

Merri Creek Environment Fund Project 2018

'Say G'day Trail – Filling the Gaps'

Heathcote Junction

PROJECT PARTNERS

Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) in partnership with Mitchell Shire Council.

BACKGROUND

The Say G'day Trail Reserve in Heathcote Junction is a 570m-long linear reserve, covering approximately 2.2ha. The reserve straddles the Great Dividing Range and rainfall drains to both the Merri Creek and Goulbourn River catchments. The reserve follows a gas pipeline easement and half the reserve was excavated in 2014 during pipeline duplication works. The remaining half is managed by Mitchell Shire Council and contains rare and threatened Valley Heathy Forest and Herb-Rich Foothill Forest vegetation, is rich in orchids and other wildflowers and supports significant invertebrate species.

In 2015 Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) was contracted by pipeline managers, the APA Group, to assess and recover a failing vegetation restoration of the pipeline duplication site. During 2016 and 2017 MCMC conducted detailed weed control throughout the pipeline site, implemented erosion control measures, sowed 4kg of native grass seed and planted over 9,000 grass plants propagated from locally-collected seed. These actions halted sheet erosion at the site and established a dense cover of indigenous grassy vegetation across the excavated area. While undertaking these works, MCMC staff confirmed the presence of the critically-endangered Golden Sun Moth, the endangered Yellow Ochre butterfly and the rare Dwarf Boronia, all previously unrecorded in that area. MCMC's works for APA Group at this site finished at the end of 2017.

PROJECT OUTLINE AND SUMMARY

In 2018 community donations to MCMC's public fund, the Merri Creek Environment Fund (MCEF), supported a project at the Say G'day Trail reserve, building on from earlier works for the APA Group. The works aimed to improve the habitat values of the restored area, in keeping with the character of remnant vegetation in the reserve, and to address several threats to the vegetation identified during previous works. MCEF funding paid for:

- Establishment of 700 wildflower plants with high self-regenerating potential to increase diversity of restored area and provide 'pollination partners' for remnant species lacking sufficient numbers to maintain viable populations.
- Development of a management plan for the reserve, to ensure Mitchell Shire Council's weed and fire management programs maintain or improve the site's significant environmental values.
- Design of a brochure to educate residents and trail users about the ecological values of the reserve and 'good neighbour' practices.
- Contributed to the hosting of a 'Secret Seven bus tour', which visited the trail and other reserves in the upper Merri catchment, and educated locals and other community members on the important values of these sites and threats to the sites' survival.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

Involving the Community

Fifteen participants attended the bus tour of the Upper Merri on 10th November 2018, as well as an additional two participants who joined the tour specifically for the Say G'day Trail section. Participants learned about the significant species inhabiting this reserve and the important role played by linear reserves like the Say G'day Trail as habitat corridors connecting fauna and flora in the Merri Creek catchment with those in the wider world.

A brochure was developed for circulation by Mitchell Shire Council to residents adjoining the Say G'day Trail, to inform residents of the environmental values protected by the reserve, give them with insight into the reasons behind Council management approaches, and provide them with information on ways to connect with the site and aid in its protection.

Planting

Approximately 700 wildflower plants were reintroduced to the restored section of the trail in August 2018. As of December 2018, subsequent survival of these plants was high. Many species such as Common Everlasting, Murnong and Hoary Sunray were flowering profusely, potentially acting as valuable genetic partners to the small number of remnant plants of these species remaining nearby. Communication with Council ensured that mowing crews avoided slashing the planting areas, allowing them to set seed. The management plan developed by Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) through this project provides direction for council mowing and weed control regimes, to enable these plants to persist and expand into the future.



Left: MCMC Ecological Restoration staff planting diverse wildflower species amid restored grassy vegetation along the Say G'day Trail pipeline easement.



Left: Bus tour participants visiting the Say G'day Trail on 10th November 2018. In this picture, the group is examining remnant vegetation containing Dwarf Boronia and hosting Golden Sun Moths and is learning about the habitat requirements of these species.



Left : Spotted Sun Orchid - Spring 2016.

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PROJECT FUNDING AND EXPENDITURE – 2018

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	EXPENDITURE
Planting preparation	Preliminary weed control	\$977
Planting	Including hole-digging, planting, plants and plant ordering	\$2,337
Planting Establishment	Chemical & non-chemical weed control	\$3,909
Bus tour	Includes bus hire, specialist tour leaders and food for attendees	\$1,293
Develop interpretive materials	Includes brochure for residents and management plan for council	\$2,571
TOTAL		\$11,087