

NEWS FROM THE ALPS

NEWSLETTER

THE ALPS PROGRAM. WORKING TOGETHER BEYOND BORDERS.

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LAND MANAGERS - GRAB THESE TOOLS

It's time for the Landscapes and Policy Hub to pack up and move on to new projects, but before it departs, a value-packed hand-over is taking place. The study has achieved a lot over the past three years – it's been described as biodiversity-boosting gold - and alps land managers are making sure they grasp these new and powerful tools from their source. It's a bit like a dream garage sale...

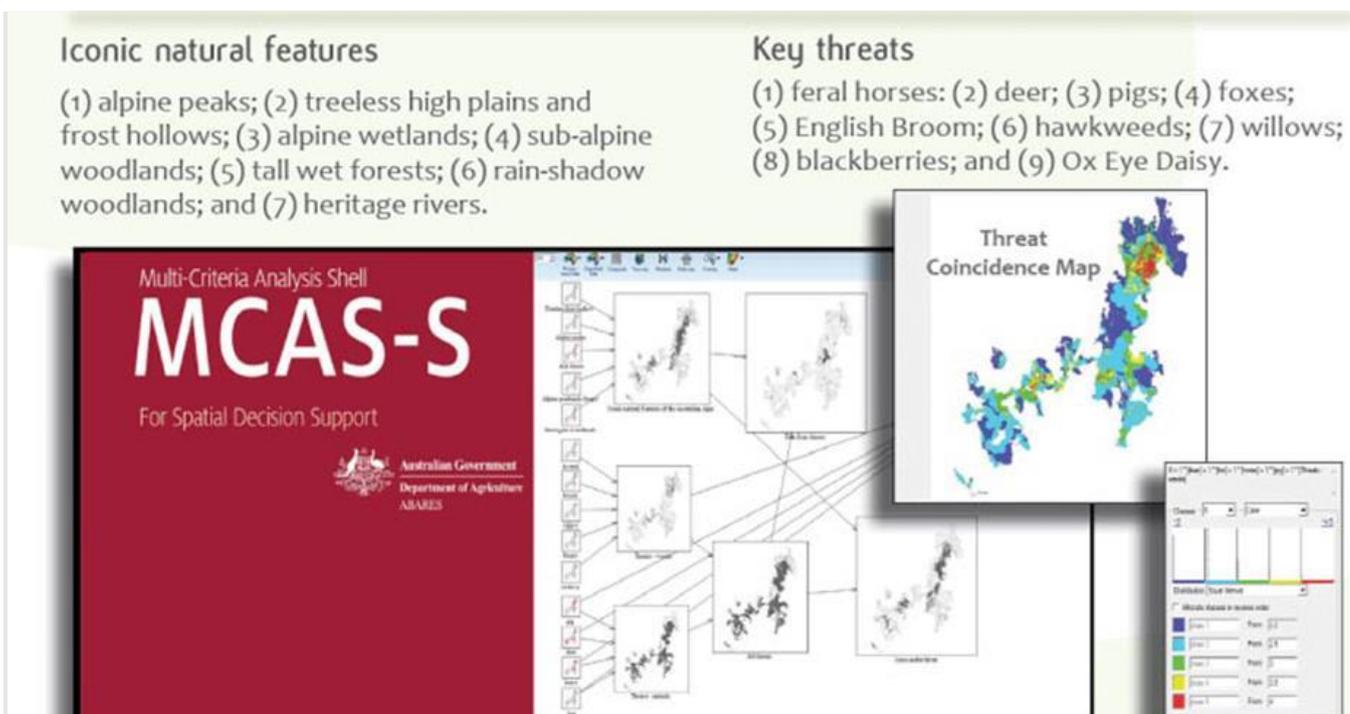
For anyone who has come in late, it all began with a group of scientists from the Landscapes and Policy Hub, (one of five, as part of the National Environmental Research Program). As part of their study project they came to the Australian Alps and began looking at the best way to answer the big question - *What would a whole of landscape approach to biodiversity conservation look like?* The scientists' ultimate aim – one shared by Alps land managers – was to develop ways to take accurate stock of biodiversity to make good decisions: what is living in a landscape, and what are the processes that support or threaten.

Three years of activity has followed where Hub and Alps people have worked together, looking at the topics that are familiar to those working in the Alps, among them: bogs, grazing & fire, invasive species, climate change and its impact on tourism & species movement.

