

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow's People"



Draft Local Environment Plan 2002 How can it help protect our creeks and waterways?

It may be a while since we last saw torrents of muddy water flowing down the street gutters after a storm, but we need to think about it now - **it is a key issue in the Draft Local Environment Plan 2002.**

Planning laws may seem far removed from the undercutting and collapse of creek banks. They are not. Too many hard surfaces in the urban area cause erosion of creeklines and clogging up of creeks with silt. (The shallow sandy pool at the base of MinneHaHa Falls was once thought to be 'bottomless')

When we increase the area covered by buildings and paved surfaces, less rainwater soaks into the ground. This reduces the groundwater available to gently feed swamps and creeks. It also means that more rainwater joins the overland flow into creeks leading to rapid rises and falls in the creek itself, causing in-stream erosion.

This destabilisation of urban creeks can destroy the habitat of aquatic plants and animals and fill pools with sediment. The creeks become deeply gouged channels which transport water at high velocity after storms and carry silt, weeds and rubbish from the urban area, dumping these into the National Park.

Not only is more water released, but it is also released in more concentrated flows, because we tend to channel water into pipes and gutters. These concentrated flows, unimpeded by any natural obstacles to slow the water down, are eventually released into creeks at high speeds and high volumes.

The way to stop this damage is at the source. The more absorptive surfaces the better. The DLEP 2002 begins to

address this problem by putting some limits on hard surfaces.

In Living-Conservation and Living-Bushland Conservation zones, the DLEP proposes that 60% of any lot must be retained as water-absorptive (or soft) surfaces. In Living-General this is to be 40% of the lot. These provisions are called 'site coverage' and found in Schedule 2 for Living Zones.

It is vital that we all let Council know that we support this as a minimum. If we don't voice our support for these limits to hard surfaces, others may convince Council to reduce the limits.

Unfortunately the amount of pervious, soft or landscaped surfaces to be kept in Employment Zones is not nearly so good for our creeks. It is only to be 20% in Employment-General and only 30% for Employment-Enterprise zones. This could be improved.

DLEP 2002 covers a wide range of environmental issues. Concerns about protection of sensitive areas by Environmental Protection Zones and Protected Areas were covered in the November newsletter. The Society has developed a two-page summary guide to the key issues in the Plan. This is available on the website, or by contacting Monica Nugent (4784 1631 or email monican@bigpond.com.au). A more detailed assessment of the Plan is also available.

There is an insert in this edition of Hut News which includes a form letter, if you can do nothing else we urge you to sign this. If you can use it as a guide, it is better to write your own letter. **Don't delay! Submissions need to reach Council by 5pm, Friday 13 December.**

A Timeline for the Upper Blue Mountains

At our general meeting in October 2001 Jim Smith presented the draft of a seasonal nature calendar for the upper Blue Mountains. Jim combined his own observations over the last 25 years with those obtained from interviews with observant naturalists in the area, particularly those that have kept diaries. After much work and checking with contributors, the very first Timeline for the Upper Blue Mountains has been printed.

A copy is enclosed with this newsletter. Keep it and look for the natural events that mark the seasonal changes in the Blue Mountains. A study of Nature in the Blue Mountains can be a truly rewarding experience.

But this is just the beginning. What do you look forward to or notice each year? Have you noticed regular weather events, mass flowering events, stages in the behaviour or life cycle of local animals. You may be able to verify the information currently listed and add records of reliable and conspicuous indicators of seasonality or indicators of the health of our local environment.

These events could include when something happens for the first or last time each year (first bloom of flower, migratory bird leaving), when the numbers of something common reach a peak or a trough (large hatching of insects, absence of swallows), effects of a natural or human-made catastrophe (regrowth after fire, storm impact), distribution changes in animals (flocking, nesting, hibernation, territory defence), interesting plant and animal associations (wasp pollinating an orchid, rosella attacking galls on wattle), changes in bush colours, sounds, and smells.

Send your observations to Jim Smith, 65 Fletcher Street, Wentworth Falls.

