



The REC Newsletter

May 2010 Edition 2

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/environment/roadsideenvironcommittee/index.html

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Latest news from the REC

- ❖ When roadside trees have been identified as 'hazardous' (by safety audit, crash history, community perception, etc), local councils will need to respond in some way.

The REC commissioned a project that aimed to provide a practical approach for local road managers to decision making with respect to managing roadside hazards, particularly trees, while minimising any adverse impacts on the natural environment. The project was undertaken for roads with less than 1,000 vehicles per day, although the resulting methodology could also assist for higher volume roads.

The ARRB Group was engaged by the REC to undertake the project. The approach taken was to provide a balanced decision process which can be applied to road segments or a particular location that has consistent conditions for the criteria being assessed. It does not attempt to define clearance distances from the edge of the road or heights above the road, but rather provides guidance on how to objectively assess the level of safety versus environmental risk within a particular road segment.

A series of actions are provided in a matrix from which decision makers can choose the most appropriate response for their situation. It should also be noted that the approach does not rely on any overarching principles about the safety of road users having precedence over the conservation of native vegetation, or vice versa.

The assessment steps are as follows:

Step one: Assess environmental value – by rating various attributes of the tree or vegetation stand.

Step two: Assess road safety hazard risk– by identifying the relevant safety factors and then calculating a 'risk score' using a simple Excel spreadsheet containing a series of look-up tables for each factor.

Step three: Select the most balanced treatment – using the guidance provided by the Environmental Value-Safety Risk Matrix and accompanying guidelines.

The spreadsheets are currently being field tested for the REC by a sample of NSW local councils. For more information contact Mick Savage (NSW Roads Directorate) on 0418 808 085.

- ❖ In 2004, the REC obtained funding from the NSW Environmental Trust to implement a project titled 'Saving our Corridors'. The project involved three stages and was implemented between 2005 and 2007. The three stages were:

Stage One. Standardised assessment to enable analysis of environmental values at site, catchment and landscape scales.

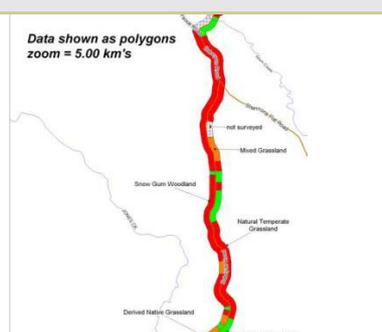
Stage Two. Local and catchment environmental planning which identifies and secures high environmental value linear reserves for protection and conservation management.

Stage Three. Accredited training for staff and contractors to build capacity and facilitate best practice linear reserve management among works crews within authorities, sub contractors, utility and community groups to ensure environmental values of linear reserves are conserved and enhanced during maintenance and other works.

One of the outputs of the project was that 89 local councils and 14 Rural Lands Protection Boards produced or upgraded management plans for their linear reserves.

As an action related to its current strategic plan, the REC is keen to find out how well these management plans are being implemented and what further support is required. The REC will soon be surveying councils and the Boards (now Livestock Health and Pest Authorities) regarding this. For more information please contact the REC Executive Officer (details below).

Cooma-Monaro Native Vegetation GIS Layer Project



In conjunction with the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) and the NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW), Cooma-Monaro Shire Council is completing a pilot project which uses a 'rapid assessment' technique for sampling remnant vegetation in roadsides. The data can then be used to produce a GIS (Geographic Information System) layer of roadside vegetation. The following outlines the project components.

Photo caption: Draft map of surveyed roadside vegetation

Sections of RTA and Council maintained roads were surveyed by a botanist whilst a Council staff member drove a Council vehicle. Data was recorded against each feature using a Thales 'Mobile Mapper' (a hand held GPS data mapper). This data was then manipulated in Council's GIS software to create an interim GIS layer. A final GIS layer was developed by classifying sections of roadside vegetation using an 'Ecological Integrity Index' comprised of three categories: low, medium and high. The categories are colour-coded in the GIS layer to facilitate cross-referencing between the GIS layer and a standard set of management strategies.

Strategies were then developed for the environmental assessment, construction, rehabilitation and maintenance aspects of road management. Each strategy was assigned a unique code. These codes were used to populate the relevant field in the GIS layer.

A peer review of the project involving surrounding councils, the RTA and DECCW was held late last year. The outcome of the review was that the survey technique appears very useful and robust although it was recommended that a validation survey be undertaken. It was also thought that the GIS layer and accompanying strategies would be of substantial assistance in the management of roadside vegetation. A validation survey has been scheduled for March this year. Once the survey is complete and the project report finalised both the report and strategy document will be available to local government bodies.

For further information contact Sue Robb at Cooma-Monaro Shire Council 6450 1777 or sue.robb@cooma.nsw.gov.au

Managing Native Vegetation in Travelling Stock Reserves



The Australian Network for Plant Conservation (ANPC) has received a grant from the NSW Environmental Trust to develop and provide workshops to Travelling Stock Reserve (TSR) managers.