What has emerged is a series of tools ready to be used by anyone who is responsible for managing our mountain landscapes. The great news is that these tools are being made available on a web site (www.LifeatLarge.edu.au) – a big plus over the usual written report. And wait, there's more. The Hub people are holding a series of detailed hand-over sessions to make sure their work is handed simply and clearly into the hands of those who can make good use of it. For your place at one of these sessions, contact Gill Anderson (peopleinnature@bigpond.com M: 0418 561 827). Take a look at the following tool snapshots and you'll see why it's worth making time to come along...

SPADE: a new tool to assist cost-effective decision-making in the management of invasive species. SPADE (Spatial Population Abundance Dynamics Engine) is a spatially-specific model that predicts the spread of invasive species based on an understanding of habitat suitability, the biology of the species, and estimates of current population size. The tool runs on a standard desk-top computer or laptop. It can incorporate different target densities in different landscape zones, and compare the costs and benefits of alternative management methods. Its ability to model the movement of animals and diseases over large areas provides managers with a powerful means of exploring the likely outcome of different management interventions, decades into the future. The tool is being used to examine the likely distribution and density of wild horses in the Australian Alps and fallow deer in Tasmania, and exploring its potential to model the invasive plant species, Hawkweed. Lead Researcher: Nick Beeton Nicholas.Beeton@utas.edu.au: Key Collaborators: Dan Brown (Parks Victoria) & Rob Gibbs (NSW NPWS)

MCAS-S: Multi-Criteria Analysis Shell for Spatial Decision Support (don't be put off the name) combines maps of biodiversity values *and* threats, to help managers explore options and prioritise actions over large scales. The MCAS-S tool helps managers pinpoint areas of highest value under different types and levels of threat, and decide where to allocate resources for greatest impact. MCAS-S can generate maps to show natural values and threats, helping people from different backgrounds, and different levels of technical and scientific expertise, to participate in conservation decisions. A wide range of biodiversity values and threatening processes have been assembled into datapacks for the Australian Alps, providing examples of how the MCAS-S tool can be used in conservation planning. The maps can be generated on a laptop and projected at meetings and workshops, helping managers communicate decisions to broader audiences. Lead Researcher: Dr Luciana Porfirio Luciana.Porfirio@anu.edu.au : Key Collaborators: Peter Jacobs (People in Nature) & Jasmine Rickards (ABARES)



Protected area managers, policy makers and stakeholders can now use MCAS-S when making management decisions across landscapes and borders. It's based on the first alps-wide vegetation classification & map, using existing datasets from NSW, Victoria and the ACT. It identifies iconic landscape features, their

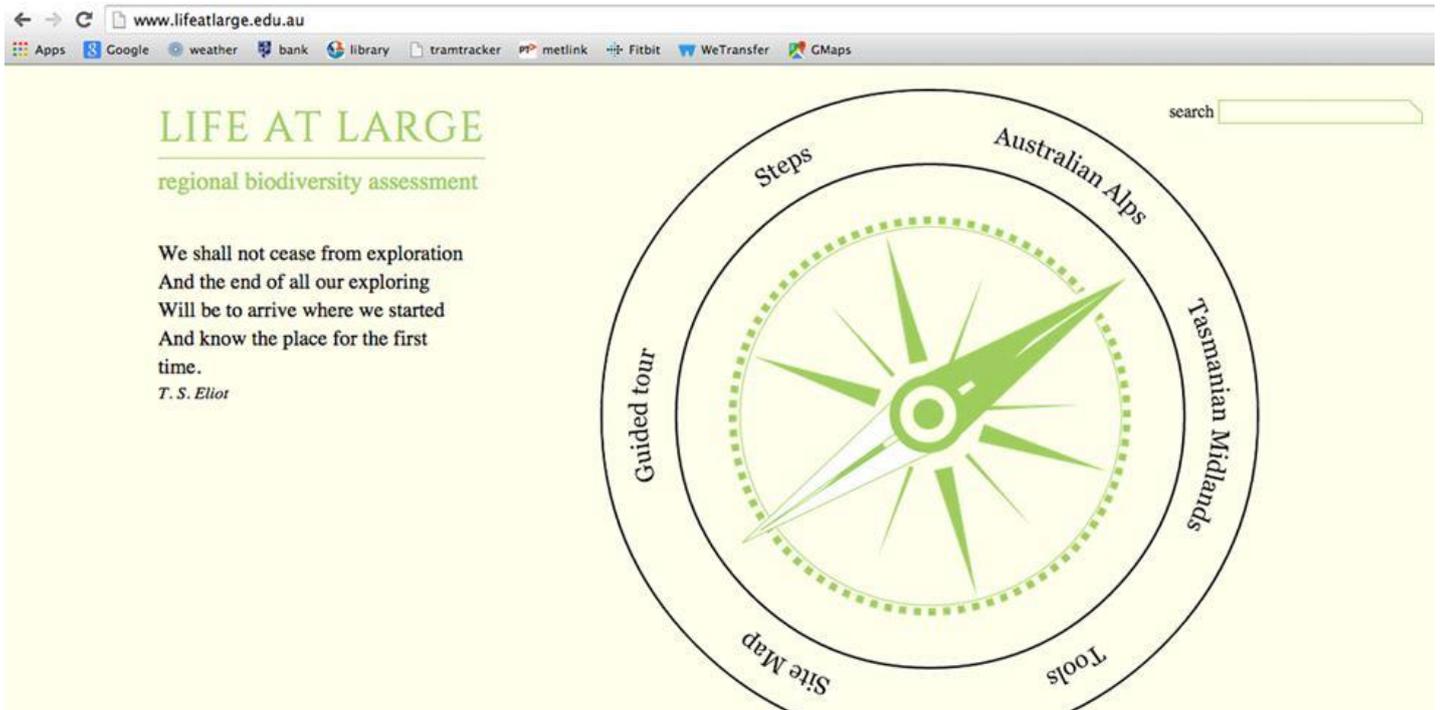
associated biodiversity values, and the threats to their condition. MCAS–S combines everything to reveal areas of high natural value and their relative level of threat.



