

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"



40,000 YEARS Accumulated Knowledge

Our first general meeting for 2004 will be held at the Conservation Hut, Wentworth Falls on Friday 30 January.

The Society's President, Kevin Bell will start the meeting at 7.30pm with a brief outline of events and issues (with relevant handouts) and then introduce our guest speaker Frances Bodkin at 7.45.

Frances Bodkin is an indigenous Education Officer at Mount Annan Botanic Gardens, and her indigenous ancestors have over 40,000 years of accumulated knowledge of the region. In her talk Frances will discuss indigenous foods, law stories of the dreaming, ancient weather cycles, plant uses and protocols. There will be time to ask questions of Frances before a short supper break at 8.45.

During the second part of the program, Kent Gillman from BMCC and David Gamble from the environmental engineering firm of GHD will outline details for construction of the new Blaxland waste disposal site, which will incorporate state of the art planning. Please let Kevin know on the night of any environmental issues you would like to raise or discuss.

Visitors are very welcome.

A Time for Good Cheer

At this time of the year when good cheer abounds we can reflect on what good has been done over the past year for our local environment. Without a doubt the putting into place of the new Local Environment Plan will provide a standard for environmental protection over the next few years.

An important component of that plan is the Bushland Protection Order. Although passed only on the casting vote of the Mayor, it will engender a new attitude to our shrinking urban bushland.

Nobody could be unaware of the Tree Preservation Order which, consciously or unconsciously, has influenced the thinking of residents for several years.

We hope that the BPO, which is designed to protect the understory of those trees, will occupy a similar place in the minds of people, despite the vigorous and ill-informed efforts of certain vested interests to undermine it.

Changes will not happen overnight but gradually residents and developers will realise the importance of maintaining our natural heritage and will embrace the concept and thrust of the BPO to their, our and our unique flora and fauna's advantage. *Kevin Bell.*

Clear Planning Laws Needed

A recent judgement handed down in the Land and Environment Court has demonstrated the need for Blue Mountains City Council to establish concrete standards in the LEP to ensure that environmental protection guidelines are upheld if challenged in court. The matter was an appeal against Council's refusal of the DA for a subdivision in Orama Road, Hazelbrook.

The Society supported Council's case by providing a witness during the appeal. One of the two key contentious issues was "how wide should the buffer to the significant vegetation units be?" Evidence was tendered in letters to and from the applicant and in the planning study for DLEP2002 that a 60m buffer was accepted by Council as a guideline based on the survey undertaken by Drs Peter and Judy Smith. Dr Peter Smith gave evidence of their scientific findings. However the Commissioner accepted the statement "a buffer of 20m to 25m is appropriate", based on no scientific findings at all and with no evidence produced to justify this width.

In coming to the conclusion that the buffer width of 60m was not a guideline and did not apply here, he explained his job as "finding the appropriate balance". This is **not** an appropriate position from which to make assessments about scientific ecological evidence. The Land and Environment Court is not equipped to make such merit based assessments, as can also be seen from the Commissioner's failure to understand basic environmental concerns which are fundamental to planning matters in the Blue Mountains.

The LEP defines a watercourse as a "creek ... with ... (a) defined bed or defined banks, or (b) endemic riparian vegetation ... or (c) evidence of natural stream processes such as siltation, erosion, gulying"—implying that the creek starts where the first signs of creek appear, either vegetation or defined banks etc. However the Commissioner accepted the applicant's claim that the watercourse commenced where the riparian vegetation became evident, which was the location of a 'melaleuca'. This *melaleuca* was in fact a *leptospermum* and occurred some 30m below where gulying and stream banks first became evident.

The Society has asked Councillors to initiate changes to DLEP 2002 to include 60m as the baseline buffer width around swamps, heaths and other sensitive vegetation communities, and asked them to include this change during the review of LEP 91. These

changes would enable Council to successfully oppose or impose conditions on developments which have the potential to impact on the special natural features in the City and the World Heritage National Park.

