



Welcome! As we settle in to Winter let us reflect on the Summer and Autumn seasons of this year and update you on some of the activities of the Linear Reserves Project.

Taking a closer look...

Our team have been turning their attention to the Roadside Conservation Values (RCV) mapping and seeing if we can come up with a quick, simple and practical way of comparing the existing mapping with the current condition of native grassland vegetation on roadsides.

The RCV data has been extremely useful for planning and prioritising where we focus our conservation activities. However, since the initial surveys were carried out (in some cases nearly two decades ago) conditions have changed on many of the roadsides.

The “rapid assessments” we carried out over the Summer allowed us to ground-truth the existing data and to create an updated RCV mapping layer to help us better determine where the project should invest its efforts.

Grassland roadsides were assessed and given an overall score of low, medium or high value. Comments and photographs were recorded and segments mapped using the Collector App.



Figure 1: Tiarne (DELWP) and Ben (GHCA) test out our Rapid Assessment process.

The updates will be added to our Linear Reserves Online Planning Portal. The portal brings a variety of data layers to one place to assist land managers in planning and prioritising on-ground works. Layers such as administration boundaries, threatened species and burn history can be selected or deselected as needed.

The portal, which was developed through this project in partnership with Federation University, receives updates and improvements as new data becomes available.



Figure 2: The Linear Reserves Planning Portal

Planned Burns on Roadside

Regular and well-timed planned burning can have an extremely positive effect on the condition and diversity of native grasslands.

Burning every 2-3 years in late Summer or Autumn is the perfect recipe for a healthy grassland as it reduces weeds and biomass, opens inter-tussock spaces and allows for native seed set.



Figure 3: Recently burn grassland roadside.

The project agencies recognise the dedicated and ongoing contribution local CFA volunteers make towards conserving grasslands through their fuel reduction burns.

Without their efforts over previous decades many of these native grassland linear reserves would have long since degraded.

Through this project we have been working with CFA Vegetation Management Officers across several CFA districts to -

- identify grassland roadsides which require eco-burning,
- Prioritise sites of highest priority for burning
- Identify barriers/reasons for burns not going ahead as planned
- Educate brigades on the importance of native grasslands and the role fire plays in enhancing biodiversity and reducing fire risk
- Recognise and thank individual brigades that successfully undertook planned burns on priority sites and offer to provide a small payment and information regarding native grasslands.

We will prioritise our Spring weed control on the recently burnt sites to get the most effective outcomes and value for money.



Figure 4: *Ptilotus macrocephalus* (right) and *Arthropidium strictum* (left)

Weed Control Contractors Workshop

We recently invited weed control contractors who have been involved in the project to an information session at Woorndoo, where we discussed aspects of the project as well as methods, techniques, mapping and reporting.

With funding secured for the project to continue for the next 4 years and over 1000ha of weed control to achieve across the VVP next financial year, this event was a great opportunity for DELWP staff to get to know our contractors better and discuss improvements to our processes.

We also gave a demonstration of VBA Go so that contractors can enter their observations of rare flora, fauna and significant weeds directly into the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas. VBA Go can be found at <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/victorian-biodiversity-atlas/vba-go>

This event was funded through the State Government's Biodiversity On-ground Action initiative.



Figure 5: Participants at Woorndoo Grassland Common in April



Figure 6: DELWP project officers presenting information

Droving

Throughout Autumn the issue of droving was back on the agenda for DELWP officers. There were several cases of inappropriate roadside grazing and cattle droving, predominately in the Moyne Shire.

There are numerous concerns with these activities, the main one being cattle accessing road reserves of medium or high quality Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act (FFG) and Environment and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC) listed native grasslands.

Native grassland roadsides are vulnerable to cattle droving, particularly at this time of year as many have been burnt and have little cover, and they become wet and waterlogged. Cattle droving impacts native grasslands through destroying native flora, disturbing and pugging soil, increasing nutrients, and facilitating the invasion of weed species.

We have an obligation to protect this vegetation type under local, state and federal law. The short-term gain of "free feed" is not worth the long-term pain of then having to manage a site that has become weedy, overgrown and much more of a fire risk than the original native grassland would pose.



Figure 7: An example of pugging on soft ground which leads to weed spread.

VVP's Most Wanted

This edition's Most Wanted (Dead or Alive, but preferably dead) is Chilean Needle Grass.

A declared noxious weed and Weed of National Significance, Chilean Needle Grass affects agricultural land and native grasslands. It is a perennial tussock forming grass which outcompetes native species.



Figure 8: Chilean Needle Grass in seed, *Nassella neesiana*

Chilean Needle Grass turns a distinctive purple colour on the flowering seed heads and seeds have a very sharp needle-like point. It can be very similar in appearance to native Spear Grass. The main identifying feature to distinguish it is the corona at the join of the seed body and the seed awn.

Last year, Golden Plains Shire Council partnered with the Linear Reserves project to undertake extensive mapping of Chilean Needle Grass in native grassland areas in the Shire. This component of the Linear Reserves project has been funded by the Victorian Government's Biodiversity Response Planning program and is helping to ensure that Victoria's natural environment is healthy, valued and actively cared for.

Experienced ecologists were engaged to survey roadsides to map Chilean Needle Grass and other "New Invaders", Texan Needle Grass and Serrated Tussock. Follow up weed control will be undertaken this year.

These grasses have the potential to seriously threaten biodiversity and agriculture and care must be taken to prevent further spread.

Seeds will naturally disperse via wind; however roadside slashing has been a major cause of seed spread and continues to pose a threat where slashers or other vehicles are moving from infested areas to high quality grassland areas. Appropriate vehicle hygiene and timing of slashing are critical factors in minimising seed spread. Similarly driving also has the potential to facilitate the spread of seeds.

Regional Roads Victoria Environment Officers have responded to our concerns by assuring us that where possible, attempts are always made to coordinate weed management and slashing at times of the year when there will be a lower risk of weed spread. Slashing contractors are aware of the location of high-risk weeds and the stringent vehicle washdown procedures that are required when performing their works.

For further information on Chilean Needle Grass, go to –

<http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/weeds/a-z-of-weeds/chilean-needle-grass>

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