

Highfields Falls Coordinator's Report

Personnel

Thirteen enthusiastic members have contributed to bush regeneration this year, with at least six and usually ten or more attending on a weekly basis every Tuesday morning. More than half the group prefer an early start when the weather is cooler, so that is how we operate. Not all can make the early start, so a flexible arrangement has evolved where I get there for the start at 7:30am and volunteers arrive and depart as their situation allows. In the hotter weather, this allows us to depart by 11am. In Winter we often get an extra hour of work done.

Safety

All volunteers have sturdy footwear, long trousers, FEP shirts and good hats. Gloves are always worn when working. Insect repellent is used to deter ticks which appear intermittently. When handling chemicals, disposable gloves are utilised, while all handling is done on the shelf outside the container so that any spills (none this year) and fumes are not in a contained space.

Every week the worksite is communicated and all volunteers work within close proximity on that site. This allows regular visual checks by the coordinator.

Work Completed

All work this year was within and beside the “loop” tracks between Dau Road, the Waterfall and the storage container, as this is the area where most of the visitors spend their time. Very little work was done on clearing new areas as the total area cleared until this year is about what we can manage with regard to preventing re-infestation of the main weeds while the plantings and natural regeneration create a canopy cover which deters germination of exotic pest species. Most undesirable species in the working areas are now small in size, so mechanical removal is our main method of control.

Several members collect seeds from local native plants and are proficient in germinating these. When a suitable size, these are planted in the more open areas to create cover for the expediting of natural regeneration.

In particular, I would like to put on record my appreciation of Max Henderson's work in regularly checking the Cat's Claw area for any regrowth and his

ongoing work to eliminate this menace by spraying and uprooting. There has been no seed set in his time doing this work.

Equipment

The purchase of the Trojan “hand mattocks” has been very successful as these are robust and can take the rigours of prising out Asparagus vines, moth vines and small privet and lantana. These are preferred by those who like a smaller, lighter hand tool. Greg Lukes is currently creating more root-cutter shovels which is the preferred implement of the majority of the volunteers since this eliminates a lot of bending when weeding. These shovels are also great for cutting planting holes when the soil is compacted or drier.

Having looked at several types of “grow-tubes”, I would recommend that the more rigid plastic type which fold into a triangular shape and are supported by a single, more robust wooden stake, (20cm square cross-section), be the type purchased in future. The collapsible plastic tubes, supported by three bamboo stakes often collapse and kill the tube stock by creating a waterproof covering and a “greenhouse” which kills the plant in any warm weather when the sun shines on it.

Mindless vandalism also takes place where the water is released from tanks and the taps damaged. To this end a screw has to be used to prevent the tap turning and the tap removed after each use and stored in the container. Markers showing where planting occurred are regularly removed or broken. The signs showing “Friends of the Escarpment are undertaking revegetation work in this area”, are also subject to being extracted and thrown into creeks or hurled away into the bush. Several have been shredded by knives and had to be binned.

The future

I can see the need to do regular maintenance on our current regeneration areas for at least the next five years until the regrowth is dense enough to deter exotic seed germination. Native bird populations continue to increase with several species previously not recorded starting to appear. The lantana thickets covering the southern slopes, which presently prevent the koalas from utilising the gum trees (except the accessible trees along the tracks), should gradually be pushed back and allow the small colony nearby greater access to food.