



<https://www.wallagalakeheightscare.com/>

Bega Valley Shire Council
Community Environmental Grant 2020/21
Report on the year's activities





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Heights Care – caring for Wallaga Lake Heights

Report on the year's activities 2020/21

Version: Final 1.0, 29 June 2021

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1. Summary of outcomes achieved

At dawn on New Year's Eve 2019 residents of Lake View Drive gathered on the road in the path of the Badja Forest fire. Over the next few weeks without power and communications, the community got together to form a group to:

- Care for the people of Wallaga Lake Heights, and
- Care for the immediate environment

Heights Care – caring for Wallaga Lake Heights – was born.

In the ensuing 18 months Heights Care has grown into a capable and energetic group, around 70% of Wallaga Lake Heights' households are subscribers, fifteen regularly working on the Land Care project to restore initially a 200m long section of Wallaga Lake Estuary foreshore.

While complying with restrictions imposed by COVID 19, the group has held community consultations, run workshops and issued 15 newsletters. The web site www.wallagalakeheightscare.com was created and is active.

This has been made possible by the Environmental Grant received from the Bega Valley Shire Council in July 2020, and the support of the Far South Coast Land Care Association.

2. Project and the activities and approaches used

The original grant application had five activities. Two of them – removal of identified hazards and cultural burning – were not approved. The grant for 2020/21 thus covered the following three major activities:

1. Weed identity and replacement workshops;
3. Removal of weeds and replacement; and
5. Administration.

With COVID restrictions, workshops proved challenging. Despite this, two highly effective events gave the Heights Care group insights into just how the tasks should best be approached.

The area covered and summary of work carried out is shown in [Appendix A](#).

2.1. Workshop 1, December 2021 – removal and mulching of extensive *Tecoma* and *Cotoneaster* growth

Volunteers had cut down extensive growth of *Tecoma* and *Cotoneaster*. The piles of branches and leaves needed either removal or mulching in situ. After looking at alternatives it was decided to use a Bobcat-mounted mulcher, and a local BVSC and FSCLA-approved contractor was engaged. Volunteers were on hand to ensure that the area was safe, damage to other planting was minimised and the large amount of mulch was spread optimally along the foreshore path and slope.



Bobcat- mounted mulcher processing and spreading felled Tecoma and Cotoneaster

A number of valuable lessons were learned as part of this process, including:

- The Bobcat-mounted mulcher and operator did the job quickly and efficiently;
- There was no damage to the surrounding growth of landscape;
- Mulched material laid along the lake side path retained water and later had to be repositioned by hand along the bank;
- Clear communication with neighbours is vital to avoid misunderstandings.

These will stand the group in good stead as we continue to deal with similar weed infestations in the vicinity.

2.2. Workshop No.2. June 2021 – Weed identification and removal

The Heights Care group is fortunate to have several highly experienced volunteers familiar with Land Care work and processes. With assistance from environmental officers from the Shire and Land Care contractors, weed removal and disposal has been a major success during the year.



Infestations of Elephant Grass and prickly pear, now removed and being monitored to eliminate any re-growth

To build on this, formalise a program for further weed action, and build skills for dealing with some of the more problematic weeds, a workshop was held in June 2021. The workshop, leader, Jens Birchall, was identified through FSCLA, and twelve volunteers attended an afternoon workshop.

The session started with an initial discussion of the challenges, work done to date and information the group thought it needed. This was followed by a survey along the lake side path looking at the environment, natural growth, weeds and planting already undertaken.

Conclusions from this event included the following:

- The lake's edge is a unique environment in the Bega Valley with indigenous plants rarely seen elsewhere in the Valley;
- Some steep areas with intense infestation by weeds will need professional spray-poisoning and clearing, before re-planting; we should approach the council and FSCLA about this;
- There is a 'right time' to treat the most pernicious weeds. If Turkey Rhubarb for example is cut down once it has flowered but before its seed pods have fully formed and ripened, it can be left in situ as the immature seeds will not sprout;

- Where some indigenous plants are over-represented (such as Pittosporum) and are providing a framework for climbing weeds such as Ipomea, it is acceptable to thin excess growth. This also promotes growth in the indigenous understory.

