The REC Newsletter

February 2011 Edition 5

The aim of this newsletter is to profile the NSW Roadside Environment Committee (REC) and share information about the management of NSW linear reserve environments. For more information on the REC, including how to create roadside vegetation management plans, go to: www.rta.nsw.gov.au/rec

In this Issue:

Latest news from the REC

- The REC will be holding its annual regional meeting in Bathurst during August. The meeting will involve local councils and other linear reserve managers. The meeting program will include presentations and discussion about linear reserve management in the Central West region and a field trip, as well as the formal REC meeting.
- The REC has completed a GIS mapping project that shows the NSW local councils that have completed Roadside Vegetation Management Plans (RVMPs) or similar and which ones are implementing the RVMPs (according to a recent survey). The GIS maps will be updated as further information is obtained and will be used by the REC to identify gaps and possible support.
- At its last meeting, the REC received a presentation by the NSW Streets Opening Conference (SOC) to investigate synergies between the SOC and the REC. The main roles of the SOC are to:
  - allocate space for utilities in road reserves
  - coordinate work between utility providers and roads authorities
  - encourage agreed codes
  - minimise the impact of utility service providers on road users and the natural environment
  - promote road safety by design.
- The REC is supporting a project by the Sydney Weeds Committees that aims to:
  - review processes for managing roadside weeds in the Sydney area
  - identify and map locations of key and priority roadside weeds in the Sydney area
  - recommend improved processes for managing roadside weeds in the Sydney area

- The IPWEA (a member of the REC) tabled a report from its Roads and Transport Directorate providing findings of a trial by four NSW local councils of the clear zones assessment spreadsheets developed by ARRB Consulting for the REC.

REC to sponsor Roadside Environment Management Award for Local Councils

The REC will sponsor a new Roadside Environment Management category in the LGSA's 2011 Excellence in Local Government Awards. Local councils are encouraged to nominate for the award, with more details and award criteria to be released soon by the LGSA and the REC.

Conflicts of Vegetation Management Vs Urban Rail Network

It is widely accepted that transport corridors are valuable reserves of vegetation that may provide remnants of the localities original vegetation and provide an important corridor that wildlife can utilise. Rail corridors also provide an amenity value as they snake through the urban environment.

Image: An identified area of conflict between legal requirements for electricity supply clearance and council/residents.

Maintaining these community values and running a busy passenger train system without incident can be considered in conflict. There are many opposing issues with regards to vegetation management, particularly with the management of large trees.

Some of the major constraints to having trees along the rail corridor include the following:

- Maintaining legal clearances for electrical infrastructure - The urban rail network is designed to run electric powered trains, and the infrastructure to support them includes the overhead wiring above the track and the higher voltage electrical feeder wires that usually run along one side of the track. Legislation that governs electrical infrastructure dictates specific safety and bushfire clearances from vegetation are maintained. This is a high input and expensive exercise that impacts on existing trees on the rail corridor and adjacent public or private lands.
- Providing access ways for maintenance - Unlike roads, the rail corridor must provide room for train running and motor vehicles, as vehicle movement is essential for infrastructure inspection and maintenance. As well as electrical infrastructure such as poles and wires, the rail corridor has complex signalling and communication lines that must be accessed for inspection, fault finding, sight lines and maintenance.
- Minimising potential impacts on safe and reliable train operations - Civil works in the rail corridor are extensive as rail track must be level and not follow the lay of the land. To achieve this extensive cut and fill to build the track has resulted in endless rock or earth cuttings, retaining walls and fill embankments that must be maintained along with the associated drainage lines and road access. Steep cuttings in particular must be inspected regularly and cleared of larger vegetation to ensure they are stable and loose rock and debris cannot fall and impact on train running and safety.

The linear nature of the rail corridor that is highly visible and adjoins so many neighbours means that land management activities are constantly under scrutiny. The general public, conservation groups, neighbours and rail commuters all have expectations that the rail corridor will be managed in a certain way, including providing suitable amenity and conservation value.

Within these groups there are also conflicts such as what a neighbour may want is not what is best for the environment or train operations e.g. the neighbour that wants noxious weeds

retained as a screen to the rail corridor. Vegetation management in any form often generates complaints that are sometimes difficult to resolve.

Developing and implementing clear and concise plans for vegetation management and tree management is a way to minimise and resolve conflicts. This can be achieved by mapping the rail corridor vegetation to identify the following categories;

- areas of significant conservation value to be managed for conservation
- areas of ongoing minimal input management to have suitable maintenance regimes established, such as tractor slashing and/or scheduled weed control programs
- areas of major operational conflicts and/or high input management

Where areas of major operational conflict are identified, vegetation works can be designed to be more proactive and attempt to address the long term issues. Generally this will involve negotiating with local government authorities and neighbours to replace operationally unsuitable vegetation (i.e. large trees or weed species) with a vegetation community that requires much less maintenance by not impacting on infrastructure, such as dense stands of locally indigenous shrubs and ground cover species.

