

# NEWS FROM THE ALPS

NEWSLETTER

THE ALPS PROGRAM. WORKING TOGETHER BEYOND BORDERS.

APRIL 2016



The boots in the foreground say it all. Bad as this bogged vehicle is in the short term, it's the sediment in the run off that's the real concern for the future.

## a muddy tale

What follows is a tale that has way too much mud in it at the beginning, but a lot less at its end. It also features three heroic bodies which teamed up to make the ending a happy one. And interestingly, it all happened in a place that's a little bit fuzzy...

If you look at a map of Australia, then zero-in on Canberra, you'll see that it sits surrounded (mostly) by a wobbly line, created by the surveyors charged with defining the Australian Capital Territory way back when. (See [issue #52](#) for more). This line defines a natural watershed that gives Canberra its water supply. Amongst the wobbles there's a straight section – the Coree Conundrum – and this is the setting for our story.

The fact that the term 'conundrum' is used is apt given there's a somewhat loose – but effective – arrangement in place concerning the protection of this creek line and its catchment values. It sits within NSW's Brindabella National Park and because it was once leased by the ACT from New South Wales, both parks agencies tend to work in tandem over this patch. But wait there's more. A large power line crosses the conundrum, and this brings our third heroic body – Transgrid – into the story.

According to ACT Parks Bendora Ranger Brandon Galpin the problem with the mud began mid-way through 2013 when a routine site inspection revealed a disturbing amount of sedimentation in the sub-alpine bogs. It wasn't difficult to work out where the problem was

coming from: "An area in the Corree was looking like a ploughed field thanks to mud burn outs and doughnuts."

A number of factors probably had their part to play in helping this section of riparian zone reach this level of degradation: an ever increasing number of people with a love for dirt bikes and 4WDs, easier access to the site, and social media boosting the site's notoriety. The problem was, this wasn't a great place to come and play given it was messing with the nearby bogs which happen to be the re-release sites for the captive bred critically endangered Northern Corroboree Frog (*Pseudophryne pengilleyi*). On top of that, the Transgrid maintenance crews were finding it increasingly challenging to get in to maintain the powerlines which supply a significant chunk of the ACT.



**Access for Transgrid's maintenance crews had become a problem.**

But it was probably the safety issue which tipped it for everyone when a search and rescue was called which ended up – literally – in the Coree Conundrum. "Two youths had bogged their 4WD in the Brindabella National Park, at a time of year when night time temperatures were down to -15 degrees C in the mountains. We found them early the next morning with no injuries, but their car was located stuck in the Coree 'bog hole'."

This is the point in the story where the three heroic agencies fell into step after Brandon approached both TransGrid and NSW Parks and Wildlife Service. A plan was hatched to address the issues by educating the public, restricting access to the damaged area and rehabilitating the site. "As the issue occurred on the powerline easement, TransGrid delivered the project under the dedicated project management of their environmental officer – Chris Johnston. NSW Parks Team were also instrumental in delivering this project, especially in terms of engaging the 4WD community. The then Senior Ranger Brindabella National Park – Scott Seymour set up a number of meetings with key members of local 4WD clubs. Scott's replacement Adam Henderson was instrumental in keeping the ball rolling as were the NSW Parks and Wildlife Field Team."

Corroboree frogs from Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve's captive breeding program were brought along to one of these meetings where Tidbinbilla Senior Wildlife Officer – Scott Ryan started a discussion about the biology, habitat requirements and the critically endangered status of this species. "Seeing the frogs they asked a lot of questions: they began to see the site as a creek and an essential habitat for a vulnerable species." And while there will be individuals who haven't had an opportunity to gain this perspective, the 4WD members and their clubs are now very supportive of this project.

What happened next was fairly straight-forward. The linear aspect of the space lent itself to

being gated at either end, with series of large boulders positioned alongside gates that would need a grader to budge. Interpretive signage explains what's being done and why, and anyone looking in from the outside can easily see the rehabilitation works underway – the ribbing, logs and large roll overs to divert the run off.



**Given the linear nature of the space, reducing access was a straightforward if monumental task.**

Completed in December 2015, the project was able to be done once off and well thanks to the commitment in work hours, expertise and funding from three separate agencies who came effortlessly together onto the same page. A superlative example of what the Alps Program is about.



**It's still a raw landscape but the negative impact has been removed and regeneration is already evident. Interpretive signage helps to explain what's been done and why.**

# snippets



**SALLY THE MOUSE-EAR HAWKWEED SNIFFER DOG:** On a gorgeous sunny day in March, a small black dog with a remarkable nose was allowed into Namadgi National Park. Its purpose was to search for mouse-ear hawkweed in an area near Nursery Swamp where a sighting was recorded before the 2003 bushfires. The area is mainly damp with thick snow grass and adjacent subalpine woodland vegetation – the perfect place for this insidious weed and for Sally to search with methodical speed and fervour. After a trial run on the Orroral Valley floor for the media, and a brisk walk up to the site, Sally was asked for real to ‘find’ and off she went, nose to the ground, back and forth, under tussocks, in the creek, controlled by short blasts of a whistle from NSW NPWS officer Hillary Cherry (above in yellow with P&CS staff). As dogs do, Sally couldn’t resist rolling in a smelly decomposing snake. Called to the task again by the whistle, she completed the search and to everyone’s relief, found none. However, to reinforce the reward system, a plant from a plastic bag was carefully tweezed out onto the ground (and even more carefully replaced) for her to find. She got her reward - the ball - and was happy.