Eco-friendly Gifts

Our unbleached calico shopping bags are very eco-friendly small gifts and you will never forget your own shopping bag if you have a Blue Mountains Conservation Society bag with our birds logo and the message *14 million plastic bags go to landfill in Australia daily!*

They are just \$4.00 each! Available from the Conservation Hut Café and some Katoomba shops in business hours. Mail order service, just add \$5.00 to the cost of the bags and post your cheque to our office at PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls. 2782

Christmas "Weed" Sale

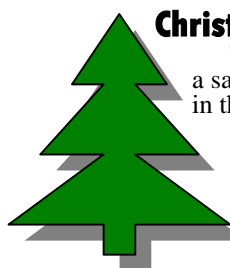
The Coalition of Residents for the Environment (CORE) will hold a sale of Christmas Trees on Saturday 21 December, 8am to 12 noon, in the Franklins car-park, Katoomba.

Members of bushcare groups will again join forces with CORE to weed out small *Pinus radiata* from reserves and roadsides in the Blue Mountains. For a small donation you can obtain a pine which makes a delightful sweet smelling Christmas tree, and at the same time do the Blue Mountains a big favour. Donations will go towards the conservation work of CORE.

Christmas trees are traditionally *Pinus radiata*, which come from Monterey, USA. These are a significant weed in the upper Blue Mountains. It is important that these trees are not allowed to displace local native plants and wildlife by altering the Mountains' habitats.

While volunteers will be removing small trees and seedlings only, this will help reduce the problem into the future. This year some of these trees will also be removed from National Park's land.

Volunteers are needed. Anyone interested in assisting Weedbusters or finding out more about CORE should phone James on 4782 5280 or Erst on 4759 2058.



**"Hut News", the newsletter of
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Clearing or Protecting the Bush?

Planning NSW has recently released a guide for Councils, Fire Authorities etc which sets out minimum standards for bushfire protection in new developments. This document has been updated and expanded with input from the RFS since its first release in 1991. Many members are concerned about the potential contained in this document for clearing of large areas of bushland.

It is important to note that the major message of this document is that if an adequate Asset Protection Zone cannot be provided without incurring unacceptable environmental costs, then Council now has the real option of rejecting the development. This is a great step forward for both fire fighters and conservationists.

Under this document, Planning for Bushfire Protection (PBP), minimum depths for Asset Protection Zones (APZs) around new developments are set. The APZ consists of an inner zone in which vegetation is reduced to scattered trees and isolated clumps of

shrubs and an outer zone in which vegetation is maintained in a thinned out state to break up the canopy and shrub layer and reduce fuel loads. It should be noted that under the Rural Fires Act and the Bushfires Act before it Council has had the power for a long time to require hazard reduction on private land. APZs are not new.

The Society supports the principles within this document that APZs must not be located on slopes over 18° and that the bulk of the protection zones must be contained within compatible zonings. We can assume that Environmental Protection zones are safe from clearing but what about watercourse buffers that only have Protected Area status? We also support the principle that the APZ must be contained within the development area and not the neighbours' or the community's land. As compliance with PBP is now required for consent under amendments to the EP&A Act, Council can now reject developments which cannot contain an adequate APZ within suitable land.

Our concerns lie with the extent of the clearing required for potential APZs of up to 70m in the higher risk areas. A high percentage of residential areas within the mountains are classed as high to extreme fire risk. Although at this stage the requirements only apply to new developments, the increased APZs could also become the standard reference for all hazard reduction works in the future. The result could be substantially reduced biodiversity on all privately owned bushland across the State. Council, NPWS, SCA and others are devoting substantial funds to conservation initiatives on privately owned bushland. DLEP 2002 also contains many provisions to protect native vegetation on private and public land, but these provisions can be overridden by the requirements of this document. It has the potential to result in extra clearing of bushland around new developments and increased clearing of bushland in already developed areas over time. In this context, there must be a mechanism for people to appeal against what they believe to be requirements for excessive clearing for hazard reduction, as there is for those who believe that not enough clearing has been required.

This document seeks to provide both fire protection and conservation outcomes. Is this possible? If it can provide legal certainty that developments will be rejected if they cannot contain adequate bushfire protection on suitable land and that APZs will not be located on sensitive land, it may make a start.

If you have any comments on this issue you should write to Bob Debus, with a copy to the Society.