The group was encouraged that Jens found the work of the last ten months effective.

2.3. Volunteer sessions on weed removal, eradication, and replacement

The main work carried out was identification and removal of weeds, and replacement with plant and tree species native to Wallaga Lake. Before receiving the grant, Heights Care benefited from several visits by FSCLA, BVSC and contractors whose advice was invaluable. James Cook of Coastal Weeds, a contractor to FSCLA, memorably observed that several areas of the lake side were “textbook examples of weed infestation”.

A schedule of weeds removed and treated is given at [Appendix B](#).

A schedule of vegetation selected and planted is given at [Appendix C](#).



Before and after - Golden Shower choked by Ipomea, and the same bush after weed removal, also showing a previously concealed Banksia, now thriving.



Before and after – Ipomea choking trees over Great South Coast Walk, and after their removal.

The Heights Care steering group met weekly, to weed, clear, and plant. Regular planning meetings were held, to arrange purchases of plants, use of materials and to monitor progress.



Planning the work ... and getting on with it

3. Achievement of proposed project outcomes

Over the last year the group has grown in number and scope. Specifically the group's community engagement has included:

- more than six community meetings, either face to face or via Zoom;
- membership now includes 39 households, around 75% of the residences;
- a Landcare group has been established under the Far South Coast Landcare Association (FSCLA), who auspiced Heights Care for this grant;
- 16 newsletters to our local membership and around twenty external supporters;
- Web site <https://www.wallagalakeheightscare.com/> records the group's progress along the edge of Wallaga Lake;
- Heights Care participated in the Badja Forest fire edge community gatherings at The Crossing in late 2020; and
- Heights Care attended and presented at a Coastal Salt Marsh seminar in Bermagui in March 2021.

Around 20 Heights Care members have joined FSCLA and take part in a regular weekly working session along the western edge of Wallaga Lake Foreshore, with useful guidance from FSCLA. Several of our members with qualifications and extensive experience in rehabilitation of weed-infested land have provided invaluable guidance and leadership.

A renowned expert in the field is conducting a monthly bird survey, given in [Appendix D](#), which will in time tell us just how successful the program has been in restoring habitat.

The results are now starting to show with some of the plants first introduced now up to a metre tall.



Lake side path and embankment before removal of Tecoma and after planting of indigenous species

4. Lessons learnt and future opportunities

Over the year Heights Care has matured and developed its skills and ways of working. The results, outlined above, are evidence of the success of this approach. The group intends to continue, consolidating the work already done and extending north and south along the western foreshore of the Wallaga Lake Estuary.

In the longer term, the path to Murunna Point has patches of severe weed infestation that would benefit from this approach. Heights Care is not yet ready to take on a task of this size but may, with additional support and recruitment of volunteers, be able to do so in the future.

Even further ahead is the idea of a 'Wallaga Lake Edge' Landcare group that could include the Wallaga Lake Village, Akolele, Beauty Point, Fairhaven and other settled areas.

5. Use of funds and volunteer contribution

5.1. Budget and expenditure

Heights Care has monitored its spend closely with FSCLA providing valuable financial assistance. Administration was ably handled by FSCLA Bega, whose contribution was set at XX% of the grant budget. Table 1 below shows the financial reconciliation, showing a total spend of XX% of the grant budget

Table 1 – Heights Care budget and spend TO FOLLOW WHEN FINALISED

5.2. Volunteer contribution

In its grant application, Heights Care contracted to provide 550 volunteer-hours of effort to achieve the outcomes noted in this report. As required by the Land Care guidelines, the group has recorded attendance at working sessions since August 2020. Despite some items being removed from the scope and restrictions caused by COVID 19, the following results have been achieved:

- More than a dozen regular participants, all of whom have been briefed in first aid and risk avoidance as required by FSCLA;
- More than thirty weekly working sessions of around two hours each; and
- A total of more than 500 volunteer-hours recorded.