Photo caption: An ANPC Workshop on plant identification for site assessment. Photo: Sally Stephens

The project titled 'Managing Native Vegetation in Travelling Stock Reserves' will:

- ❖ Conduct six, two-day workshops (over three years) to engage on-ground managers of TSRs to increase ecological knowledge and plant conservation skills, and
- ❖ Develop course materials that will also be a resource for further workshops outside the project funding and could also be applied to other linear reserve management.

The TSR network includes many sites important for conservation of native species and ecological communities, particularly in the wheat-sheep belt where remnant native vegetation may comprise less than five percent of the landscape. This project focuses on conservation of TSRs in Box-Gum Grassy Woodland, including threatened communities listed under State and Commonwealth acts and Natural Temperate Grasslands.

The aim of the project is to improve biodiversity conservation on TSRs. The workshops will provide on-ground managers of TSRs with enhanced knowledge and skills to enable them to identify and manage remnant native plant species and communities in TSRs and the threats to those species and communities. They will also help to develop their capacity to access relevant advice and ecological knowledge and to familiarise them with options for multiple use management consistent with conservation goals.

Development and delivery of these workshops will involve collaboration with CMAs (Murrumbidgee, Central West and Border Rivers-Gwydir) LHPA State Council, TSR Rangers, the Grassy Box Woodlands CMN and Friends of Grasslands. The ANPC would also like to thank the NSW REC for their letter of support for the project application.

For more information on the project please contact Sue Mathams on phone 02 6250 9523 or sue.mathams@environment.gov.au.

Regional Roadside Vegetation Marker Project



The Regional Roadside Vegetation Marker Project is now in its final stages of implementation. The project aims to identify and improve protection of 250 ecologically sensitive sites located in council managed roadsides across the Hunter, Central Coast and Lower North Coast region. It aims to do so by triggering the implementation of best practice roadside management practices at marked locations.

The scheme identifies and provides management recommendations for the following roadside environment categories:

- ❖ Threatened Vegetation Communities
- ❖ Threatened Plants
- ❖ Orchids
- ❖ Significant weeds
- ❖ Important wetlands
- ❖ Significant Fauna Habitat
- ❖ Koala Black Spots

Each of these categories will be represented by unique and regionally consistent markers and

codes that link directly to Field Guides containing recommended management practices. These cover a range of activities including slashing, grading, weed control and drain clearing.

This project is part of a much broader Roadside Environment Program that aims to protect and improve the ecosystem services and community benefits provided by well managed roadsides. While the current project initiative focuses on ecologically sensitive sites, its design provides for expansion to cover a wider range of roadside management issues in the future.

For more information regarding the Regional Roadside Marker Project contact Eva Twarkowski on 4970 4029

Roadside Conservation in WA



In WA, roadside conservation began formally in 1952 when a policy was implemented to create a two-tier reservation system consisting of conservation reserves and roadside reserves to connect them. Community concern over the loss of wildflowers and the ongoing degradation and destruction of roadside vegetation resulted in the formation of a committee to look after these vulnerable areas.

The Road Verge Conservation Committee (RVCC) was formed in 1969, with 2009 marking 40 years since its formation. However, the RVCC was limited by a lack of funding and many worthwhile initiatives were not carried to fruition. As a result, the committee disbanded after 14 years of operation.

In 1984 a definitive commitment of funds for a full time executive officer led to the rebirth of roadside conservation. RVCC's successor, the Roadside Conservation Committee (RCC), was created to "coordinate and promote the conservation and effective management of rail and roadside vegetation for the benefit of the environment and the people of Western Australia."

In the past 25 years the RCC has "made significant changes to roadside conservation thanks to strong partnerships with key stakeholders and committed volunteers."

An important initiative of the RCC has been the roadside vegetation survey project. Roadside vegetation is surveyed according to several biological characteristics to give a condition rating. The resulting map is an important tool in developing strategies for the management of roadsides and raising community awareness. Since 1989, 47 shires across the south-west have been mapped for their conservation value.

The RCC has trained local shires in roadside management techniques for 29 years to raise awareness among works crews of the values of roadside vegetation and the best ways to balance the practicalities of road construction and maintenance with conservation outcomes.

The RCC has also published a wide range of material including technical handbooks for roadside maintenance and guides for adjoining land managers, as well as managing the Flora Roads program, which recognizes a select group of 33 roadsides of high conservation value with significant tourism and landscape value.

Despite the achievements of the RVCC and the RCC, there is still evidence that roadside vegetation is in decline. During the next 25 years, the RCC will strive for continued advancement in roadside vegetation management to ensure the preservation of those values for which roadside vegetation is so important.

Caron Macneall is the executive officer for the Roadside Conservation Committee. She can be contacted by phone on: (08) 9334 0423 or by email: caron.macneall@dec.wa.gov.au

Do you have an article on Linear Reserve Environmental Management for us?

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 Councils, CMAs, industry and NGOs from around the State, we would love to hear from you. Email your ideas or articles to akarwaj@molinostewart.com.au

For more information contact:

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