**WORKING TOGETHER IN WONNANGATTA:** Over Easter 2016, Parks Victoria joined forces with community groups on site in the iconic Wonnangatta Valley to promote the Healthy Parks Healthy People philosophy. Parks Victoria worked alongside delegates from Victoria Police, Four Wheel Drive Victoria, Friends of the Wonnangatta and other government departments to provide learning and educational information specific to the Wonnangatta and surrounding Alpine National Park. It was a win-win-win for the park visitors, friends groups, and agency staff.

**NEW TO THE ALPS PROGRAM:** Not far to the north west of Baw Baw National Park lies the Lake Mountain plateau, a part of the Yarra Ranges National Park. The Lake Mountain Management Unit, a distinct sub-alpine zone of the park, has recently been approved by Alps Heads of Agencies to be added to Schedule 1 of the Memorandum of Understanding. Australian Alps National Parks welcomes the staff of Woori Yallock work centre (local park managers) to the Australian Alps Program.



**ALPINE BOG GETS ATTENTION:** The Yarra Ranges National Park team has been working collaboratively with volunteers from the Australian Deer Association and Sporting Shooters Association to undertake deer exclusion fencing of remote sub-alpine bogs. The strategy aims to protect the bogs from Sambar Deer wallowing and minimise the risk of the spread of

Amphibian *Chytrid* fungus. Both associations were super keen to be involved in the project to show their commitment to any conservation project that involves the management of deer. All the volunteers were very interested to learn how deer can be a potential vector in carrying pathogens such as *Chytrid* fungus and destroying critical habitat for certain species through wallowing. Their hard work and contribution was very much valued and contributed significantly to the success of the project.



Bradley Fauteux (2<sup>nd</sup> from left) and entourage at the chalet.

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE VISITS THE HIGH COUNTRY:** Parks Victoria Chief executive Bradley Fauteux is getting around the state visiting the many districts. In March North East staff were able to profile some of the wonderful parks and assets that the district manage. Mount Buffalo was on the itinerary and the loved chalet warranted a visit. So too stakeholders, including tourism, local government, the ski industry and user groups were able to meet and discuss many of the high country's issues with Bradley.



**WHAT THE.....?** This is how you get student (volunteers) to learn the intricate art of cleaning a drop dunny. Many thanks to Wollanagarra Outdoor Education Centre for assisting the Heyfield Parks Victoria staff at Wellington River Alpine National Park. Yep, the personal

protective equipment for cleaning the toilets may be over the top, but it's a cheeky way to get young people to tackle to job. (Apologies for the image quality.)

**MORE BOGS NEWS:** Alpine *Sphagnum* bogs and associated fens (ASBAF) continue to get good attention from a variety of projects across the agencies. The research project *Seed persistence in soil seed banks of sub-Alpine Bogs and Fens* is in its third year. Jointly undertaken by the Australian National Botanic Garden and the CSIRO, the Australian Alps Program has contributed funding over the last three years. Research outcomes will assist in efforts to mitigate biodiversity loss due to climate change. This work may also inform the development of operational, on-ground, management actions in the alps-wide National Recovery Plan for ASBAFs. The project has been led by principal investigator Lydia Guja of ANBG and is a collective effort with partners including the Centre for Australian National Biodiversity Research, ANBG volunteers, local government and agency park staff. Year 3's report is available on the Australian Alps National Parks website.

**FOR MOUNTAIN AND ADVENTURE FILM LOVERS:** Check out The Backcountry Film Festival. Melbourne screening is on Monday May 2, in Carlton; in Sydney it's on April 30. Details [here](#). There's also The Banff Film Festival, some of the best adventure films from around the globe, screening at various locations around the capital cities and specific Alps locations. For more click [here](#).

**FOR YOUR READING LIST:** Need to update your knowledge on alpine landscape rehabilitation? If you are not participating in the current round of the 'Green Book' site rehab workshops then you could alternatively be an armchair student of this science. Peruse at your leisure the MacPhee/Wilks paper *Rehabilitation of former Snowy Scheme sites in KNP*. To be found [here](#).

**ALPS HEADS OF AGENCY MEET:** The chiefs of the four park agencies - Parks Australia, Parks Victoria, Parks and Conservation Service (ACT) and National Parks and Wildlife Service (NSW) - met on the last day of March at Namadgi National Park HQ. The Australian Alps Liaison Committee shared the achievements of the year past and strategic planning for the next three years. Wild Horse management was a topic of good discussion that saw Dr Graeme Worboys of Jagumba Consulting present the case against accepting a large horse population in the alpine landscape. Next day agency heads Phillip Perram and Bradley Fauteux were able to get a birds-eye-view of both northern Kosciuszko plains (horse present) and the Bimberi escarpment (horse free). As the saying goes "A Picture tells a thousand words".



**Bradley Fauteux, Phillip Perram, Brett McNamara and Rob Gibbs take to the air to compare horse-tree landscapes from those that are still affected.**

**THE GREAT ROTATION IS UPON US:** With the hosting of the Australian Alps management program rotating to the ACT on the 1<sup>st</sup> July, preparations are well underway within ACT Parks & Conservation Service to assume the mantle from Parks Victoria. An Alps-wide recruitment action will soon commence, with the successful applicant to be based in the nation's capital for up to three years. The Chair of the AALC Committee will also rotate with Brett McNamara excited by the prospects of the ACT taking stewardship for the Program. As a Park Service the ACT will also be transitioning to new administrative arrangements moving from Territory and Municipal Services to Environment Planning Directorate. This structural realignment is in keeping with the Governments desire to create a single conservation agency with responsibility for both conservation policy and operational delivery.

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