We appreciate the commitment of the majority of Councillors to good planning outcomes in this case and see the need for legislation to help not hinder this process. Whilst Councillors are concerned about any perceived waste of Council funds, they would be remiss in their duties as Councillors in a City within a Blue Mountains World Heritage National Park if they were to approve any undesirable development merely on the grounds that their good environmental decision could be reversed if challenged in court.

A Wonderful Community!

One of the happy events of last year was the Community Celebration at the Conservation Hut on 6 December.

The day dawned cold and misty—typical mountain weather—but that did not deter the 80 or so people who came to celebrate and see the new lightbox display in The Hut foyer.

There was a theme of catchment education for the morning. There were educational displays and a few short speeches. Aboriginal elders Aunty Joan Cooper and Bill Hardy gave 'Welcome to Country' addresses.

We heard from Graeme Head, Sydney Catchment Authority, who said, "We are committed to safeguarding the catchments and their biodiversity, of which the Valley of the Waters is such a magnificent example."

Richard Kingswood, NPWS, said "The project is an excellent example of community and agency interaction to achieve best practice interpretation at a high visitor area."

Bushfire safety information was provided by RFS and NPWS. Water creatures were on display with information about water quality provided by SCA and BMCC. The Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group had weeds on display. Fairmont Resort provided a scrumptious morning tea.

A dance by Katoomba Dance Theatre opened the entertainment. There were songs, poetry and music from Denis Kevans, Denis Rice, Diana Levy and Bronwyn Kirkpatrick. Children from Wentworth Falls Primary School sang an adaptation of "What a Wonderful World" (photo taken by Ron Withington is on page 3) and planted trees in the John Buki Garden. *Christine Davies.*

**"Hut News", the newsletter of
Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc.**
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'Streamlining' Developments

The NSW State Government wants to 'streamline' development approvals to 'make NSW competitive—a State that is easy to do business in' but in the process seems to have forgotten about ecologically sustainable development.

The Local Development Taskforce convened by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning & Natural Resources (DIPNR) has released a report entitled 'Improving Local Development Assessment in NSW' making a series of recommendations to fast track the development assessment process for 'local developments' which are dealt with by local councils.

There is currently a 'fast track' system for standard dwellings called 'complying development' which is used in identified residential areas in the Blue Mountains where it is not considered that there are environmental constraints.

These types of developments are dealt with by private certifiers—they require no environmental assessment of the land and exclude the community from any opportunity to raise issues to be considered in the assessment. The complying development system has many problems. A major criticism of it is its inability to deal with environmental matters. Certifiers do not routinely check even sediment controls. They are neither trained nor required to assess whether a site has any special environmental features which should be protected.

One of the Taskforce's recommendations is to expand this standardised fast track system to 'environmentally sensitive areas'. This would adversely affect the Blue Mountains and result in less protection for our World Heritage Area. The Blue Mountains suffers from very many small developments each having a small but cumulative negative impact on the Park below. Better, not less, protections are needed. The protective measures need to be specific and tailored to each site.

There are a few good ideas being proposed such as the inclusion of water and energy efficiency standards in model provisions. But overall the recommendations of this taskforce clearly represent its membership. One may ask why did this taskforce of eight have **both** a representative of the Housing Industry Association and also Masterton Homes and no representative of any environment or community group?

The period for comments has been extended to 14 February. You can find the report on www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/taskforce/pdf/localdevelopmentreport.pdf or contact the Land Use Subcommittee on 4782 1635 (lyndal@hermes.net.au) for more information. Send your comments to Regulation Review, Local Development Taskforce Information Centre, Department of www.iplan.nsw.gov.au/taskforce/infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, GPO Box 3927, Sydney NSW 2001, or online ce/taskforcefeedback.jsp

A few suggested points would be: call for a full review of the planning system giving priority to environmental and community outcomes; oppose the expansion of complying development; improve the development assessment process by better environmental standards and better assessments by appropriately qualified people; improve the current system by more opportunities for community involvement—not a further erosion of rights; object to the biased representation on the Taskforce towards the construction industry and administrative efficiency; support the inclusion of water and energy efficiency standards in the model provisions.

Free-trading Away Our Independence

(Source: Habitat, December 2003)

The Australian Government is rushing to finalise a free trade agreement with the United States without fully

investigating the environmental, social and economic impacts to Australia.

