



Ord Land and Water Newsletter

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4,000 hectares of neem destroyed in a year



Project Officer Nerylie (Blu) Gaff and land owner Matt De Candia finish off a stand of trees on private property

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New Board members for OLW

OLW held its AGM on the evening of the 17th May. Two new Board members, Kym Croot and Noel Wilson were elected to the Board with outgoing member John Buchanan co-opted back to the Board for a second term.

Retiring Board members Elaine Gardiner and Suzi Silvester were thanked for their valuable contributions to the organisation over the past two years.

Those attending were also given an update of the work the organisation is currently engaged in and what is planned for 2008. Those attending were most impressed with the Neem Project Officer's presentation on the work achieved to date (see front page).

All the current work OLW is involved in will continue into next year with the addition of some new work that will look at ways to contain the movement of soluble pesticides.

From the floor OLW was praised for its work in involving all the community in fighting the threat of weeds.



Katya Tripp SWEK Environmental Officer explains why the erosion control project is needed to RCG members and staff



Board members (left to right) Noel Wilson, Kym Croot, Wilhelm Bloecker, John Moulden Duncan Palmer, (Middle) Liz Kirkby, Susie Williams (Front) Fritz Bolten

Funders give Ord catchment projects stamp of approval

The Ord Catchment Reference Group is proving to be a successful model that other areas could follow according to the Rangelands NRM Coordinating Group (RCG).

These comments follow a recent visit to the Ord catchment by the RCG to view progress in the natural resource management projects underway in the Ord. During their time in Kununurra the RCG met with a number of project staff and toured project sites in the irrigation area, Lake Kununurra and Lake Argyle. They were impressed with the progress being made and also the enthusiasm, knowledge and competence of project staff. The RCG also recognised the level of collaboration and cooperation between community, industry and government organisations in implementing the projects.

The RCG is the organisation which distributes both Australian and Western Australian funds for natural resource management projects in the Rangelands region of WA including the Ord catchment.

Whilst they were here representatives from the RCG were also able to sign contracts for a number of new projects that will be undertaken over the next 12 months. The new projects include a Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley project to tackle erosion in the Weaber Plains area, an Ord Land and Water project to investigate best practice for the use of water soluble pesticides, an Ord Irrigation Cooperative project to trial different weed control methods on irrigation infrastructure and a Department of Agriculture and Food WA project which will produce a range condition guide to help pastoralists manage grazing country.

As well as these projects the Ord Catchment Reference Group was informed that funding is approved for a major project which will use new airborne technology to map the soil profile and water aquifers of the irrigation area which will help to identify any potential salinity threats in the future.

For more information on any of these projects please contact Liz Brown 9169 2610.

You tend to come across some strange things in the bush when killing neem trees. Apart from some unusual pieces of junk you see the occasional very large boab, or in this case a snake vine as thick as a person's leg. →

Neem project one year old

By the end of the first year of the OLW 'Nuke the Neem' Project neem trees have been destroyed in an area approaching 4,000 hectares around Kununurra. With everything running smoothly this area should be doubled and much of the land re-treated by the end of the project in December of 2008.

One of the great positives this project is highlighting is the number of people, mainly small land holders who are treating the plant as a serious pest and are happy to clear the infestations off their own properties with assistance from OLW. Large entities such as the Shire and Sugar Mill down to individual owners of small rural blocks have all been engaged in doing the work from Packsaddle to Weaber Plain.

At end of May the total of land treated stands at 3655 ha with —

- 30 landholders clearing 239 hectares off their own property,
- 3165 hectares has been done by OLW on public land and
- 251 hectares sprayed on Aboriginal land.

Over this dry period a 20 hectare section of the Lake Kununurra shoreline, easily the densest population found to date will be worked on by Aboriginal participants in the CDEP weed program.

The current project is due to finish at the end of 2008 and by that time it is expected that over 95% of the neem population around Kununurra will have been destroyed.

Neem's fatal flaw

The reasons for the current success rate of the neem project stems back to some of the inherent weaknesses of the weed and its methods of distribution.

Whilst the plant is very fast growing and produces large quantities of seed that can very quickly become a monoculture in areas such as river banks, the viability of the seed is restricted to not much more than a year. The seed deteriorates very quickly in our wet season so if seedlings are controlled the first year as well as the seed bearing trees in the immediate area only minimal work is required in the second year to clean up.

In addition, as the seed is largely transmitted by birds rather than water or wind, its movement is restricted to only a couple of hundred metres a year. Birds that eat the neem seeds are largely territorial, restricting themselves to a particular home range and tend to favour certain trees to roost in.

When travelling across their territory birds will follow protective corridors such as tree lined rivers and roadways to keep out of the way of raptors.

Capitalising on these weaknesses has allowed OLW to make the progress it has done to date.

OLW erosion project progress to date

OLW has held a number of erosion workshops under its National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality project *Delivery of Best Management Practices to Ord Catchment Land Managers*.

