Issue 33

GECKO Spring 2007

The Newsletter of the Blue Mountains City Council Bushcare Program

Welcome to the Spring edition of the Gecko.

We have come out of a fairly cold winter, which brought about a change on many of our sites, particularly the frosts in the lower mountains. We have also seen some variable weather leading up to the summer season. We have had a few changes to the Bushcare Program in recent months as well. Chris Dewhurst, who has been our team leader for so long, has taken another position in Council as the Coordaintor of the Green Team (the Green Team includes Bushcare, Bush Regeneration, Walking Tracks, Fire Mitigation and Noxious Weeds). Chris has worked with the Bushcare program for ten years since the time of its expansion from one Bushcare Officer to 3 Bushcare Officers. He has been dedicated to fostering community stewardship of the local environment and has put a lot of thought and effort into developing and promoting the Bushcare program to be where it is today. Chris's ability to represent the Bushcare program positively and its role in the environmental management of the Blue Mountains has been highly valuable. Chris worked hard to ensure Bushcare stayed contemporary and accessable to the local community. We will certainly miss Chris and will congratulate him on his new role.

Currently, I am acting as the Bushcare Team Leader. As many of you know, I have worked as one of the Bushcare Officers for this program for ten years as well, and have seen the program evolve over this period. I have been a part of the Blue Mountains community for some time and very much look forward in continuing to work with the dedicated and passionate people that make up the Bushcare program. We would also like to welcome our new Bushcare Officer, Natalie Knipler to the program. Natalie will be replacing Andy Forster, who left us in July, and she brings much experience from other community Bushcare programs including Baulkham Hills Council. I'm sure Natalie will be an asset to the program and she will introduce herself in this newsletter.

The enthusiastic volunteer efforts on our sites continues to bring about good results. Along with this, there are a number of event based activities adding variety to the program. The Biodiversity workshops continue, and there are also Threatened Species monitoring projects, Swamp workdays, Trackcare projects and a stream rehabilitation workshop coming up. The Bushcare 'Thankyou Party' will take place in February next year, and for the first time we are going to try a new venue in the lower mountains at Sun Valley.

Nathan Summers

Acting Bushcare Team Leader

DATES TO NOTE

Saturday 17th November – Workshop on monitoring Giant Dragonfly & Blue Mtns Water Skink. Minnahaha Reserve 9 – 1pm. Part of summer monitoring program, Threatened species program (further details in Swamp article). To book, contact Michael Hensen, Threatened Species Officer 4780 5471.

Sun 25th November – "Minnehaha Biodiversity Workshop'. Sessions will include swamp ecology, flora, fauna & threatened species, bush regeneration techniques & background of community achievements.). To book contact Nathan Summers: nsummers@bmcc.nsw.gov.au - 4780 5528

Wed 28 November - Bushcare Network Meeting, at Mid Mountains Community Centre, Lawson at 6pm

Sat 8th December – "Spotlighting Walk". Learn techniques of spotlighting and nocturnal animal observation. Megalong Valley 8pm.). To book contact Nathan Summers: nsummers@bmcc.nsw.gov.au - 4780 5528

Sat 15th December – Lower Mountains end of year dinner at the Lapstone Hotel, 6.30pm. (An informal gathering for Bushcarers at the Lapstone Hotel). Contact Nathan Summers 4780 5528.

Annual Bushcare "Thankyou" BBQ. Sat 2nd February 2008. Sun Valley *
* This will be a new venue, based at the Sun Valley Pony Club in the lower mountains.

CHRIS' FAREWELL

What a journey it's been. After beginning work as a Bushcare Officer in 1997 I have finally moved on, well sort of. I'm still employed at BMCC but in the capacity of Weeds Management Coordinator. Nevertheless, it was a big decision to leave the position of Bushcare Team Leader, a job I have enjoyed and worked in for the last 10 years. After spending so many hours in the bush with so many great people across the mountains I have collected a wonderful bag of good memories and stories. I have always said it is really about the people you work with that make the job, and this has certainly been an example of that. From all the Bushcare Officers I have worked with over the years to the current team of Nathan, Jill, Tracy, Karen, Natalie and Trish I say "Thank You" for being such great professional support and a dedicated team. Also to staff in other parts of Council within the "Environmental Management" Branch such as Soren, Eric, Linda, Jasmine, Adrienne, Michael , Anne and Amy. I look forward to continued working relationships with you all.