Additionally, one volunteer has gained First Aid Qualifications and chainsaw operations qualifications to support the work.

A summary of hours worked to 23 June is shown in table 2 below. This does not include the many hours of behind-the-scenes work such as bird surveys, seeking and purchasing goods, research, and report writing.

Number of working sessions	34
Total volunteer numbers	20
Regular volunteers (more than 20 hours)	10
Total volunteer-hours	530+

Appendix A: Area covered and summary of work carried out



Wallaga Lake Heights environmental project map, showing house numbers in Lake View Drive

Using the Lake View Drive house numbers as an index, the table below summarises the work undertaken as part of this grant. The area covered measures approximately 200m in length by 30 m wide between the lake and house boundaries.

Location behind property at Lake View Drive number	Weed eradication and vegetation management	Planting
19 - 21	Cut down and mulch enormous Tecoma. Commence careful removal of Madeira vine.	Extensive replanting of bank behind both properties.
23	Cut down and mulch large Cotoneaster.	

Location behind property at Lake View Drive number	Weed eradication and vegetation management	Planting
25 - 27	<p>Remove and treat extensive infestation by Prickly Pear.</p> <p>Remove and treat extensive infestation of Ipomea..</p> <p>Remove and treat Lantana</p> <p>Cut some dead vegetation to improve habitat, facilitate weed eradication and reduce fire load.</p>	<p>Commence planting in a very damp area with mixed success.</p> <p>Observe natural regrowth of Bladey grass once the Ipomea was removed.</p> <p>Note several small Banksia thriving once Ipomea removed.</p> <p>Frequently re-visit to maintain weed suppression.</p>
27 - 29	General removal of Ipomea, Cassia and Lantana.	Several dozen plants provided as contribution by resident.
31	General weeding.	Base for planting, weeding and planning meetings.
33 - 35	Major effort to remove and burn around 20 square metres of Elephant Grass up to 5m high Remove extensive Lantana.	Planting of tube stock.
37 – 39	General weeding.	Extensive planting on the bank below 39 to stabilise slope.

Appendix B: Major weed species removed and remaining

The worst infections of weeds were targeted first, specifically:

- Blackberry
- Cotoneaster
- Elephant Grass
- Ipomea (morning glory)
- Lantana
- Prickly Pea
- Tacoma
- Turkey Rhubarb.

We are doing regular sweeps over these areas removing weeds, cutting and pasting larger specimens.

Other weeds that are now being addressed include:

- Agapanthus
- Asparagus Fern
- Bridal Veil
- Cassia
- Fishbone fern
- Ginger Lilly
- Honeysuckle
- Madera Vine.
- Mickey Mouse Plant
- Moth Vine
- Olive Tree
- Spider Plan,

Appendix C: Planting undertaken

We have been taking our own cuttings and started successfully planting these, including those below.

Banksia Integrifolia
Carpobrotus glaucescens
Correa Dusky Bells
Dendrobium speciosum
Ficinia nodosa
Myoporum parviflorum
Prostanthera ovalifolia
Rhagodia
Scaevola aemula

Westringia

Purchased tube stock, largely from supplier Meryn from South Coast Flora as follows

Acacia longifolia
Banksia integrifolia
Boobialla
Carex
Correa reflexa
Dianella caerulea
Doeneed viicosa
Ficonia nodosa
Hardenbergia violecea
Helichrysum elatum
Indigofera australis
Juncus krausii
Kennedia coccinea
Lilly Pilly Acmena
Lomandra longifolia
Ozothamnus argophylla
Poa poiformis
Rhagodia candolleana
Viminaria juncea.

