

Future aspirations for fire management in the East Kimberley

- Cooperative burning programs across tenures;
- Increased engagement of the pastoral industry;
- Additional funding to; encourage 'cells' of cooperating land owners, implement aerial fire suppression & support local volunteer fire brigades;
- Local Shires supporting and accepting fire management plans;
- Increased support for indigenous ranger groups to do fire management planning, obtain equipment, training & implement fire management;
- Provide pastoralists with a simple guide on how to achieve fire permits for late season fires for woody weed control;
- Reduce volunteer probation time to one or at least by one month;
- Recognition from State bodies and support for fire management to protect values beyond their State responsibilities;
- Be able to communicate as a group to funding bodies;
- Education program for the broader community to promote the idea that irresponsible burning is wrong and to promote an understanding of good & bad fires;
- Produce posters to educate the broader community about the link between fire and wildlife.



Ord Land and Water

Newsletter

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Volume 7
Issue 1

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Fire forums spark interest



Cait Westlake from Mount House Station talking at the community meeting about the need to burn collaboratively

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Early action from Fire forum

As a result of the collaborative burning theme brought to the fire forums by the Eco Fire project a trial of the process will start in the East Kimberley this year. Supported by Ord Land and Water, the Department of Environment and Conservation and Pastoralists a series of fire breaks will be burnt early in the season on the Ord River Regeneration Reserve and adjoining properties. It's hoped that these actions will prevent some of predominant late season fires that have constantly been destroying pasture in the hottest part of the year.

Local forums a success

Three Fire Forums held in and around Kununurra in March reignited debate about burning, policy and fire management in the Kimberley. Forum speakers included representatives from Government agencies, pastoralists, the local Shire, Indigenous organisations, Tropical Savannas CRC and the general community. Some of the take home messages that came out included a need for more early burns to be done collaboratively between neighbouring landholders and the burns be connected to stop fires working between them later in the year. Sarah Legge the Eco Fire project manager and pastoralist Cait Westlake from Mount House Station talked about the success to date of one such project situated in the West Kimberley. Local community members talked about the effect of fire that they have seen in the past couple of decades including the impacts on the bush and cave paintings. Alan Lawford from Bohemia Downs Station talked about managing property burning and how both Indigenous and Non Indigenous people need to understand each other's reasons for burning much better than they do currently. Another point of interest was the prospect of fire abatement projects sponsored by large companies to enable sufficient early burning to be done to lessen the impacts of hot fires lit late in the year. Late season fires burn with more intensity and release much more carbon into the air compared to an early cool fires. Late season fires also kill many more trees reducing the ability of the bush to remove carbon from the air. For more details of what was said at the three forums see back page.

Common messages

- Fire regimes have changed and are having negative impacts;
- Cool early burning does limit the extent of hot late season fires;
- Inter-property & inter-agency cooperation is improving control of wild-fire;
- The opportunity in the future for fire management to provide financial outcomes.

Northern Australia a priority in new Federal program

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Along with northern and remote Australia other priorities for funding include:

- An enhanced national reserve system
- Biodiversity and natural icons
- Coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats
- Sustainable farm practices
- Community skills, knowledge and engagement

Funding acknowledgements

Fire Forums – National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality and National Landcare Program.

NRM Forum – National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality

Satellite Mapping – National Landcare Program.



Issues from the sessions

Actions

Importance of timing and planning	
Different management for different country	
Recognise both traditional and scientific knowledge	
Lots of people involved and working together but need to extend network and involvement.	
Resources are required; presently there are lots of volunteers.	
Aboriginal involvement in planning and doing of fire management	Aboriginal involvement in management
Sustainable employment opportunities for aboriginal people in fire management.	Fire teams, Ranger training, equipment, planning support.
Need for more 'layman's' information to prompt everyone to care and take responsibility for fire.	All present at this session said that this point would be taken into consideration for the future
Signage has increased but need more.	
Problems with the handling of '000' calls.	Review & refine '000' use.
Everyday person needs to know about good and bad fires.	Push information out to community
Unsupervised kids lighting fires as young as 3-5 years old, no adult in sight & no one taking a blind bit of notice or interest.	
Difficulty obtaining permits for late season weed control burns.	
Repair of fire breaks to prevent erosion.	
Fire permits.	
Fire permits may limit best use of fire because of the perceived threat if it gets away.	
Often there are no consequences if fires are lit without a permit.	
Fire management on Ord Reserve, small budget, need to liaise with neighbours for future management	OLW to contribute towards fire management on the Reserve this season, burning to start April.
LCDC's possible group to 'over-arch' fire control- CF Eco Fire project	