Yet the hallmark of Bushcare work is really the community volunteers. Without whom I would never have had a job in the first place. I have always said there was two layers to the Bushcare Program, one of environmental improvement the other in community growth. Both have been very satisfying but I would be denying the truth to say it wasn't the community people that will hold the longest lasting memories for me. Clearly there would be too many names to mention and I would hate to forget anyone, but a few people have been simply outstanding in their dedication and commitment that I feel I need to acknowledge – Barbara Harley, Lyndal Sullivan, Erst Carmichael, Mike Purtell, David Coleby, Rae Druitt, Alan Lane and Libby Raines – extra special thanks for all your achievements, efforts and inspiration to others. All in all it was a pleasure to serve all the good volunteers of the mountains, I took pride in my role as a staff member of Local Government in public, but also to represent volunteers issues within Council. As tough as the role could sometimes be , I always knew I had the support of the volunteers and this counted for a great deal.

So why did I leave? Personal reason's mainly. I wanted to establish a more normal work pattern and regain my weekends. I also feel it is a position that requires continual inspiration and new ideas. After 10 years this was starting to get a bit thin. My new role will still allow me to stay in contact with many people of the Bushcare Network, a working relationship I am really looking forward to continuing as we continue to care for the Blue Mountains. Kind regards, Weed on, Chris Dewhurst.

Introducing a New Bushcare Officer

Hello to all the Bushcare, Landcare and other environmental community groups of the Blue Mountains City Council Bushcare Program. My name is Natalie Knipler and I'm the new addition to the Bushcare team and a replacement for Andy Foster.

Since starting the role as Bushcare Officer in early September I've been busy meeting different Bushcare groups and familiarising myself with sites, faces and of course some of Bushcare's living legends.

I've been involved in a variety of Bushcare programs for over 5 years now and have worked with different councils and organisations during that time. I have a strong passion and commitment to the natural environment that is highlighted by my fascination with the Australian bush and Australian native plants. There is always something exciting happening in the bush!

It gives me great pleasure to work with such a dedicated team of volunteers and staff and I look forward to the many different projects to be undertaken in the future as well as showing those weeds a bit of attitude! Hasta la vista Montbretia!

Natalie Knipler

The Water Page

2007 BLUE MOUNTAINS CATCHMENT SNAPSHOT

The Catchment Snapshot was held on Sunday 14 October in Wentworth Falls. The morning session saw Streamwatch volunteers come together to report the results of their Snapshot testing day and to discuss trends and issues at their sites. In the afternoon three guest speakers presented on topics related to stream restoration—Peter Johnston (fluvial Geomorphologist) talked about stream processes and geomorphic problems, Scott Nichols (NSW DPI Fisheries Aquatic Habitat Reinstatement Unit) spoke about fish in Blue Mountains waterways—their habitat requirements, impacts of changed water quality and barriers to fish passage, and Kathryn Duchatel (Senior Ecologist at Earth Tech) gave a presentation on different types of algae, slimes, sludges and scums that occur in local waterways.

Some of the concerns raised by volunteers at the even included the impacts of stocking Wentworth Falls Lake (and subsequently Jamison Creek) with trout, the impacts of highway widening, sewage leaks, groundwater extraction, sedimentation from various sources and seepage from the old Lawson Tip. Some volunteers pointed out that the Streamwatch tests do not always detect the problems that are visually obvious, such as erosion or sedimentation. BMCC is looking at developing a rapid riparian/geomorphic assessment tool that will assist Streamwatch volunteers in monitoring this type of degradation at appropriate sites. This could form the basis of assessment and prioritisation for on-ground Streamcare activities.

See www.streamcare.com.au (then click 'Streamwatch & Streamcare' on the left and follow the link for a summary of Snapshot water quality results and discussion points from the day).