The work has been spread along the length of the catchment from south of Halls Creek to north of Kununurra. Initially the work took the form of a series of workshops on pastoral stations in April of 2006 looking at how to reduce erosion from the installation and maintenance of roadways and firebreaks on fencelines. This was followed by another series of similar workshops in November including one for the local shire.

In October 2006 a two day workshop was held at Nelson Springs in partnership with the East Kimberley LCDC and the Victoria River District Conservation Association. The workshop looked at the history of the regeneration area situated on the eastern side of the Ord River below Lake Argyle. The workshop was filmed and formed part of a DVD that demonstrates the use of equipment that was used to rehabilitate degraded land and maintain good vegetation cover on it.

Future work includes a workshop for local landholders to demonstrate different methods of maintaining fence line fire breaks and how to remediate already eroded fire break areas on sandy soils prone to erosion. There is already some areas close to town where fire breaks have become quite serious erosion scars

A demonstration site is also currently being developed on a pastoral station that will try and halt the occurrence of gullies off hillsides.



An example of erosion on the sandier soils around Kununurra

Local Fire Management

As part of its National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality project *Delivery of Best Management Practices to Ord Catchment Land Managers*. OLW has been working with the Indigenous communities on Maxwell Plain to develop a fire management strategy for the area.

Work started in February with a fire training seminar held by FESA. A workshop followed to determine the first steps towards initiating a fire management plan for the area.

Meetings were then held in April to develop a plan for Maxwell Plain including where fire breaks could be placed and a better understanding of both the resources, or lack of situated in the communities.

The next step will be to bring into the plan expertise from other organisations such as FESA and the shire followed by some on ground work to implement the plan.



The effects of fire are one of the major impacts on the Kimberley environment.

Botanic gardens on the drawing board

The Shire recently removed a large stand of leucaena from the corner of Swim Beach Road and Victoria Highway as part of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality project *Key Management Actions for Lake Kununurra*.

In the past OLW had been removing smaller areas of weeds from there and Swim Beach using Conservation Volunteers.

With the area now clear planning will soon be underway for its intended use as a native botanic garden. A Work Base supervised Work for the Dole team funded by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations have also been working in the area removing weeds and repainting the bridge.



A mulcher starts work on the leucaena stand next to the dam.

Salvinia still threatens the lake.

The infestation of salvinia in a corner of Lily Creek Lagoon has been present since 2000 and while we've been fortunate enough to have stopped its spread across all of the lagoon and into the lake itself complete eradication has eluded all those involved. Faced with this, a project plan has been written and agreed to by all agencies and stakeholders involved. It outlines the following actions to be undertaken -

- Another groyne would be built parallel to existing one placed there a couple of years ago.
- The cumbungi will be removed from between the two groynes using an excavator.
- Two of 25 metre floating fence booms would be strung between the two groynes to completely encircle that affected area.
- Spraying would be carried out to kill any remaining vegetative material inside the affected area.
- Department of Agriculture and Food would carry out a search of houses connected to that drainage system looking for the initial infection source.
- Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley would check drainage sumps in the drainage system for salvinia.
- Signage would be erected on the site and regular media releases maintained to keep the community informed and aware of the project.
- Ongoing monitoring by the Shire and OLW would be maintained to ensure that another outbreak does not occur.

To assist with these initiatives a further \$25,000 of funding has been applied for and is in the final stages of being received.



Work done in August of 2006 to infill and bury salvinia within the affected area

Indigenous weed officer cleans up

A fairly small project that is part of the local National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality initiative has recently made itself apparent around town.

Through the wet season Project officer Zainel Bin Busu and a group of CDEP workers have been quietly working around Indigenous communities and the edges of Lily Creek poisoning neem trees.

This work has given valuable training and experience to at least 10 Indigenous people through the Waringarri CDEP program. With the countryside drying out as we head into the dry season the work has moved out to communities further a field.

A large infestation of neems on the Lake Kununurra foreshore a few kilometres upstream of town is now the focal point of the project. Work started on this infestation in mid May and will most likely continue into 2008.

With the success of the project to date funding has been sought to continue its work until 2010. This will allow Zainel to move further out into the more isolated communities and assist them to put together a weed plan for their area.

The project is currently supported by Waringarri CDEP, The Miriuwung Gajerrong Corporation, Dept of Agriculture, Dept of Water and OLW



Project Officer Zainel Bin Busu loading up with chemical ready for another day of weed control.

Air humour

After the airline pilot had managed to land his plane, albeit rather bumpily, following a descent through the exceptionally heavy weather we tend to get around November, He came out of the flight deck to bid his passengers farewell as they gratefully walked down the stairs on their way back to terra firma.

The most memorable comment he received was from a little old lady who asked him politely whether he would please satisfy her curiosity on just one point: "Did we land, or were we shot down?"



This tree near Victoria River station was marked by Thomas Baines in 1856 whilst accompanying Augustus Gregory on his expedition. Folklore has it as being the most eastern representative of the species' natural distribution.