As a consequence of the legal requirement for environmental assessment of such projects, in most cases revegetation will cover a much larger area than the vegetation removed and can result in enhanced amenity and potentially enhanced environmental value. Other biodiversity values lost, such as the removal of tree hollows, can be mitigated by the installation of suitable nest boxes. Although the initial cost of such proactive vegetation management is much higher than existing maintenance, the long term savings to the maintenance budget are significant and are also likely to result in reduced ongoing conflicts.

Rail corridors, while highly modified and intensively managed linear reserves, can contribute positively to biodiversity values by providing connectivity and suitable habitat for certain flora and fauna.

Myrtle Rust Spread Alert (as of 21st Feb 2011)

Since Myrtle Rust (*Uredo rangelii*) was identified on the NSW Central Coast in April 2010, it has spread rapidly and is considered widespread on the eastern seaboard of NSW from Shoalhaven to the Queensland border.

Image: Melaleuca quinquenervia with new Myrtle Rust lesions (courtesy of I&I NSW)

Recent detections on the North Coast from Ballina to Queensland have been reported from bushland, nurseries, gardens and bush food production sites and have raised the total number of infected premises to 201. There are over 40 known infected species and this number is expected to rise with hundreds of species of *Myrtacae* having been exposed.

A National Myrtle Rust Coordination Group representing industry, government and non-government stakeholders has been established to oversee ongoing actions aimed at minimising the impact of Myrtle Rust on the environment, industry, and the community. Based on the current knowledge and distribution of the disease, the National Coordination Group agreed that it is not technically feasible to eradicate the disease.

On Jan 28 2011, the NSW Department of Industry and Investment (I&I) held an industry and community briefing session in Sydney to provide an update on the Myrtle Rust issue.

I&I have prepared a map of Myrtle Rust Management Zones for NSW which will assist in the implementation of Myrtle Rust management measures and bio-security precautions in day-

to-day business operations and community awareness.

NSW has been divided into two zones:

- Red zone - Myrtle Rust is considered widely distributed.
- Green zone - considered relatively free of Myrtle Rust.

These zones are dynamic and will change with the known distribution of the rust. Currently the red zone includes all coastal LGAs from Shoalhaven City Council to the Queensland border. The green zone covers the remainder of NSW.

There are several steps that can be implemented when working along roadsides and in a bushland environment to minimise the risk of spreading Myrtle rust.

1) Become familiar with the symptoms of the disease. The signs of Myrtle Rust include leaf curling on new growth tips, leaf loss, infected seeds and fruits and a general yellowing of the plant.

2) If you see the disease at a worksite on Myrtaceae plants (e.g. scrub turpentine, Eucalyptus, tea tree and paper bark), implement bio-security measures to mitigate the risk of spreading it to another site. See:

www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/362096/preventing-spread-Myrtle-Rust-bushland.pdf

Cleanliness is the key. Simple steps like laundering clothing before moving between sites can be the difference between healthy and diseased plants. Hats are of particular concern as these are rarely washed and frequently contact plants when worn by people working in bush land situations. Choose a floppy style of hat that can be easily washed. Gloves are also of major concern as they may come into direct contact with infected plants. Gloves should never be taken from one site to another unless first washed. Washing clothing, vehicles and equipment after visiting an infested site will aid in slowing the spread of this serious pathogen.

Photos of suspected infection in the green zone and new hosts can be emailed to biosecurity@industry.nsw.gov.au. The I&I website should be consulted for the most up to date information on Myrtle Rust and it also provides recommended management measures to help prevent the spread of Myrtle Rust: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity/plant/myrtle-rust

Myrtle Rust Identification and Bio-sanitation Course

The Australian Network for Plant Conservation (ANPC) is working to develop an accredited one-day training course for the field recognition and reporting of Myrtle Rust, and for field bio-sanitation. Register your interest in having this course run in your area by contacting ANPC at anpc@anpc.asn.au with subject line 'Myrtle Rust course EOI', or phone 02 6250 9509.

Murray CMA Tree Mapping Layer

Developed by DECCW at the instigation of the Murray CMA, a particular spatial layer used segmentation technologies to 'map' individual paddock trees.

Individual paddock trees and remnant tree clumps constitute a major part of the CMA's NRM interest, particularly in terms of Property Vegetation Plans (PVPs) and incentive plantings.