SWAMP RESTORATION

Works continue as part of BMCC's Upland Swamps Restoration program, with recent focus areas in the Yosemite catchment and at Wentworth Falls Lake. Bushcare groups have identified required works in swamps at Wentworth Falls Lake and Wilsons Glen, Woodford. One of the larger upcoming contracts will address degradation in a swamp system in North Lawson. If you know of a swamp that you believe could benefit from soft engineering and/or targeted weeding, call Anne on 47805457.

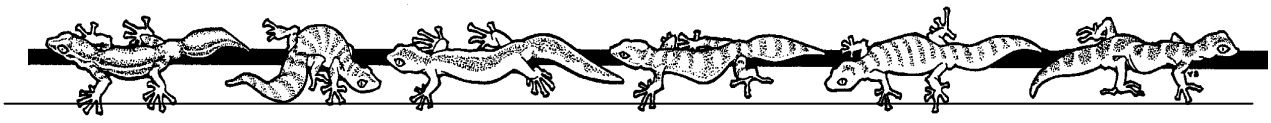
BMCC Natural Systems Website

www.bmlivingcatchments.com.au

For information on swamps, creeks, threatened species, biodiversity and how to get involved!

NOW IS THE TIME FOR SPRING WATERBUG SURVEYS!

For assistance call Amy: 47805553



Save our Blue Mountain Swamps!

In August 2007 Blue Mountain Swamps were listed as a vulnerable ecological community under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act, thanks largely to the efforts of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society. To celebrate the listing spring and summer will be full of activities for volunteers to find out more about Blue Mountain Swamps and the threatened species that inhabit them and with opportunities to get involved in preserving our vulnerable Blue Mountain Swamps and their unique inhabitants !

The Giant Dragonfly and Blue Mountains Water Skink Monitoring Program 2007-8
This years monitoring season will kick off with a field workshop at Minnihaha Reserve on **Saturday 17th November 9am-1pm** to train volunteers on how to identify and monitor for the Giant Dragonfly and the Blue Mountains Water Skink and to plan the upcoming monitoring season. The monitoring program will extend for 10 weeks and involves a weekly commitment of 1hr monitoring in selected Blue Mountain Swamps. To book contact Michael Hensen on mhensen@bmcc.nsw.gov.au (preferred) or 47805471

Blue Mountain Swamp Bushcare Biodiversity Workshop, Sun Nov 5 10am-4pm-
Come along to Minni ha ha Reserve in North Katoomba and hear Clive Hayward Barker explain the main features of Blue Mountains Swamps, let Ian Baird shed some light on enigmatic swamp inhabitants such as the Giant Dragonfly, and listen to Lyndal Sullivan outline how the Minni ha ha Falls Bushcare group has helped preserve the Blue Mountains Swamps in the Minnihaha Reserve. To book contact Nathan Summers on nsummers@bmcc.nsw.gov.au

Swampcare workday- Saturday 10th November 9am -2pm
A Swampcare workday is planned for Kittyhawk Swamp, Wentworth Falls, as part of the Great Grose Weed Walk program which will roll back an emerging Tutsan and Erica invasion into a near intact Blue Mountain Swamp system that is home to both the Blue Mountains Water Skink and the Giant Dragonfly.
To book contact Michael Hensen on mhensen@bmcc.nsw.gov.au (preferred) or 47805471

Swampcare website launched-if you are interested in finding out more about Blue Mountains Swamps and swamp related events visit www.swampcare.com.au . If you are interested in getting updates on swamp related events and information send an email to mhensen@bmcc.nsw.gov.au requesting to be put on the Swampcare email distribution list.

Watch the next edition of Gecko for more to come on Swampcare!