"The US Free Trade Agreement will provide unprecedented rights for US companies to challenge the environmental laws and social policies of Australian governments. This is free-trading away our sovereignty", says Australian Conservation Foundation Executive Director Don Henry.

The agreement is set to resemble the North American Free Trade Agreement, which has allowed US companies to set aside the environmental laws and social policies of the Mexican and Canadian Governments. For example, the Canadian Government imposed a ban on the import and interstate transport of a fuel additive due to public health concerns. Ethyl Corporation, a US chemical company that produces the additive, sued the Canadian Government, which was eventually forced to reverse its ban on the additive and pay US\$13 million in legal fees and compensation.

Potential outcomes from a Free Trade Agreement with the US include:

- The granting of rights to US corporations to challenge Australian laws designed to protect the environment. These rights could also allow corporations to sue the Australian government for billions of dollars in compensation should an Australian law jeopardise corporate profits.
- Increasing US market access to trade in service providers which could pave the way for the privatisation of Australian conservation management, such as National Parks.
- The removal of Australian laws requiring the labelling of food products containing genetically engineered ingredients.

Find out more at www.acfonline.org.au

To express your views on this issue write to Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Alexander Downer MP, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600 minister.downer@dfat.gov.au and Federal Minister for Trade, the Hon. Mark Vaile MP, Parliament House, Canberra ACT, 2600, mark.vaile.mp@aph.gov.au

Changes in the Office

Joy McDonald has found that her regular work has increased to the extent that she isn't able to continue as our Administration Officer. We thank Joy for all the hard work she has done in that hot office at the Hut and welcome Les Coyne who has agreed to take on the job.

Serge Domicelj

It is with regret that we report the death of Serge Domicelj on 23 December 2003. Serge was actively involved with the Blue Mountains World Heritage Nomination. He was a member of the Society and a past member of the Management Committee. Serge was a true citizen of the world, a very competent linguist, and so enthusiastic about everything that he tackled. He will be missed! We extend our sympathy to Joan and the family.

Sydney's Water: *Ross Coster* How Much Water Should You Use?

Sydney metropolitan area, which includes the Blue Mountains, currently consumes about 630 gegalitres of water per annum (1 gegalitre = 1 billion litres). The Sydney Catchment Authority estimates that the dam system(s) can safely yield about 600 gegalitres per annum, which means we are using 30 gegalitres per annum too much right now. In the near future about 100 gegalitres per annum will need to be released as environmental flows to save our dying rivers. So that leaves about 500 gegalitres per annum for us Sydney residents. If predictions about the Greenhouse Effect reducing rainfall prove true, we may have to revise this number downwards in a few years.

Given that there are 1.5 million homes in Sydney metropolitan area, and that domestic consumption is about 70% of all consumption, the average Sydney home, with 2.5 people living in it, is using about 294 kilolitres per annum (1 kilolitre = 1 thousand litres).

If we are to reduce consumption to the 500 gegalitre per annum target, then each home can only use 233 kilolitres per annum, or about 640 litres per day. As Sydney grows, and the raw water supply does not (unless we want more dams), we will all have to reduce this target 640 litres per day per home by about 1% per annum to handle population growth. If your home is using more than 640 litres per day, you

are part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

My home uses about 700 litres per day, which is OK, but not as good as it could be. We never water the garden, but we have four adults taking showers, washing dishes, washing clothes, washing cars, washing the dog, filling the pool and pond etc.

So What Can We All Do?

Don't water the garden. If your garden is all local natives, then they don't need watering. After all, local natives grew here just fine before we and our hoses arrived. Never hose paved areas, use a broom (this is mandated by current water restrictions, but should be permanently banned).

Install a rainwater tank, and have it plumbed to your toilets. Toilet flush is a huge consumer of water, and you don't need filtered, chlorinated, fluoridated water to flush a toilet. Install dual-flush toilets if you don't already have them. This is a nasty one, as you really need to replace the whole toilet, both cistern and pan (or bowl). Single flush pans don't work well with dual-flush cisterns (trust me, I have tried it). Alternatively a reduced flush can be installed, which works well and allows you to use 1 or 2 flushes as needed.