Environmental Education

The Society's Education Officer Jenny Hill has had to resign due to work commitments. Thank you Jenny for all you have done to promote environmental education. Over the past few years the Environmental Education sub-committee under the stewardship of Meredith

Brownhill and Jenny Hill has gone from strength to strength.

There is a growing interest in Environmental Education within the local community. It is important that the Society continues its involvement in EE. Education that focuses on valuing nature is essential to complement planning and legislative conservation activities.

We are looking for a volunteer who is interested in environmental education and would be willing to take on the position of Education Officer until the next AGM in March 2003. Contact Meredith Brownhill 4782.4823.

Save the ADI Site

The battle to save the endangered Cumberland Plains Woodland on the ADI Site at St Marys continues. The Residents Action Group recently went to the Land and Environment Court to oppose the first development on the site, the Xavier College, a Catholic High School. A judgement is expected soon.

The ADI Residents Action Group needs money. Solicitors need to be paid, and a State Election campaign is underway. Donations can be sent to ADI Residents Action Group, PO Box 4134, Werrington 2747.

A Plea for the Forests

On a recent walking trip to Tasmania we were excited to see platypus in the wild, but while experiencing the thrill of walking through these wonderful old growth native forests – the natural habitat for Platypus, Tasmanian Devils and countless other species of native fauna, we found out about Clearfelling.

In my innocence I assumed that Clearfelling was some new fangled method of getting out timber for chips without too much damage. But I soon learned the terrible details.

Clearfelling involves removing all possible vegetation in the area designated and then doing a "regen burn" (what a name) - a fire so hot that it kills all the native seeds which are left in the soil. But, native animals may come back to this devastated area, and so the poison 1080 is put down to murder those animals which might stray onto this "pristine" land.

Next, trees are planted which will be harvested in 25 years - a monoculture! And all for chips which currently earn \$7 a tonne. Only 15% of the "old growth" timber which is harvested is used for furniture, etc. The rest demoted to chips.

Japanese people know something we don't - they don't cut down their native vegetation, they use Australian wood chips instead.

Wilderness Australia is conducting a campaign to try and reverse this frightening practice, so that future generations will be able to walk through these wonderful old growth native forests and have the thrill of seeing native animals in their natural habitats.

Please help by making a tax-deductible donation to "Wilderness Australia" at 130 Davey St, Hobart, Tasmania 7000 or visit their web site at www.wilderness.org.au. Elizabeth.

Membership Enquiries

Contact Elizabeth van Reyswoud

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Blue Mountains Swamp Dweller Lewin's Rail

A secretive bird of dense swamp vegetation. Spends most of its time on land but also swims on and under water, seldom flies. Uses its long bill to probe for insects and other invertebrates, usually in mud. Nest a loose cup of soft plant material at or near ground level in dense moist vegetation. Eggs August-February.

(*Fauna of the Blue Mountains, Judy and Peter Smith*)

On frequent walks from Katoomba station which takes in the weed-infested, degraded swampy area behind Council Chambers, Fiona Lumsden reports: 'Last Autumn I began hearing a rail-type call which started again in August and which I have heard frequently since. It's a staccato, mechanical fast tapping call—slightly resonant—like knocking together two rocks or two glass balls. Sometimes it starts slow and speeds up a little, usually 8-10 taps in a row. My 10-year-old stepson, Andrew and I have been trying very hard to see the bird but it always calls from thick cover. I borrowed a tape and we played it one morning in the swamp. The taped call of the Lewin's sounds identical to the calling bird which seemed to respond and came within a couple of meters at one point. However, we couldn't see the bird at all though the blackberries were quite low there and it didn't even disturb the vegetation at all. Obviously a master of skulking.'

(*October issue of Blue Mountains Bird Observers newsletter*)

Butterfly Migration

Caper White butterflies (white butterflies with black lace edging the wings) were travelling across the upper mountains today (22/11/02), thousands of them, fluttering rapidly towards the north-east where they lay their eggs on their preferred plants.