There are now new tools to be used when making decisions about how best to use your resources when managing these landscapes (like conditioning these feral horses with a molasses salt block for re-homing).



Given this tool set has been set up as an online resource, anyone can make use of them – these members of the staff from the Australian National Botanic Gardens gather seed in Kosciusko National Park, as part of an alpine seed ecology project conducted in conjunction with Australian National University.



To find the tools, just type in www.LifeatLarge.edu.au, and you're away.

alps program reference groups – this is for you! Now's the moment for the Australian Alps Program's reference groups to pick up these tools as they continue their good work - especially in the areas of climate change, natural resource management, and water. Best of all, we've an opportunity to build much of what the Hub has produced (scenario planning and better governance options) into the Alps Program's next 3 year Strategic Plan.

snippets

NORTHERN CORROBOREE FROG RELEASE: Endangered Northern Corroboree Frogs were recently released into Brindabella National Park. Late last year Taronga Zoo, OEH and NPWS staff released just over 200 adult frogs at two sites within the national park. The frogs were bred in captivity at Taronga and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and released as part of a joint project to ensure the frogs survival. Prior to this release the Brindabella population only number about 50 frogs. This is the first time that adult frogs have been released in the park and their progress will be monitored by OEH threatened species specialists.

CANBERRA BUSHWALKING CLUB: The CBC has entered into two exciting new partnerships to help monitor and control the spread of exotic weeds in alpine areas of the ACT and NSW. The CBC will work together with ACT Parks to identify and report on incursions of priority exotic weeds in the more remote areas of Namadgi in which they bushwalk. The CBC also is partnering with Greening Australia/NPWS/Landcare Australia to carry out volunteer weed monitoring and control in KNP.

THE OFF ROAD CEMENT MIXER: One of the main problems confronting the contracting team working on the Aberfeldy Hut rebuilding (Baw Baw National Park) was how to get a fully loaded pre-mixed concrete truck into the bush and down some terrible narrow tracks to the site without damaging the environment or falling over a cliff. As far as the contractor was concerned this wasn't a problem and a solution was at hand. A seemingly impossible problem was solved with a purpose built, tractor driven concrete mixer powered from the tractor power take off shaft.



KIERAN LAWTON NEW AREA MANAGER AT TIDBINBILLA: Kieran brings 20 years of wildlife research, land management, community engagement and ecotourism operations experience to this role. He grew up in Canberra and studied at the ANU; one of his first wildlife experiences was helping Linda Broome trapping Burramys in Kosciusko; and since then he's managed research, land management and ecotourism programs around the world, including a wide variety of projects in the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic as well as in Siberia, Chile and Argentina. A keen skier and Aussie Alps enthusiast, he walked from Thredbo to Tharwa on the Alps track over the recent Xmas period. He is looking forward to helping lift the visitor experience at Tidbinbilla and further strengthening ties with the Australian Alps Program.



MAKING GOOD USE OF NATIVE SEED: Ranger staff from Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve have been collecting seed from *Themeda triandra* (previously called *Themeda australis*) along the rural road sides of the ACT with the seed harvester. The seed will be used for the re-generation of nature grasslands where weed control or minor degradation areas has taken place this session. Other summer grasses will be harvested to compliment other areas within the park.