As the majority of the remnant trees in the Murray landscape occur along roadsides, it is apparent that the 'tree layer' can also be a useful tool to highlight the actual spatial extent of road side tree canopies as a discrete feature. This feature can be generated anywhere there is SPOT imagery.

The 'tree layer' is currently provided as a separate product within the mapping geo-database. It is currently being generated for example for the entire Hunter CMA. The tree layer is not however 'typed' in terms of species or communities.

The fuller extent of the vegetation (canopy trees, shrubs and grasses) including roadsides, is mapped as part of the vegetation mapping program where it meets minimum mapping criteria (minimum two hectares, two trees wide etc.).

The Murray Mapping report is currently in the final phase of scientific editing and should be published soon.

Update: DECCW has also recently completed and delivered a Tree Canopy Layer for the whole of the ACT for the ACT Government.

Western Legal Roads Project

Unlike other parts of NSW, a large number of roads and highways in the Western Division have never been formally dedicated as public roads. Instead, most roads simply overlie Western Lands Leases, creating uncertainty of access and unknown legal liability.

Access arrangements have relied on lease conditions and a clause in the Western Lands Act that says the leaseholder is "Not to obstruct or interfere with any reserves, roads, or tracks, or the use thereof by any person." (see schedule 1 cl (e) of *Western Lands Act 1901*)

The intention of the Western Legal Roads Network program is to create greater legal certainty about the legitimate road network and then discourage use of unnecessary duplicate tracks. Significant public roads will be formally excised from the Western lands leases. Some details about the project:

- probably take about five more years to complete
- about 20,000km of road will be formalised in total
- to-date about 7,000km have been completed
- the RTA standard of 60m (for access tracks) and 100m wide (for significant public roads) has been applied
- easements are used to provide legal access to "land-locked" properties.

The process involves:

- identifying an appropriate road network to provide access
- withdrawal the necessary land from the western lands leases
- declaration under the Roads Act
- vesting in the roads authority (s145 of Roads Act), which is usually local government. The RTA informally acts as the road authority within the unincorporated area.

The Land and Property Management Authority (LPMA) is also identifying lot & DPs of roads within national parks. Subject to negotiations with DECCW, the shire roads that pass through the national parks may be removed from the park and vested in (& managed by)

the local road authority.

Linear Reserve Resources

Linear Reserve Forum Presentations:
YouTube presentations from the recent linear reserve forum 'On the Road Again: Linear Reserves Connecting Biodiversity Across Fragmented Landscapes' are now available on the Conservation Management Networks website.

The web address is:
http://www.gbwcmn.net.au/node/3521

TSR Papers:
Of interest to those working with Travelling Stock Reserves, two papers have been published in The Rangeland Journal late last year. This material is the result of several years' research.

- Cameron, J. & Spooner P.G. (2010) Origins of Travelling Stock Routes. 2. Early development, management, and the growing embrace of the law (1830–70s). The Rangelands Journal 32, pp. 341-351 (Murray Darling Basin Special Issue)

- Spooner P.G., Firman, M. & Yalmambirra (2010) Origins of Travelling Stock Routes. 1. Connections to Indigenous traditional pathways. The Rangelands Journal 32, pp. 329-339 (Murray Darling Basin Special Issue)

Publication available - Fauna Sensitive Road Design Manual:
'The Fauna Sensitive Road Design Manual. Volume 2: Preferred Practices', published by the Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads is now available on TMR's website for downloading and printing (free of charge). This document is based on state, national and international research, with Australian case studies presented at the end of the document.

The web address is:
www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Business-and-industry/Technical-standards-and-publications/Fauna-sensitive-road-design-volume-2.aspx

State of the Catchment Reporting:
The 2010 State of the Catchment (SOC) Reports for all 13 NSW catchments have now been released. The SOC reports document the condition of, and pressures on, 11 natural resource assets and two community targets at the regional scale. This is the first time that comprehensive data and information is available for all natural resource assets in catchments across NSW. This data has been collected and analysed using a common analytical framework, and implements international best practice in regional natural resource condition reporting.

The web address is:
www.environment.nsw.gov.au/soc/stateofthecatchmentsreport.htm

Did You Know??

The Travelling Stock Route network includes over 700,000 hectares in the Eastern and Central Division of NSW and about 1.27 million hectares in the Western Division (though much of this area overlays Western Lands Leases and is managed as part of these leases).

Do you have an article on Linear Reserve Environmental Management to share?

The REC encourages readers to share ideas and information through the REC newsletter. If you have a project, idea or any other piece of news regarding linear reserve environmental management that you would like to share with others from around the State, we would love to hear from you. Email your ideas or articles to akarwaj@molinostewart.com.au

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