Small numbers of these butterflies were passing through my Blackheath garden on most days from 22 September until early November, meandering from flower to flower, going nowhere in particular (they particularly liked the native mint bush flowers and mauve native daisies.) What is Nature's signal which makes them suddenly decide to move en masse? *Christine.*

McCallums Creek through an Old-Timer's Eyes

Extract of an article by Simon Kaminskas in Native Fish Australia, Feb 2002, reprinted in Inland Rivers Network News, Winter 2002.

The legacy of riparian vegetation clearing and catchment degradation can be seen right across southeastern Australia. Everywhere you drive you see tiny silted up creeks flowing through bare denuded paddocks; wilted trickles that dry easily in summer and don't get a second glance from passing fishermen.

McCallums Creek is such a creek.

Down Clunes way in Central Victoria, it is a small creek flowing through bare, brutally cleared banks and grazing lands and doesn't have any fish besides the occasional Trout or Blackfish, if you're lucky. It in turn flows into Tullaroop Creek, (which also holds the occasional Trout or Blackfish) and into the Lodden River (long ago a serious Cod water, holding good Murray Cod stocks), and having a bit of a revival in the Bridgewater area with stockings of hatchery bred Cod.

Recently I learned something remarkable about this creek from an old timer who happens to be my father in law. He in turn had learned this from an even older timer, his father in law, long since passed away. Long ago, the upper reaches of McCallums Creek, far above the bridge where it flows past the family property, had big holes with Murray Cod in them. I couldn't believe it! I have driven over this feeble degraded little creek many times, and the thought of any fish in it, let alone Murray Cod, had never crossed my mind. But no doubt about it, it once had a few big holes in its upper reaches, and they had Murray Cod in them. The sad fact now is of course that those Murray Cod are long gone, as are the deep holes they lived in.

Unfortunately, in the early days it was standard practice to clear the native vegetation on creek banks and raze almost every tree in the catchment. The early settlers, the farmers, didn't realize that we weren't in England and that the things they did in England weren't going to work here. Here, clearing of a creek or river's riparian bank instantly stuffs it. The stream goes from being narrow and deep with deep holes where fish can live, to wide and shallow and choked with silt. The regular input of leaves and other organic matter from the native vegetation, the basis of any creek's food chain, ends. The exposure of the creek bed means it dries up easily, often changing a stream from permanent to ephemeral, and the addition of willows, thirsty water stealing villains, simply compounds the problem. But this is well known to many responsible farmers.

The Murray Cod is generally thought to be a fish of our larger, turbid, sluggish rivers (not that they were turbid or sluggish once). But these remarkable fish once pushed up into the tiniest of creeks, and showed a remarkable ability to live in a huge range of environments. There are records of this here and there in early settlers' writings. But Murray Cod are no longer found in tiny creeks, and we have forgotten that they were. We have drastically reduced their range, and have quite an inaccurate idea of where they will and won't live.

Welcome to New Members

Anna and Brian Marshall, Leura
Robert Jorgensen, Wentworth Falls
Jenny Miller, Glenbrook
Layton Hart, Bathurst
Lyn and Peter Horn, Katoomba
Helen Simpson, Katoomba
Blue Mountains ANTAR, Katoomba

Don Peak

May Fortune Smile Upon Them

Premier Bob Carr and former Liberal Leader John Hewson are in the front line of moves to convince the Howard Government that Australia should sign the Kyoto Greenhouse Protocols. You have right on your side fellas .. good luck!

Dropping In on Adam

I recently called at the Calga Springs Wildlife Sanctuary, run by Adam Cohen, just off the F3 near Gosford. Emus and several species of macropods were wandering through the tranquil bushland setting. After consultation with Aboriginal Councils, indigenous sites were accessible and well interpreted. Adam spoke to me of his sanctuary's co-operation with Macquarie University's School of Biological Sciences, the Department of Agriculture's role in approving introduction of native animals into the electric-fenced sanctuary and its popularity with Probus clubs and other organised groups. He also mentioned a person I vaguely remembered. Around 1999, whatsisname wanted to set up something similar in the Blue Mountains, but he needed to overthrow a Government and override the opinions of public sector and private sector environmentalists to do it ... which is not a result he achieved.

Adam's well run and quietly developed sanctuary could use more visitors ... it's a shame he doesn't get as much publicity as thingummy got back then.

