

Blaxlands Creek Riparian Rehabilitation Project – Paul O’Connor (paulo@envite.org.au)

The Blaxlands Creek Riparian Rehabilitation project was identified as a priority project by the Upper North Coast Catchment Management Board and Blueprint . The project was conceived to improve the quality / quantity of riparian vegetation and protect / rehabilitate stream structure. Implementation of the project was to be facilitated through a partnership with the Blaxlands Creek Community. The 12 month River health project commenced in mid November 2003.

Blaxlands Creek is located between Coutts Crossing and Nymboida just south of Grafton. Blaxlands Creek is a tributary of the Orara catchment and more broadly of the Clarence Catchment. The Creek has a channel length of around 25 km, subcatchment area of 144 km² and flows mainly through freehold land and occasionally Crown land.

Hydro – electric power station discharge flows have contributed to significant creek-bed lowering and other erosion issues as well as stock and weed competition which has been negatively impacting stream health. The main objectives of the project have been to:

1. Assist the community to develop working relations with Country Energy and other stakeholders involved in the management .
2. Encourage landholders to protect and rehabilitate riparian areas through a planned process of fencing, targeted weed control, revegetation and provision of off-stream watering points.
3. Achieve a 1 km minimum length of riparian rehabilitation within the first 12 months

It was hoped that through the creation of stable riparian buffers and better management of stock access to the riparian zone the benefits of a healthy riparian zone could be extended along the creek and water quality could be improved within the catchment.

EnviTE NSW has been managing the project under contract with the Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority (CMA). A series of regular open community meetings and have been occurring to discuss Riparian Rehabilitation strategies and options for the creek. A project Steering Group comprising six community representatives and Chair together with representatives from EnviTE, Country Energy and the CMA was formed to guide the project. Technical guidance has been provided by CMA Catchment Officers Tony Broderick and Peter Menzies. A project officer has been working on the project on a 1 day per week basis. Development of a Strategic Plan with a 1 – 5 yr time horizon was a major goal of the project.

A Project Investment Kit has been developed consisting of an Expression of Interest requesting funding applications from landowners for rehabilitation works. The project officer assisted landholders in developing submissions and promoting the project through mail outs, site visits and media articles. A Point based assessment of each submission was made by the Steering Group on the basis of 9 criteria including level of landholder contribution , effect on improved stock and vegetation management and utilization of best practice weed control & other rehabilitation methods.

The development of detailed Riparian Rehabilitation Action Plans followed outlining Site description , condition, weeds other threats and desired outcomes together with a Workplan, Permitting, Monitoring & Evaluation, a detailed Site Map and a Statement of Intent signed by the landholder and EnviTE NSW. Six landholders responded to the EOI with 1 landowner pulling out for personal reasons. Seven rehabilitation plans have been produced as part of the strategic plan.

Implementation assistance for the project has been provided by the Blaxlands Creek Environmental Skills & Education Team managed by EnviTE under the Work For The Dole (WFTD) program. This team which averaged 10 participants assistance with Mysore Thorn (*Caesalpinia decapetala*) and other weed control on the Skinners Swamp TSR site, seed collection and propagation, re-vegetation work as well as assistance with field days.

A series of information evenings, field days on rehabilitation strategies and plant propagation together with over 5 media articles have formed the key components of the communication strategy developed for the project.

The project has drafted a strategic plan which identifies future work priorities. Priorities for years 2 to 5 will include ongoing site maintenance on the current sites together with expansion / linkage to new sites. A 4 year

Cats Claw Creeper (*Macfadyena unguis-cati*) Control project estimated to control this invasive vine over a 9 km stretch and at 6 main infestations has been scoped with an estimated cost of \$160,000.

The main project outcomes have been excellent ongoing community ownership and attendance at project meetings, a motivated and functional steering group, development of a detailed GIS database for the creek, development of a strategic plan identifying rehabilitation priorities involvement of 5 landholders. The 35,000 project budget has been value added by Landholder contributions of \$12,428, Work for the Dole assistance of ~ 32,400 and additional in-kind which has raised the value of the project to around \$83, 428.

Interim caretaker process funding has been in place since mid November 2004 to ensure continuation of project activities. The current priorities include additional promotion, a new WFTD team and finalization of minor aspects of year 1 works. Future rehabilitation projects will be undertaken once the Regional Investment Strategy and associated Year 2 funding allocations and contracts are finalized.

Summary of Results

Site	Riparian Rehabilitation		
	Length (km)	Area (ha)	Activity
Landholder 1	.9	1.8	Targeted Weed control including Cats Claw Creeper (CCC), Bush regeneration & replenishment plantings
Landholder 2	.93	2.4	Targeted Weed Control and fencing
Landholder 3	.5	1.0	Targeted Weed Control including CCC, replenishment Planting
Landholder 4	.5	.5	Fencing replenishment planting and provision of Off-stream Watering point
Landholder 5	.45	.5	Fencing
TSR	2.5	1.8	Targeted Weed Control including CCC
Total	5.33	8	



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