Local NRM forum a success

The Ord Catchment Reference Group held its first community open forum on the 28th February. The group has been active since 2003 with member organisations carrying out a number of natural resource management projects since then. The intent of the forum was to let the local community know first hand from project managers and officers what work has been done in projects ranging from weed control on Lake Kununurra to water quality monitoring of the Ord River.

Over fifty students and teachers from both St Josephs and Kununurra District High School attended a number of interactive sessions given on the day, for the younger kids in particular the animal displays were very popular. During the evening Chris Done gave a particularly interesting talk on the impacts he had seen in his 29 years of living in Kununurra. The day finished up with a skit put on by KATS featuring a team of young kids playing out a cane toad pantomime.

Feedback from the day was very positive with the informative nature of the day highly commended along with the photo competition and the animals on display.



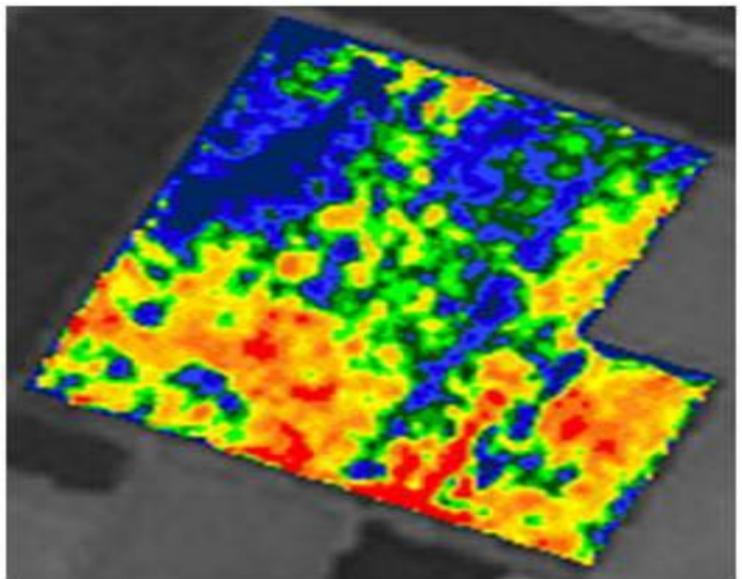
School children (background) and others taking in the displays at the NRM day

Farmers using an eye in the sky

An exciting remote sensing project is happening in the Ord River Irrigation Area this year. The project is looking at using satellite images to monitor and assess crop production. Satellite images provide up-to-date, detailed information about land and crop conditions that are very difficult to pick up at ground level. Old water courses and even old channels running across paddocks can be easily seen in the images as well as variations in crop size and health.

The project involves receiving 10 images from the SPOT 5 satellite (at a resolution of 10m) from April until October and working with the farmers to interpret/ground truth the images to the crops they are growing. The crops include sandalwood plantations, hybrid seed, chickpeas, pumpkins, watermelons, rockmelons and beans.

The main objective of this project is to assess how useful satellite images are to farmers as a farm management tool in monitoring and improving crop health and yields. The project is funded by the National Landcare Programme and is hosted by Ord Irrigation. It employs a full time project officer who you can contact on 9168 3300 if you would like any more information.



Satellite imagery showing vegetation variations in a farm paddock

OLW Landcare awards

Ord Land and Water was one of the winners of the Western Australia Weeds Committee Invasive Plants Award at the State Landcare Awards night in April. The award recognises the group's achievements in the control of neem trees around Kununurra and its ongoing weed project on Lake Kununurra.

OLW has been active in weed control since 2003 on Lake Kununurra focusing on woody weeds such as leucaena and moringa in the middle and upper sections of the lake. Over 500 ha of land had weeds destroyed on it in 2007

Neem control started in earnest mid 2006 and employs a full time project officer. A total of 6570 ha of crown and private land has been covered to date.

The group was also a finalist two more categories, Landcare Professional Award and the Community Group Award.