Iconic?

This is a word a promotional sign still uses to describe the Snowy Scheme on the Alpine Way ... there is no mea culpa about the salinity it encouraged in the inland or the interruption to environmental flows in the coastal rivers. Also the area has a plague of brumbies like the Victoria National Park mentioned by Mary Jane Shaw in November Hut News.

Divisive

Patricia Forsyte, Liberal spokesperson on environmental matters, rubbished Bob Carr's announcement of new National parklands at the recent NCC conference, suggesting it would upset rural people affected by the drought. Trying to play off urban conservationists against country people won't help the environmental debate, Patricia! It won't make it rain either.

Repent at Leisure

Councillor Mark Greenhill has been quoted in the press on the 'Escarpments' development at Katoomba Golf Course. He said 'I think there are a range of arguments to suggest it should be scrapped ... I believe the council as a whole made a mistake in 1999 by voting for this. I, like many other newly elected councillors at the time, did not have a full understanding of this development.'

This development has so far taken 12 years and was once known as the 'Leisure Lea' development. Councillor Greenhill's current position will be applauded by its many opponents. The councillors who have opposed it throughout their entire terms on Council also deserve applause and the development may yet be defeated. *Don Morison.*

Cox's Catchment Capers

Multi-day activity, 8-12 April 2003

Walk Grade: Medium-hard.

Tues: 3.30 pm. Arrive Kanimbla View Cabins, Shipley for a three night stay. Barbecue and night walk on Kanimbla bridle trail.

Wed: 3-4 hour walk, Walls Ledge, Collier's Causeway, Porter's Pass.

Thur: 3-4 hour walk, Mermaid Cave, Mystery pits of Blackheath, Wonderland track.

Fri/Sat: Walk, Green Gully, Black Dog Ridge, Splendour Rock, Medlow Gap, with free overnight bush camp.

Maximum cost per person, \$38 per night accommodation plus \$5 per day petrol (re-imburement if you supply a vehicle).

Please register interest asap to Don Morison 4782.3993. You can register for 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 days.

Nature or Nurture?

For 17 years I have nurtured a clump of waratahs in my garden to entice them into flower.

They have been given native plant fertilizer, sprayed with pyrethrum when insects chewed them and pruned. They received a small bushfire one year and were given leaf litter gathered from the ground in the bush, instead of tree pruning mulch gathered from the air.

Then a Himalayan Cedar was cut down and they stood tall in bright sunlight for four years. Bugs stopped eating them, they grew and then during this dry and cold winter I noticed four flower buds growing – I just watched and waited. Spring arrived and yes, the rewards of watching their bracts and stamens unfurl into beautiful red flowers were great.

Nature has its own way in its own time – who knows, perhaps waratahs like the drought. *Meredith.*

Down the Golden Stairs ...

Our Thursday walk to Lockley's Pylon was cancelled because of bushfire, so after a check with NPWS to see if the tracks were open, we drove to Narrowneck and walked down the Golden Stairs. It was a very hot day, and the track very rough in parts, but at the bottom on the old tramway track it was cool. We strolled a little way towards the Ruined Castle. Such beauty on a hot day—cool rainforest, beautiful boulders decorated with ferns and lichens, tall tree ferns, a magic place! The Golden Stairs were named for a song written by Frederick and Emma Booth Tucker for the Salvation Army who used the track to go to a miners' village near the Ruined Castle.

"O my heart is full of music and of gladness, As on wings of love and faith I upward fly (upward fly), Not a shadow cloud my Saviour's face obscuring, While I'm climbing to my homestead in the sky. (Chorus) O I'm climbing up the golden stair to Glory, O I'm climbing with my golden crown before me, I am

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Dec 21 (Sat) Management Meeting, 9am, Mid Mtns Community Centre, Lawson.

Dec 21 (Sat) Christmas "Weed" Sale, Franklins car-park, Katoomba, 8am to 12noon. Join in the spirit of the festive season, while promoting weed control. (See Page 1.)

QUOLL CLUB (Activities for 12 and under) ☎ Jessica 4757.3686 for more info.

BUSHCARE (Tools provided — bring morning tea and gloves.)

