

Friends of Aranda Bushland Annual Report 2021

Committee

2021 saw Eugenie Edquist and Anthony Todd sharing the leadership of Friends of Aranda Bushland (FOAB) as co-convenors. Jenny Andrews as Secretary and Peter Mellor as Treasurer continued to provide support in their respective roles, with Diana Brown persisting to chronicle the activities of the organisation with taking the minutes at committee meetings. The Convenors also continued to draw upon the wealth of knowledge held by Ian Falconer and Kevin McCue who served on the committee and provided invaluable advice on the ecology of the bushland. As part of the committee arrangements, 2021 is a notable year with neither of the Co-Convenors residing in Aranda. Luke O'Connor and Thomas Wyatt are also committee members who both live outside of Aranda and continued to provide support to the organisation. This attraction of FOAB to people living outside of Aranda demonstrates the appeal the organisation continues to have to people across Canberra and is something the 2021 committee encourages future committees to continue and build upon going forward.

Several members of the 2021 committee have indicated that they will be stepping down from their committee responsibilities in 2022 to focus on supporting FOAB as regular volunteers. The 2021 committee would strongly encourage potential new committee members to come forward and nominate at the Annual General Meeting to be held in January 2022.

Ian Vonarx

The committee wishes to acknowledge the tragic loss of one of FOAB's most enthusiastic and knowledgeable volunteers during the past year, Ian Vonarx, who sadly passed away in January 2022. During his time as a volunteer, Ian contributed greatly to FOAB not only through the output of his work, but also through his willingness to mentor other volunteers and pass on the knowledge he had acquired in his career in environmental and conservation work. He was also a wonderfully kind and decent man who everyone looked forward to having a good chat with at morning tea. On behalf of all of FOAB, the committee wishes to express its condolences to Ian's wife, Catherine and extend an offer to help in whatever way we can during this difficult time.

Proposed Ian Loiterton walk

The start of 2021 saw the committee working earnestly and with much energy to complete the Ian Loiterton walk (the walk). FOAB had received a grant for the walk in the 2019/20 financial year and had been endeavouring to receive the necessary approval for the final route from the relevant government authorities with the grant needing to be acquitted by 30 June 2021. Unfortunately, despite the support of Parks ACT in working with the committee, the final approval was not able to be obtained in time for the grant to be acquitted. As detailed below, the funding was, with the necessary government approval, diverted to another program. In some good news, in being outside of the time constraints of the grant program, the committee is hopeful an enhanced route taking in more of the bushland can be agreed upon and implemented. The committee would also like to acknowledge the support of Ms Alicia Payne MP, the federal Member for Canberra, whose office provided assistance in liaising with relevant government agencies and who also personally visited the bushland and walked the original proposed route.

Erosion control

As indicated above, it became apparent by May 2021 that it would not be possible to obtain all the necessary approvals ahead of the due date for the grant's acquittal. On the advice of the federal agency administering the grant, the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources (the Department of Industry), the committee applied for a 'change of scope' to the grant in order to fund

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another project that would be of benefit to the bushland. Following discussions with the Department of Industry, FOAB received approval for the grant to fund the purchase of coir logs to assist in the erosion control of the gully near the snow gums. The coir logs were successfully installed across three special work parties in June. On this note, the committee would like to thank Friends of Mt Painter and Geocaching Canberra for the assistance their members provided in installing the coir logs.

In addition to installing the coir logs a significant amount of effort and logistical coordination was required as part of their importation into Australia from Malaysia, their transportation from Queensland to Canberra and eventual delivery to the Aranda Bushland. The committee would like to thank ParkCare Ranger Martin Bajt for his assistance and patience in organising the receipt, storage, and delivery of the coir logs. Most of all, the committee greatly appreciates Martin's good humour throughout the process, which certainly made a sometimes-difficult situation much easier to deal with.

The committee received confirmation that the final grant acquittal for the project had been accepted by the Department of Industry on 28 September 2021.

