

Friends of the Aranda Bushland Inc.
Convenor's Report 2004/5

I find I am ambivalent and concerned when I reflect on the general well-being of the Aranda Bushland and the Snow Gums Natural Heritage site over the past year. We are still to realise the full effects of the fuel reduction measures, the clearing for the GDE and the negative and positive effects of the drought.

While we appreciate the arguments in favour of regular burning to reduce fuel loads we are concerned about the long term effects on biodiversity and we are very aware of the change in the aesthetic quality of the area immediately adjacent to the urban development.

Disturbance of the ground surface, either by slashing or burning not only reduces native plant growth it also lays open large areas of ground to weed infestation and the introduction of new species carried in on machinery.

Similarly, the clearing for the construction of the GDE not only presents an eyesore and heart ache to all those who care about the value and natural beauty of our "Bush Capital", it also presents the Aranda Bushland with a number of unknown outcomes. The wide road reserve served as a buffer zone protecting the inner area of the bushland itself. Now the edge of the bushland is exposed not only to increased light, with its consequences for the stability of species but also the multitude of weed species which line our roadways. While we have the government's assurance that rehabilitation work will be done using only local soil, mulches, plant materials and seeds we will have to wait to learn the full impact of this project.

The drought has had both adverse and beneficial effects on our area. The abundance of wild flowers was greatly reduced this year and the germination and regeneration of plants was also reduced. This was abundantly clear in the long wait for the recovery of shrubs, Lomandra and grasses following the control burn in the bushland adjacent to Bindubi Street. On the other hand, the germination of weed seed like Paterson's curse and thistles and the regrowth of St. John's wort was severely limited in the autumn, only with the late spring rain did we see them burst into abundance.

We were able to take advantage of the effects of the drought. During the winter two working parties, a visit by the Australian Conservation Volunteers and some casual work enabled us to restore all the track roll-overs in the Aranda Bushland. Casual work by members was sufficient to control most of the weeds in the Aranda Bushland. This enabled us to start work early in the season at the Snow Gums Site. In September, October and November the grass was sparse and short in the Snow Gums site making it easy to spot and treat St. John's wort in the rosette stage. The result of this is a remarkable reduction in the number of St. John's wort reaching the flowering stage. In December the rangers from Canberra Nature Park included the Snow Gums Site in their routine spray programme. I would like to say we now have it under control it certainly will be interesting to see the numbers next season if we have reasonable rainfall in the meantime.

Chemical control of weeds sounds easy and five of our members have received

certificates in recognition of their training to use glyphosphate and “Brush-Off”. However, our desire is to maintain the highest possible diversity of native plants and this restricts where and when we can use chemicals. The use of weed wands is laborious but it does enable us to target individual weed plants and protect our native species. Our policy not to use chemical weed killers under the Snow Gums’ dripline and the ability of the St. John’s wort to regenerate from underground roots means that the labour intensive alternative of hand weeding is an on-going process. We are extremely grateful to those members who are dedicated to this task and we thank them most sincerely for their efforts.

Our hawthorn removal on the Rural Lease continued this year and the first two paddocks in the rural lease adjacent to the Bushland are now free of hawthorns. One of the Labour Party’s election promises was to take measures to protect the South Aranda woodland containing the stand of *E. blakelyi*. We hope this means it will also become part of Canberra Nature Park. We would welcome this and it would be a stimulus to try to clear the rest of the area more quickly. It would also challenge us to control the abundance of St. John’s wort and Saffron thistle which is there.

One of the features of our regular 2nd Sunday in the month working parties is the magnificent morning tea provided by Bill Packard and when he is not available by Diana Brown. Bill and Diana thank you.

One of the results of the 2003 fires has been the development of a system of fire fuel monitoring in the urban fringe area and also in the Nature Park itself. Four of our members received training in fire fuel assessment procedures and we now have five sites which have been assessed and will continue to be assessed at 6 monthly intervals in the future. We have a team of five members at present and would welcome further help.

An exciting stimulus to the education project which has been in progress for some years was the award of an Environment ACT grant to help bring this project to fruition. The project aims to develop web-based educational material, for use by schools and family parties using the Frost Hollow to Forest Walk. An art competition was launched in December as part of this programme. The final date for receipt of entries is in March so we are waiting to see the response. A special thank you goes to the sub-committee, lead by Hanna Jaireth.

The GDE development has raised the consciousness of the local residents to the value of the undisturbed roadside edge on Caswell Drive. Together with members of the Aranda Residents Group we have held meetings with Stephanie Straub of Canberra Urban Parks and Places (CUPP) to discuss how this area might be rehabilitated and protected from machinery used in the construction of the new roadway. This project will proceed in the coming months.

Clean-up Australia day activities, Frost Hollow to Forest Walks to celebrate World Environment Day, involvement in the Conservation Council are among the diverse programme of events this year. We responded to the opportunity to share ideas and aspirations at the Community Forum “A Vision for Canberra Nature Park” and on a more intimate level the seminar on “The Power of Parkcare” gave us the opportunity to meet those involved in the Integrated Management Plan and to share ideas and

information.

One of the issues raised at these meetings was the need for more co-operation between us as parkcarers and the staff of Canberra Nature Park in the planning and implementation of management decisions concerning Aranda Bushland and the Snow Gums Natural Heritage Site and we will continue to work towards this goal.

As a Parkcare group we are grateful for the support and encouragement from a number of agencies. We thank John Carter and the Ginninderra Catchment group for their help and support during the year. John is one of those leaders who visits when there is hard work to be done and pitches in with the best. Our very best wishes go with John as he retires from Canberra. We also thank all the Canberra Nature Park Staff for their support each month and we are deeply indebted to Angela Calliess, our Parkcare Co-ordinator for her commitment to the support and training of all volunteers in Parkcare work.

The corner stone to the achievements of Friends of Aranda Bushland is the Committee. Our meetings are held monthly in each others homes in a friendly sociable way and I thank you all for your hospitality. It has been a hardworking cohesive group where every member is important and valued for their individual contribution. Thank you everyone David our secretary, Diana our minutes secretary, Bill White our treasurer, Hanna, convenor of the education sub-committee Ian and David, our representatives on the Conservation Council and all the members, Bill, Jenny, Jim and Peter.

Mary E. Falconer
Convenor