Dec 14 (Sat) Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group. (9 am, 2nd Saturday of every month) Tools provided. Bring morning tea, gloves and drinking water. Contact Karen on 4757.1929 for the meeting place.

BUSHWALKS:

Monday Leisure Walks: *Usually half day walk unless noted, leisurely pace.* During October, walks were cancelled due to Safety Closures of National Parks walking tracks and early fire season. We request walkers call the contact or Bill G (4759.1692) before 8pm the day before the walk to verify whether the published walk is on, or an alternative arranged. This arrangement will continue for the duration of the season.

Dec 09 Spit Bridge to Manly. ☎ Bill 4759.1692. Train 6.39 from Lithgow (Lawson 7.42) second carriage. Lunch at Manly.

Dec 16 Evan's Crown Bux Trip. ☎ Jock 4758.6346. Leaves Katoomba depot 8 am. Easy/Medium. Book with Kees 4759.1958 for travel plan.

Jan 07 Lithgow Water Supply Walk. ☎ Jock 4758.6346. Meet at Mount Victoria Station 8.30 am for car pool to Lithgow, walk to dam for swimming, lunch at Lithgow Workman's Club.

Very Easy Walks on Thursdays. These walks are conducted at a slow pace to suit the walkers on the day and are usually 2 hours starting at 10am. Lunch follows for those so inclined. Contact Bill 4759.1692 for any enquiries about the program.

Dec 05 Blue Gum Swamp. Meet Winnmalee at end of Whitecross Road 10am. Check for alternative if fire hazard.

Dec 12 River Lett Waterhole. Meet Mt Victoria Station 10am. This is the final walk for the year, bring picnic celebratory lunch.

Weekend Bushwalks: *Bushwalkers are requested to phone the contact before 8 pm the day before the walk. The walk may be cancelled if fewer than 4 walkers register, or if other circumstances make conditions unsafe. Always discuss with the contact if the walk you would like to do is medium/hard or hard, before attending.*

If this is your first walk, or you are in any doubt, discuss with the contact or Bushwalks Convener Bill Tocher 4758.8545.

Dec 07 (Sat) Crossing the Blue Mountains of NSW, Day 7. The final walk of the series from Woodford to Blaxland. Bushfires and National Park closures may affect route. ☎ Jim 4758.6009 for information closer to the date. Some off track walking may be expected. May be hard in parts. Bring lunch and extra water.

Dec 14 (Sat) A Christmas meeting for the weekend bushwalkers which includes an invitation to all walkers and friends who would like to join us at Bacchante Gardens, Blackheath for a leisurely day. We will probably include a short informal walk, destination to be discussed on the day. All those attending are asked to bring their own food and drinks for sharing if desired. On past performances, it might rain on the day, but some shelter is available! ☎ Bill 4758.8545.

The next organised weekend bushwalk will be in February.

climbing in the light, I am climbing day and night, I shall shout with all my might when I get there (I get there) ..."

There are a couple more verses. A snatch of the tune is played in the Scenic Railway's display in the valley.

We headed back towards the Land Slide. It hadn't rained for many days and most of the little streams off Narrowneck were quite dry. There were lots of fallen leaves on the track. Many tall, apparently very old, tree ferns had no fronds on top. They surely would have experienced drought conditions many times before and will recover when the rains return.

We came to the entrance to the tunnel beneath Narrowneck, built to bring shale from the Glen Shale Mine in the Megalong Valley, to take it to the funicular rail (Scenic Railway). An icy blast of wind was coming through the tunnel, which we found very refreshing.

At the Land Slide we discovered why there had been such a strong breeze coming through the tunnel. A young man who had passed us on his way to the Ruined Castle strolled past us effortlessly on his way back while we clung on by our fingernails as wind gusts threatened to throw us from the rocks. In between gusts we were able to admire the wonderful colours and shapes of the gigantic boulders fallen in the slide, bearing and surrounded by a lovely garden of wildflowers, the most conspicuous on the day a white daisy (*Olearia elliptica*).

We had intended to walk the board walk below the Scenic Railway but somebody suggested a cold beer in the luxurious comfort of the Carrington Hotel which was a very civilized ending to a walk on a hot day. *Christine.*