Buy a front-loader washing machine as they use far less water. This one is also nasty, as the women in my life tell me that they don't like front-loaders and don't want one (that's right, I never wash clothes). Front-loaders wash a smaller

load and are harder to load and unload but they do save water. Install AAA rated shower heads. They save lots of water, at the expense of a slightly less satisfying shower. You do get used to them however!

Some people recommend re-using washing water on the garden. I am not a fan of this however, as washing machines use chemicals that just don't belong in the Blue Mountains environment. Catherine Hind in her talk at the last general meeting spoke of the problems of alkalinity and salts in grey water, which will impact on native bushland and groundwater.

What Can Sydney Water Do?

In the long term the only way Sydney can continue to grow, while using no more water, is if Sydney Water implement large-scale effluent recycling.

This is already happening at Rouse Hill, where sewage effluent is treated in a multi-stage filtering plant, then distributed to homes through a so-called 'third pipe' reticulated system. Rouse Hill residents use this water for toilet flush, garden watering and car washing. The cost of rolling this out to every home in Sydney is about 6 billion dollars, so it will take decades, and will involve an increase in the cost of water, or sewerage services, or both.

Next Month

That's it for me on water for the moment. Next month I will be writing about my favourite subject, sewerage!

Ross Coster.



What a Wonderful World

I see trees of green, red waratahs too,
Bright golden wattles, boronia too.
And I think to myself, what a wonderful world.

I see skies of blue and clouds of white,
The waterfalls splashing, the birds swift in flight.
And I think to myself, what a wonderful world.

The colours of the rainbow so pretty in the sky,
Are also on the faces of people going by.
I see friends shaking hands, saying 'How do you do?'
They're really saying 'Glad to see you!'

I see children grow, they'll learn much more,
How to take care of this wonderful world.
And I think to myself, what a wonderful world.

Nature's Banquet

The other day I was thrilled to discover a tall white spike of grass tree (*Xanthorrhoea*) flowers in the National Park behind us. How beautiful! The grass tree flowers are plentiful this year—in burnt areas as is usual and also in unburnt areas. Perhaps the weather has been favourable, or perhaps the flowers were triggered by the smoke of last year's fires.

The Aboriginal people had many uses for the grass tree. The flower spikes were used as spear shafts, resin from the trunk was used to make glue and the tender white leaf bases were eaten.

The grass tree flower has had special protection for many years along with the Boronias and other native flowers which people found attractive and were tempted to pick, and with good reason.

It contains the sweetest nectar! Honeyeaters, Lorikeets, Brushtail possums, Sugar Gliders, Pygmy Possums, Feather-tail Gliders, ants, beetles, butterflies, native bees, possibly moths at night and other insects sup on the sweet nectar.

Some native bees may build little tunnels into the

flower stem to nest. When it seeds, little finches like the Red Browed Firetail Finch, parrots and other seed eating birds and seed-eating insects feed on it.

This afternoon it was gone! Somebody who was ignorant of all this had taken the flower.
Christine Davies, 21/12/03.

Culling the library

The society's collection of environmental books is being culled. We need the shelf space, so will be giving away those books which have not been in demand. Come to the next General Meeting and see if there is anything of interest.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

General Meeting: Friday 30 January 7.30 pm, at the Conservation Hut, Wentworth Falls. (see page 1).

Management Meeting: Saturday 24 January, 9 am, Mid Mountains Community Centre, Lawson. Members are welcome to attend as observers.

Bushcare: Saturday 10 January. Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group meets at 9am on the 2nd Saturday of every month. Tools are provided. Bring morning tea, gloves and drinking water. Contact Karen 4757.1929.

Blue Mountains Conservation Society Bushwalking Group organises a variety of activities for all ages. See page 4.

Children's Activities

Welcome to Liz Riley who is the new coordinator for the Pre-School Walks. See program for details of the next activity. Unfortunately our Quoll Club leader David King has resigned and we need a replacement. Thank you David for taking on the job over recent months. The job involves organising a monthly activity for children 12 and under. Help is available. If you would like to find out more contact Christine on 4787 7246 or email hutnews@bluemountains.org.au

End to NSW Land Clearing

Article by Francesca Andreoni, *Wilderness News, Summer 2003*

In an historic announcement on 15 October 2003 the NSW Government announced an end to the clearing of mature bushland across the State.