NEW PARKS VIC STAFF: Parks Victoria Regional Services Division has undertaken its biggest transformation ever in the organisation's 18 year history. East Region, base for the AAnp Programs majority of participating Parks Victoria staff, has a number of new or returning faces, and a lot of whom move into brand new roles. Welcome to district staff: Darren Hill, team leader Traralgon (Baw Baw NP); Bridget Grant, Area Chief Ranger - Valleys, Plains & Coasts (inc. Baw Baw NP); Dannica Shaw, team leader Heyfield (Alpine NP); Jeremy Tucharke, Area Chief Ranger - Lakes & Eastern Alps (inc. Alpine and Snowy River NP's); Cameron Fleet, team leader Bairnsdale & Buchan Valley (Snowy River NP); Gary Bellisini, team leader Bendoc (Snowy River NP); David Jenson, Area Chief Ranger - Kiewa and Murray (Alpine NP); Michelle Doherty, team leader Mount Buffalo NP. There are a few new faces in the Regional Operations team also, a hello to these folk next month.

HERITAGE SIGNS LOOKING GOOD : The Friends of Tidbinbilla in conjunction with the Southern ACT Catchment Group Inc applied for an ACT Government historical grant back in early 2014 for interpretive signage in and around the Nil Desperandum precinct. With receipt of the grant, signs were designed with these themes explored: the early history of the area; the first owner of Nils Desperandum and the subsequent owners; the eucalyptus distillery, the camellia gardens and swimming pool, and the Ashbrook homestead



HAWKWEED: In mid January 2015, NPWS received a creditable report from a bushwalker of an occurrence of Mouse Ear Hawkweed (*Pilosella officinarum* or *Hieracium pilosella*) very close to the Main Range (1.5 km South West of Mt Twynam, Australia's 3rd highest mountain). The site was inspected by NPWS staff including Jo Caldwell (former Orange Hawkweed Officer), with details of the site as follows: Hawkweed was found within a grassland alpine herbfield, with rocky outcrops on the edge of a small valley at 2033 m asl; source is unknown, but assumed by hikers as it is a popular remote camp site; 182 m x 82 m area, main infestation 105 m x 30 m area; approx. 150 square metres of MEHW present at that location; approx. age of infestation is 7-10 years, with some matting of plants found. Further surveying and control measures have commenced.

THIRTY YEAR ANNIVERSARY FOR FRIENDS GROUP: The Friends of Bogong celebrated their 30th anniversary recently on the Bogong High Plains. Friends of Bogong was formed in 1984, and over the last 30 years the group has run at least two working parties in the Alpine National Park each year, carrying out maintenance work on walking tracks, removing pine trees, willows and other weeds, building benches and bridges and numerous other projects. At their AGM the Friends walked along the Wallace to Cope Heritage Trail on the Bogong High Plains, before celebrating with lunch and cake at Wallace Hut.

PHYTOPHTHORA: Observations made by several NPWS staff of dieback in the endemic shrub *Nematolepis ovatifolia* in 2012 on the Main Range triggered further research. Root and stem material from symptomatic plants of *Nematolepis ovatifolia* was collected and sent to the Plant Diagnostic Unit, Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney. The material had a clear lesion (evidence of damage from infection) and RBG were able to isolate a Phytophthora species from it. They initially suggested it was *P. multivora* but further tests indicated that it was *P. cambivora*. The extent of the impacted plants appears to be restricted to the Main Range area of KNP, however further work on this is ongoing. NSW NPWS have taken action to prevent this soil borne root rot from spreading and are trialling treatment of some effected plants with phosphite. Funding for research in part assisted by an AAnp Program grant.

FRONTLINE FORUM: a workshop for Visitor Services staff particularly front counter folk at Visitor Information Centres, is coming up in March, 19th & 20th to be exact. Those of you with a passion for this important part of our communication role should note the date. Contact Alps Program Support Officer Nicole Stocks for further info nicole.stocks@parks.vic.gov.au (Sponsored by the Alps Program Stakeholder Engagement & Communications Reference Group – SE&C RG.)

WORTH MENTIONING: Andy Gillham, convenor SE&C RG (and now Fire RIC in Central Gippsland District) is the very worthy recipient of the Australian Fire Service Medal. Andy was awarded the medal for his contribution to reducing the risk and impact of bushfires on Victorian communities. Well done Andy!

News from the Alps (in magazine and newsletter format) is published by the Australian Alps national parks. Program Manager and Editor: Andrew Nixon: Parks Victoria office, 46 Bakers Gully Rd, BRIGHT Vic 3741. Andrew.Nixon@parks.vic.gov.au For more information about the Alps, including information about the Parks, other publications and news, visit the Australian Alps Web Page: www.australianalps.environment.gov.au Thankyou to those who have made time to be interviewed; and to the photographers for their images. Without this support, *News from the Alps* would not be possible.