Birdwood Gully Biodiversity Workshop

The Birdwood Gully Biodiversity Workshop was held on the 15th of September at the Boland Avenue entrance to beautiful Birdwood Gully. The biodiversity workshop projects are funded by Sydney Cathcment Authority and BMCC. We were pleased to host 27 people, both from as far afield as Blackheath and also a number of locals from around Birdwood Gully, to sessions on local history, botany and birds. Elizabeth Mitchell, who is a founding member of the Bushcare Group, commenced with a lovely historical talk and provided artifacts found whilst regenerating over the years. We then moved down to the Wind Eroded cave where Elizabeth explained about the Bushcare Groups early days and showed before and after photo's illustrating the extent of changes that have occurred, due to the hard work of many people, to achieve the resulting natural asset that is Birdwood Gully. Jill Dark, a well known naturalist, conducted sessions on bird observing with the use of binoculars and was able to provide a list of some 35 species seen on the day. The place was positively jumping. We also had a sessions on native plant ID which took in the major plant families in Birdwood Gully. It was a beautiful Spring day and we are hoping the event was a catalyst to attract some more members to the Birdwood Gully Group. If you think you may be interested in joining the group visit http://www.weedsbluemountains.org.au/

Tracy Williams

Trackcare

Council supports a wide range of community initiatives, such as the Bushcare and Landcare programs. Now, community interest in walking tracks has lead the establishment of a pilot 'Trackcare' program. This program aims to support community involvement in looking after the many walking tracks on Council land, around 100km of them spread across the mountains. Council's walking track team, Kieran and Will, are available to support Bushcare Groups with an interest in walking tracks in their reserve, as well as supporting new initiatives in this area. Trackcare work days have been run with the Burgess Falls Bushcare Group, and with the Lower Blue Mountains Rotary Club at Lennox Bridge, and also the climbing community at Bardens Lookout and Centennial Glen. If your Bushcare Group is interested in running a Trackcare work day, please contact Council's Bushland Management Officer, Soren Mortensen on 4780 5742 or smortensen@bmcc.nsw.gov.au to discuss the proposal. We have organised a Trackcare Work day on 17 November, at Bardens Lookout, Mt York from 8am-4pm, please contact Soren to book.

Recycling

The Recycling & Transport Division of Blue Mountains City Services has a recycling centre based at Springwood Depot. Council crews, contractors and external customer can bring products such as concrete and bricks in so that they can be recycled into crushed concrete roadbase and concrete pieces for drainage. Works crews also bring into the depot soil that has been dug out of various projects. This again is recycled & screened and sold as screened soil or clean fill. All tree pruning that is carried out by our crews is also chipped (as long as it is free of weeds) and sold as mulch. Our internal crews use these same recycled materials on our assets and delivery can be arranged. The recycling division has been going for the past 3 years and our clientele has been growing by word of mouth. As well as a cost savings to external clients these products which have previously gone into landfill are now recycled and reused. You may have seen our brochure included in the rates notices in May 2007.
If you need any further info please feel free to contact Zofi Johnson at our Springwood depot on 47 23 5061.

Tracy Williams

The History of the Burgess Falls Track

The first track in Hazelbrook was established in 1892, when the Hazelbrook Reserves Trust was formed, an organisation that functioned until 1989 and was responsible for the maintenance of the tracks in Hazelbrook. These tracks were generally circular, starting and finishing at the station and taking in many of the dozen waterfalls in Hazelbrook. The town was a tourist centre in the early years of the twentieth century, one of the main activities of tourists being walks along these circular routes. One of the two main circular routes was a walk from the station down Winbourne Road, then down the Burgess Falls track which joins the Horseshoe Falls track, coming out at Oaklands Road and returning to the station. It seems that this circular track was constructed by the Reserves Trust in the years 1918 to 1920. The Burgess Falls section's main attraction is the falls, named after Sapper Edward Allen Burgess, the eldest of three Burgess boys who went to World War I. He was killed on the Western Front on 3 June 1917, aged 38, while rescuing his seriously injured officer, and buried in Strand Military Cemetery Ploegsteert Belgium. His father, Hazelbrook shopkeeper Edward Burgess, organised a plaque in memory of his son that is still to be seen at the falls and the father was also involved in the building of Diggers Bridge which was constructed by volunteers at the falls and destroyed soon afterwards by flooding. There were 150 local residents in attendance when the falls were named and a title board was unveiled by Edward's brother Harold. The names of Burgess Creek and Burgess Falls were gazetted in 1918. The last link in the circular track was a section between Burgess Falls and Oaklands Falls which was built in 1919-1920. The quality of the building of this beautiful circular track built by locals is apparent in its lasting up to the present, despite there having been very little maintenance in recent decades, a situation that may be changing thanks to some work by bushcare and track maintenance groups over recent weeks.