When implemented, the decision to end broad scale land clearing will be the biggest single win for conservation in the history of NSW. Up to two million hectares of bushland that would have been at risk from land clearing will now be protected.

Bulldozing of bushland for farming has been the greatest single threat to the environment in NSW. Over 240 threatened species are directly at risk of extinction in NSW alone, and massive land and river degradation, such as salinity, is also caused by land clearing.

The decision combines new regulations, along with the allocation of \$406 million from State and Federal Governments to focus on protection and management of native vegetation in partnership with farmers.

To end the broad scale land clearing means that we can keep our farmland productive, our rivers healthy and protect our native wildlife and plants. This marks a maturing of the relationship we have with our country and reflects the community-wide interest in the future of our land and rivers, which has become even stronger through the most recent drought.

Jabiluka Restored

Extract of an article by Leanne Minshull, *Wilderness News, Summer 2003*

On August 12, 2003, trucks began rolling at the Jabiluka site not to extract more ore, but to begin the process of rehabilitation. 50,000 tonnes of previously extracted uranium ore are being returned to the mine shaft.

Thousands of people in Australia and all over the world could claim that without their contribution, the uranium mine would have gone ahead; and every one of those people would be right. The campaign to stop the Jabiluka uranium mine was a milestone in the people's ability to win against incredible odds and

Membership Enquiries
Contact Elizabeth van Reyswoud
Phone 4757.2694
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Post: PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY BUSHWALKING GROUP

Our Bushwalking Group provides a range of activities. Membership of the bushwalking group is available to members of the Society. For further information contact the Activity Leader/Coordinator (listed) or Bushwalks Conveyor Bob van Reyswoud 4757.2694 (phone/fax), email mcreysw@bigpond.net.au. Membership details are on page 4. **Cost of insurance and affiliation fees for bushwalkers is \$12.50 per member.**

Pre-School Walks, for parent/grandparent/carer with children under 6 years.

Short, easy walks, approx 1 hour, 1st Wednesday of every month, starting at 10.30am. Bring a snack and a drink. Contact Liz Riley 4787.6637 for more information or if the weather is doubtful.

Feb 04 Leura Cascades, Leura. Meet in the park off Cliff Drive.

Mch 03 Darwin's Walk, Wentworth Falls. Meet in Wilson Park on Falls Road.

Quoll Club: A monthly newsletter and activities for 12 and under.

There will be no activity in January.

Monday Leisure Walks: Usually 'Short Day' walks of 3-5 hours suitable for walkers of average fitness. Graded Medium, i.e. can include some short rock scrambles or some short sections off-track. Bring morning tea and lunch, plus carry at least 1 litre of WATER, 2 litres on warmer days.

Jan 05 Waterworks, Lithgow. Mostly shaded forest walk, then a swim in the dam. Lunch at Lithgow Workers Club. ☎ Jock 4758-6356. Meet Mt Victoria Railway Station 9.15 am

Jan 12 Mystery Walk, Leura. Meet Leura Station commuter carpark 9am. Norm/Laurel 4784 1554. ☎

Jan 19 Megalong Valley—Mermaid's Cave, Coachwood Glen and The Old Ford Reserve. ☎ Norah 4757 4058. Meet Blackheath Commuter Car Park 9.15 am

Jan 26 Sublime Point, Leura. Part road walk, find hidden track, views over Jameson and Kedumba, part of Grand Clifftop Track to Pool of Siloam and Leura Cascades. ☎ Laurel 4784 1554. Meet Leura Rly Commuter Car Park 9.00am

Feb 02 Watson's Bay/Dover Heights Clifftop Walk. Ocean Views, lunch at Doyle's. ☎ Mary 4787 6918. Meet top of escalators at Central 9.30 am (6.39am Train from Lithgow)

Thursday Pleasure Walks: These easy to medium grade walks are conducted to suit the walkers on the day. Times given are approximate. Slower walkers are catered for and on longer walks there is an option of a slower group to complete a section of the walk. Phone the contact for any enquiries about the program, starting times and transport issues.

