

WOODS RESERVE WEEDING PROJECT

Over the years, Bass Sydney has been involved in a number of tree planting days – mostly with Greening Australia. But when long time affiliates, the Springwood Anglers, came to us with an opportunity to assist in a riparian weeding project we could immediately see the benefits.

Weeds like lantana, balloon vine and willows are a real problem in Sydney catchments. They disperse readily and often proliferate to the exclusion of all other native vegetation types. The resultant monocultures impact on the food chain and that has the potential to impact our favourite fish. There are more obvious reasons to dislike them as well e.g. lantana is a bugger of a thing to have to bash through to get to your favourite bank based fishing spot; it's also a bugger of a thing to rip your lure back out of if you're a water based fisho with suspect casting skills.

The Springwood project was to be a collaborative effort with National Parks and Wildlife Service and was championed by Springwood member, Gary Blount and NPWS ranger, Dave Monaghan. We've known Gary for years (his name dominates our BassCatch trophy) but Dave was new to us – he's turned out to be a very likeable bloke.

The target patch was Woods Reserve on the lower reaches of the Grose River – an area that had, up until quite recently, been pristine natural bushland. Lots of tall blue gums, bracken fern by the water and a wide variety of native under storey shrubs.

This site was selected because of it's original vegetation values and because the situation looked recoverable when a lantana outbreak was first discovered. It has to be said though that we had our doubts by the time we turned up.

Our first session was in July 08. After meeting at the locked gate at the perimeter of the reserve we all drove down to the end of the formed track. From here it's a couple of minutes walk down a badly eroded fire trail and then into bushland before you approach the final drop to the river.

Our first look from this point revealed masses of lantana!

We weren't sure how we'd go but dove in anyway. With perhaps a dozen people at that first session, we were amazed at how much was achieved in 4 or 5 hours. Lantana is a large, spreading shrub but we soon learned that you could burrow straight in to the main stem, cut close to the ground and poison straight away. The whole plant could then be rolled away and stacked like haphazard hay bales.

It was a very happy group of workers that surveyed the fruits of their labour at the end of that day!

Just backing up a little, there was some paperwork to complete and some basic training before we started weeding. This was all done on site on the day. You sign up as a volunteer with national parks and receive some basic safety tips from Dave. We distributed poison to those with experience and were all given information on how to handle it. A few in the group have since completed "Chem Cert" training courtesy of NPWS and we expect that there will be opportunities for others to do this – a side benefit of the activity.

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The most important practical lesson we've learnt is that you must fully coat the exposed stem area within 10 seconds of cutting a lantana shrub. The lantana has a remarkable ability to quickly seal its wounds and won't be affected by the poison if you don't get it on quick.

We conducted further weeding sessions in August and September of 2008 and have followed up this off-season with sessions in May, June and August of 2009 (July was washed out). The progress has been impressive and the extent of native bush regeneration has been staggering.

This was probably most graphic when we first came back in the winter of 2009. Re-growth of lantana was quite limited and the only real pest that had to be dealt with was an explosion of tobacco bush in one relatively confined area (this was the legacy of a major tobacco "tree" that had been removed the year before).

Even more impressive than the relative absence of weed re-growth, was the explosion of bracken fern down along the river banks and other small shrubs under the tree line. We could really see reward for our efforts.

This year we have performed whatever re-work was necessary and continued the lantana removal by spreading out towards the boundaries of the reserve. We continue to make good progress and, in one session this year, had our numbers boosted by the presence of the Blue Mountains 4WD Club who also came to give a hand.

We have two more sessions planned for this year (before bass fishing becomes more important than weeding!) but are already looking forward to continuing with this project beyond 2009.

We're also looking forward to collaborating with NPWS and the Springwood boys to take on similar work in other patches of our local area.