At the end of April 2021 the numbers of tubestock, cuttings and established items planted out were as follows:

Cuttings and transplanted plants	82
Tubestock	291
Tubes grown from cuttings or seeds	250
Cuttings growing not ready for planting out	160
TOTAL	783

Appendix D: Bird surveys

An independent survey carried out over several months by one of Heights Care's enthusiastic bird watchers revealed the following extraordinary population:

Black Swan	15 seen feeding adjacent to site
Chestnut Teal	4 feeding and roosting on rocks
Crested Pigeon	6 seen in taller trees
White headed Pigeon	6 in taller trees
Topknot Pigeon	1 bird in eucalypt
Australian Pelican	6 Feeding in adjacent waters
White faced Heron	4 feeding in adjacent waters 2 roosting
Little Pied Cormorant	10 feeding in adjacent waters 3 roosting on rocks
Great Cormorant	20 feeding in adjacent waters
Little Black Cormorant	6 feeding in adjacent waters 2 roosting on rocks
Great Egret	8 feeding in adjacent waters 3 roosting on bank
White Ibis	4 feeding in adjacent waters
Royal Spoonbill	5 feeding in adjacent waters 1 roosting on bank
Black Shouldered Kite	1 hunting over area and resting in banksia
Nankeen Kestrel	1 hunting over area
Swamp harrier	3 hunting over area
Australian Hobby	1 seen flying through area
Wedge tailed Eagle	2 young birds flying overhead
White Bellied Sea Eagle	4 adults and two young birds seen flying overhead
Grey Goshawk	1 white phase Morph seen hunting in area
Brown Goshawk	1 bird seen hunting and roosting in area
Whistling Kite	3 birds seen hunting over area
Yellow tailed Black Cockatoo	15 birds seen in area and 6 ripping dead trees apart
Sulphur Crested Cockatoo	6 seen flying over area
Galah	30 flying over and 8 resting in trees or on powerlines
Little Corella	40 birds flying over area
Rainbow Lorikeet	20 flying over area and feeding in adjacent trees
Musk Lorikeet	30 flying over and feeding in adjacent trees
King Parrot	2 briefly seen in trees
Eastern Rosella	4 flitted through area one morning
Satin Bowerbird	10 green birds using area and adjacent gardens
White Browed Scrubwren	4 feeding in area
Superb Fairy Wren	10 feeding in area
Brown Thornbill	6 feeding in area
Striated Thornbill	8 feeding in area
Yellow Thornbill	6 feeding in area
Yellow rumped Thornbill	4 feeding in area
Spotted Pardalote	2 heard calling in taller trees
New Holland Honeyeater	20 feeding in area and many more in adjacent gardens
Eastern Spinebill	10 feeding in banksias and adjacent gardens
Yellow Faced Honeyeater	Hundreds migrating through area and possibly feeding.
White Eared Honey eater	2 feeding and calling in area
Little Wattle bird	10 feeding in area
Red Wattle bird	6 feeding in area
Eastern Whipbird	6 feeding in undergrowth in area and adjacent gardens
Black faced Cuckoo Shrike	8 resting in trees
Golden Whistler	2 feeding in area
Grey Shrike Thrush	2 heard in area
Grey Butcherbird	2 hunting through area 1 with lizard
Australian Magpie	8 feeding in adjacent gardens and open spaces

Monthly surveys have been conducted and recorded with Birdlife Australia. A summary of a typical survey is shown below; full details of this survey, including photos and data on birds observed, are on BirdLife web site .

<https://birddata.birdlife.org.au/survey?id=3462372&h=c3345f50>

Survey Date	23/01/2021
Survey Time	08:03
Survey Duration	50 minutes
Survey Type	500m area search
Water Level (if applicable)	
Number of observers	3
All species recorded	Yes
Number of species observed	25

All bird survey information can also be found on the Heights Care website

<https://www.wallagalakeheightscare.com/plant-weed-bird-lists/bird-species> .