These walks will recommence in February.

Interpretive Bushwalks: The next series of Thursday morning Interpretive bushwalks will start on 5 February. Meet at Blackheath at 9.15. Numbers are limited. Enquiries Christine 4787.7246.

Weekend Bushwalks: Always discuss with the contact if the walk you would like to do is medium/hard or hard, before attending. If this is your first walk, or you are in any doubt, discuss with the contact or Bushwalks Convener Bob van Reyswoud 4757.2694.

Jan 10 (Sat) Zig Zag Railway Lookouts (Clarence). Meet Mt Victoria Station 9.50am. Easy, Medium. Historic sites. ☎ Ron 4757 1526.

Jan 17 (Sat) Victoria Falls. Meet Mt. Victoria station 9.30am. Medium, hard climb out. Bring swimming costumes. ☎ June 4787 7312

Jan 24 (Sat) Grand Canyon. Meet Blackheath Station 9.30 am. Medium. ☎ Meredith 4782 4823.

Jan 31 (Sat) Porters Pass. Meet Blackheath Station 9.30am. Medium, hard. ☎ Bob 4757-2694

Feb 7 (Sat) Dalpura Canyon & Jinki Gully. Meet Mt Victoria Station 8.30am. Medium Hard with scratchy sections but wonderful views of the Grose River. ☎ Jim 4758-6009

show their determination to reclaim their future. Above all, the strength and determination shown by the Traditional Owners, the 27 extraordinary Mirrar people, has been an inspiration to all who were involved in the campaign.

What now? Kakadu will never be safe whilst a lease remains over Jabiluka. We must not forget that Jabiluka sits on top of one of the richest uranium deposits in the world. The Wilderness Society calls on all relevant parties to retire the lease and incorporate the area into a jointly managed National Park.

Everyone who helped to save this precious natural wonder—wrote letters,

whacked a sticker on their bumper bar, went to the blockade or supported friends and family who did, donated money, lobbied politicians, called talkback radio or helped in some way that no else will ever know – thank you!

Email Distribution List

From time to time the Society circulates information to members by email, usually items which have arrived too late for the current newsletter or where there is an urgency to pass on information. If you wish to be added to our email distribution list please email bmcs@bluemountains.org.au

Need for Concise Planning Laws

Blue Mountains City Council need to establish concrete standards in the LEP to ensure that environmental protection guidelines are upheld if challenged in court. This was demonstrated in the recent judgement handed down on the appeal in the Land and Environment Court against Council refusal of Development Application No S/01/0080 for the subdivision of Lot 1262 DP 880084, 33-35 Orama Road, Hazelbrook.

The Society supported Council's case by providing a witness during the appeal. One of the two key contentious issues was "how wide should the buffer to the significant vegetation units be?" Evidence was tendered in letters to and from the applicant and in the planning study for DLEP2002 that a 60m buffer was a guideline based on the survey undertaken by Drs Peter and Judy Smith. Dr Peter Smith gave evidence of their scientific findings. However the Commission accepted the statement a "buffer of 20m to 25m is appropriate, based on no scientific findings at all and with no evidence produced to justify this width.

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The LEP clearly defines a watercourse as a creek ... with ... (a) defined bed or defined banks, or (b) endemic riparian vegetation ... or (c) evidence of natural stream processes such as siltation, erosion, gullyng ... This would imply that the creek starts where the first signs of creek appear, either vegetation or defined banks etc. However the Commission accepted the applicant's claim that the watercourse commenced where the riparian vegetation became evident, which was the location of a 'melaleuca'. This *melaleuca* was in fact a *leptospermum* and occurred some 30m below where gullyng and stream banks first became evident.

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In the meantime we appreciate Councillors' commitment to good planning outcomes which were evident in this case. Whilst Councillors are concerned about any perceived waste to Council funds, they would be remiss in their duties as Councillors in a City within a Blue Mountains World Heritage National Park if they were to approve any undesirable development merely on the grounds that their good environmental decision could be reversed if challenged in court.