Coordinator Dick Pasfield travelled to Bridgetown to accept the Award and a cheque for \$1,000 on behalf of the group. In his acceptance he acknowledged the work done by his Project Officer Blu who has been the backbone of the neem project since it started in 2006.

The award was shared with the Esperance Weed Action Group demonstrating weed control is a priority right across the state and country groups are leading the way in participation.



Coordinator Dick Pasfield and Project Officer Blu show off their Award

Redclaw traps

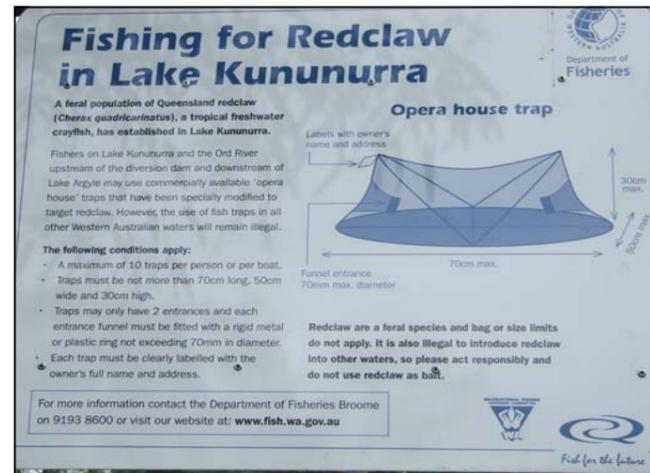
After a year or so of research done by the East Kimberley Recreational Fishing Advisory Group modified opera house traps are now able to be used to legally take redclaw in Lake Kununurra.

The research was required by Western Australian Fisheries to determine if modified traps would stop any by-catch of turtles or small crocodiles.

The modifications consist of rigid metal or plastic rings not exceeding 70mm in diameter placed in both entrances of the traps. The rings are large enough to allow fish and reptiles to be able to exit the traps but small enough to contain the redclaw.

Due to redclaw taking much longer to move into any sort of trap the dilly pots that are a normal method of trapping crabs and cherabin don't work. Traps for redclaw are often left out overnight and checked again in the morning.

It's important to note that the modified traps are only legal in Western Australia in Lake Kununurra between the Ord and Kununurra Diversion Dams and it is illegal to introduce redclaw into other Western Australian waters.



Redclaw signage at one of the local boat ramps

Northern Australia a priority in new Federal program

The Federal Government announced its new funding program for natural resource management in March this year, and for the first time northern and remote Australia is listed as a priority. This is good news for both the Ord region and the broader Kimberley. The program is called **Caring for our Country** and replaces a suite of former funding programs including the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT), the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP) and the National Landcare Program (NLP).

The Government's goal for the new program is: "An environment that is healthy, better-protected, well-managed, resilient and provides essential ecosystem services in a changing climate".

A business plan for future funding opportunities is expected to be released by the Government later this year.

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Last Laugh

A number of racehorses are in a stable. One of them starts to boast about his track record. "In the last 16 races, I've won eight of them!"

Another horse breaks in, "Well in the last 27 races, I've won 20!"

"Oh that's good, but in the last 37 races, I've won 29!" says another, flicking his tail.

At this point, they notice that a greyhound dog has been eavesdropping.

"I don't mean to boast," says the greyhound, "but in my last 91 races, I've won 89!"

The horses are clearly amazed. "Wow!" says one, after a hushed silence.

"A talking dog."

Local spots rubbished

Some of Kununurra's more picturesque spots seem to be coming a target for litter vandals in recent times.

Aside from the usual litter that can be found at Swim Beach and the Lions Park some of the more isolated spots such as Sandy Beach on Lake Kununurra are starting to be targeted. In fact stories of rubbish strewn across Sandy Beach have ended up in the local paper on at least a couple of occasions now. Other places that sometimes end up badly littered include the launching ramp at Mambi Island and the swimming hole up the end of Lily Creek.

One place that until recently had escaped this sort of trouble was Andy's Chasm, at least until recently. Apparently a large pile of rubbish including chairs was left in the creek bed by some thoughtless people intent on a good time.

A large percentage of the rubbish found at these sites includes broken glass that ends up buried in the sand becoming a hazard for people using the sites on other occasions.