Ken Goodlet

Burgess Falls Trackcare

Burgess Falls Bushcare Group commenced working at the lower end of Winbourne Road in Hazelbrook in July 2004, from the road edge to the falls. Since then they have been battling Crofton Weed on the creekline and a mix of plants on the slopes from the road edge, including Coreopsis and Erigeron. On the May and August workdays this year, the Burgess Falls group had the support of Council's Track Team, in which they repaired a well-worn track and then reopened an original piece of track which had become overgrown. Ken Goodlet, a local historian, coordinates the group and has been interested in the track restoration from the group's beginning. Ken has written a historical summary for us of the Burgess Falls track.

Jill Rattray

The Burgess Falls Bushcare Group after completing an afternoon of trackwork with Kieren

Meet Council's Green Team

What is the Green Team?
The Green Team is BMCC's Environmental Operations Team. They can be recognized by their khaki and green uniforms and badges depicting the beautiful Blue Mountains Tree Frog. Comprising 7 Bushcare Officers, 3 Fire Mitigation officers, 5 Noxious Weeds Officers, 3 Walking Track officers and 8 Bush Regenerators (this is composted of both full time and part time staff).

The Green Team are funded by councils' recurrent budget. In 2007-08 the budget was approximately 1.4 million. This includes the Emergency Services levy of around $200K to cover fire mitigation works, the Environmental Levy which contributes $200K and State Government grants for the control of noxious weeds which add approximately $80,000. This is to cover an area of approx. 1640 hectares owned by council, and a further 4220 hectares of Council managed Crown Reserves. 682 kilometres of this is on the urban interface.

This issue featuring…… the Bush Regeneration Team
The Bush Regeneration Team employs 8 Bush Regenerators currently consisting of Blue Mountains residents living from Winmalee to Blackheath. Two of our members were recruits from the Federal Government funded Green Corps program which provides training in Environmental Restoration projects. (See attached photo). Weed control and ecosystem restoration is the major focus of the team.

What do they do in particular to support Bushcare
Whilst the Bush Regeneration team focuses mainly on target weeding and also site maintenance of the previous Urban Run-off Control Program (URCP), Council is allocating additional resources from the Environmental Levy to support Bushcare group activities. This fits in with the Bush Regeneration Teams' co-ordinated approach to weed control, and is designed to offer assistance to Bushcare Groups with issues beyond the groups current capabilities. Bushcare Site Assistance days comprise of a team of up to 4 council bush regeneration officers who conduct works such as primary and maintenance weed control, soft erosion control, minor tree removal, spraying or other related activities to add value to already existing Bushcare works. As there are limits to the available hours, 4 group days per officer are allocated every 6 months to support groups in need of extra assistance. Ask your Bushcare Officer for more details or to nominate your group for future assistance days.

Some statistics:
Bushcare: 59 Bushcare & Landcare Groups in the Blue Mountains maintained by 7 bushcare officers with a total of 7461 volunteer hours this year
Bush Regeneration: 19,000m2 total area of weeds removed in 2005/06
Noxious Weeds: 36 declared Noxious Weeds with 2,260 noxious weeds notices issued on private property.

Tracy Williams

Your Newsletter: This newsletter is compiled by Nathan Summers (assisted by Sharon Huxley) from Blue Mountains City Council with contributions from Council's Environmental Management Staff and members of the Bushcare Network. It is sent to Bushcare volunteers and other interested people. Contributions and suggestions are always welcome, as are requests for alterations to the mailing list. We can be contacted at Blue Mountains City Council, Locked Bag 1005, Katoomba NSW 2780. Phone 4780 5528 or 0414 195 623; e-mail cdewhurst@bmcc.nsw.gov.au; Fax 4780 5555.

If undelivered please return to
Locked Bag 1005 Katoomba NSW 2780

blue mountains City Council

POSTAGE PAID AUSTRALIA