



GORSE CONTROL NOW TIMELY AFTER THE FIRES

Out of the ashes of the Mickleham fires has risen an opportunity for landholders to tackle problematic gorse infestations. Regarded as one of the worst weeds in Australia, gorse provides shelter for pests such as rabbits and dramatically reduces stocking rates. Gorse also competes with native species along watercourses, often forming impenetrable barriers.

Department of Environment and Primary Industries Biosecurity Area Leader (Goulburn Broken Catchment) Greg Wood said the intense heat of the Mickleham fires may have destroyed many larger bushes, improving access for control measures.

“This will give people an opportunity to treat seedlings as they germinate in the coming seasons,” Mr Wood said.

Warren and Sue Werrett have a property at Willowmavin, which was at the centre of the Kilmore fire emergency. Their property was among the fortunate ones to escape the flames.

They had spent the past 13 years tackling a gorse infestation to transform the 13.4ha block into a biodiversity showpiece.

“We wanted a property where we could do regeneration work – this was our way of giving back to the community and justifying our existence on the planet to some minor degree,” Mr Werrett said. “We did realize the extent of the gorse infestation but didn’t realize the difficulty we would have in clearing it. It ended up taking years of removal by hand, chain saw, brush cutter and spot spray.”

The couple is among the regional landholders working within the Sunday Creek Sugarloaf sub catchment group gorse control project.

The project has attracted \$649,000 in Victorian Government funding since 2006 channelled via the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority.

The works are aligned with the Mitchell Shire's environmental strategy, and the Department of Environment and Primary Industries co-ordinated approach to weed control.

Warren and Sue have listed their property with the Land for Wildlife scheme to enhance biodiversity and wildlife habitat.

"We wear the sign on our fence with pride as we are giving habitat back to the wildlife," Mrs Werrett said. "We did not put any barbed wire on our fences and leave all the gates open so the kangaroos have easy access.

"We don't have any stock except for sheep, goats, chooks and a dog that were all rescue and rehomed animals."

Warren tackled the gorse infestation in an eroded gully firstly by hand, followed by applications of Grazon at the recommended rate in autumn and spring, before the plant flowers. Half of the herbicide costs were funded by the Goulburn Broken CMA.

Warren grubs out the dead bushes and, along with garden cuttings, lays them along the creek banks to help stop erosion.

The couple also received funding from the CMA towards planting out the gully with 2000 trees and understorey, and 400m of fencing to protect the old growth trees.

Mrs Werrett said the indigenous trees and wattles attracted many birds and animals, including honeyeaters, rosellas, wrens, cuckoo thrush, owls, bats, phascogales, echidnas and wallabies. Although the gully banks have now stabilised and water quality improved, ongoing monitoring of the site is critical.

"I have been at it for 10 years – spraying the regrowth and am still getting seedlings as they stay viable in the soil for 20 years," Mr Werrett said.

DEPI's Greg Wood said that over the past five years, DEPI compliance officers had inspected over 300 properties in the Kilmore, Glenaroua and Willowmavin areas.

"Most landowners realise their legal and moral responsibility in controlling gorse and as a result we achieve extremely high levels of voluntary compliance," Mr Wood said.

"Landowners are aware that gorse seed is long lived and the plant is not easy to eradicate, but they are generally prepared to participate in co-ordinated programs and do their bit."