Separately to the above, FOAB also undertook its usual erosion control track maintenance work in 2021. Despite the ACT COVID-19 lockdown detailed below, FOAB successfully managed to complete all its planned track maintenance work in the bushland for 2021.

Weeding

As with most years, weeding was a substantial activity throughout 2021. However, in comparison to previous years the issue of invasive weeds in the bushland was significantly increased through the change to a La Nina weather pattern, bringing with it substantial levels of rain, as well as the ACT's COVID-19 lockdown. Although the increased levels of rain were certainly welcome following years of drought, and assisted the flourishing of native flora and fauna, it has had the unfortunate side effect of activating the dormant seed bank of invasive weeds, which led to their thriving in the grassland area. In particular, there has been a significant increase in St John's Wort throughout the grassland and especially around the snow gums.

At the same time while there was substantial rainfall throughout Canberra's winter FOAB was unable to hold work parties to control the increase in weeds due to the ACT's COVID-19 lockdown from August to November 2021. FOAB has been holding short work parties throughout December, January and February to try and combat the spike in weeds and to make up for time lost due to the lockdown.

An ongoing issue for FOAB is the need to train and certify new members to handle herbicides safely in order to spray weeds. This issue has become more prominent in 2021 following members who are currently certified facing retirement from the organisation and being unable to commit to as much spraying as they were able to in the past. Although the issue is still ongoing, in some good news at least three members were scheduled to undertake the necessary training with Parks ACT in December 2021. The committee of 2021 notes this is an important issue for future committees to be aware of going forward.

COVID-19

Following on from the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020, COVID-19 continued to have a significant impact on FOAB in 2021. As detailed above, work parties were not able to be undertaken for part of the year due to the ACT lockdown. The lockdown also meant that rangers were unable to perform activities in the bushland and contractors were also unable to be engaged. The committee notes that heading into 2022 that ACT Parks continues to have a backlog of work to undertake across the territory

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caused by COVID-19, which has only been exacerbated by the La Nina. On this note, the committee would like to acknowledge and extend its thanks to FOAB's liaison ranger, Kelzang Tshering, who has provided a great deal of support despite the challenging conditions of 2021.

The ACT's lockdown also meant that the committee was not able to meet in person for its meetings. However, despite some teething problems, the committee successfully transitioned to holding virtual meetings using Microsoft Teams.

Planting

In comparison to previous years, FOAB did not undertake its usual planting in the area around the snow gum gully. However, FOAB did plant a grove of snow gums in the lowest paddock near the Old Caswell Drive stile. The grove is a tribute to Ian Falconer who is retiring after 23 years as a member of the Board of the Conservation Council of the ACT region. A ceremony celebrating the planting of the grove and the fixing of a commemorative plaque will be held in 2022.

FOAB Internship

In 2021 FOAB also offered the opportunity to host a volunteer internship. The position was intended to provide someone who is passionate about the bushland and conservation with real-world experience as co-convenor of one of Canberra's oldest parkcare groups. The position was advertised through ANU Intrepid Landcare's Facebook page throughout March 2021, but unfortunately no applications were received. At the same time, the committee also attempted to advertise the position through the ANU Fenner School of Environment & Society, but no response was received from the Fenner School on this matter.

The committee of 2021 would encourage future committees to re-visit the internship once the COVID-19 situation has stabilised and investigate alternative avenues for advertising the position.

Due to the pandemic...we'll only be telling inside jokes

The committee would like to express its thanks to the FOAB membership in 2021 for not only their ongoing help and support, but also for their perseverance and resilience during these difficult times. Given the year we've had, it's important to remember FOAB is not only an opportunity to wake early on a Sunday morning, muddy your footwear, squat in the middle of field while being blasted with the icy winds sweeping off the Brindabellas only to pull out some weeds whose thorns will no doubt pierce your gloves, but it's also an opportunity to come together with fellow green thumbbed oddballs who are crazy enough to enjoy doing the above with you. While the Aranda bushland might be what nudges you come along on that first cold and miserable Sunday morning of volunteering, it's the friends of the bushland that make you want to keep coming back.

Anthony Todd
Co-Convenor
February 2022