed to opposing the dam wall raising. A primary focus was the gathering of submissions to the EIS process. The Society worked with the Colong Foundation to engage a coordinator who ran street stalls and engaged the public with this critical issue. The battle will continue!

Other work in protected areas related to engagement with the updates to the Blue Mountains, Kanangra and Wollemi National Park Plans of Management. This involved public meetings with NPWS and we thank the many members that volunteered to help. The process continues and a formalised submission will be undertaken in the coming year. Submissions were written on the proposed changes to Govetts Leap lookout, Narrow Neck and Green Gully. We continue to engage in the Grand Clifftop walk project and oppose the plans to use Bell Quarry as a waste dump.

The Society has also raised concerns about the Great Western Highway Upgrade: Medlow Bath to Blackheath. We will continue our calls for a thorough single Environmental Impact Statement that examines the impact of the entire project and its effects on groundwater and the environment.

All submissions are available for members to view on our website.

Katoomba Airfield

The Society has been working to have Katoomba airfield incorporated into the national park for over 20 years. Most recently, we have worked with residents and community groups to oppose a proposal for helicopter charter flights based at the airfield. After initially being rejected in January 2020, the State Government put the proposal back on the agenda by reviewing the decision. An increase in Society campaigning followed involving actions such as a full-page open letter in the Sydney Morning Herald. Happily, the decision to reject the helicopter business proposal was made in November 2021. While this is very positive, we continue to campaign for the land to be added to the national park to protect it in perpetuity.

Land Use

The Society's Land Use subcommittee consists of a dedicated group of volunteers who seek to protect the beautiful Blue Mountains environment by influencing land use planning, development approvals and reporting potential breaches of environmental legislation. In the last 12 months, the Society Land Use subcommittee has been involved in issues such as:

- Wentworth Falls zoo aka croc park
- Medium density housing code
- Possible sites for a lower mountain base for the nursery
- Design and Place State Environment Planning Policy
- Faulconbridge Quarry
- South Lawson (old golf course) masterplan
- Clearing issue Winmalee
- Katoomba Masterplan process
- Council election questionnaire

Climate Change and Education

Actions to address climate change and promote sustainability have continued over the past year. The Society is currently working with other groups as part of the Macquarie Alliance to highlight the need for action on climate change in the lead up to the next Federal election. A campaign to reduce gas use in the Blue Mountains is also being launched.

Environmental education initiatives also remained a focus in the past year. The direct work in schools was curtailed due to COVID restrictions, but other work has continued.

In conclusion

Thank you for your role in supporting the Society and helping us enjoy and advocate for the beautiful Blue Mountains, which we all love.

Tara Cameron