



Wallaga Lake Heights community newsletter 28, 3 October 2023

Heights Care and Land Care – how are we related and what about bushfires?

Heights Care came into being on New Year's Eve 2019 as the Black Summer fires swept through Cobargo and threatened the coast. Our geographic position and some fortuitous wind changes spared us over the next three weeks.

Almost four years after the start of the Black Summer season, a prolonged spell of good rains and, consequently, low risk of bushfire, we are once again faced with a hot dry summer.

Heights Care continues to have the dual role of protecting the welfare of the people and environment of Wallaga Lake Heights by acting as support and helping with information on any matters affecting the neighbourhood. At the same time Heights Care subscribers who are active with environmental work engage in Land Care activities.

The purpose of this newsletter is to clarify the reach and the limitations of both Heights Care and the Wallaga Lake Heights Land Care group, seek comments and invite you to a session on bushfire protection.

Heights Care – caring for the occupants and environment of Wallaga Lake Heights

The threat of fire alerted us to the potential danger and brought the Wallaga Lake Heights community together. Several community meetings were held resulting in Heights Care being established.

A small steering group was formed, with around 80% of Wallaga Lake Heights' households subscribing to our mailing list. Connections were made with external bodies and other community groups. Heights Care attended meetings at The Crossing, hosted visits from the Bermagui Fire Brigade and staff from Bega Valley Shire. These helped greatly in gathering knowledge, understanding the rules we must work under and defining responsibilities.

Wallaga Lake Heights Land Care Group is formed

La Niña's arrival in mid 2020 brought welcome relief from the threat of bushfire and Heights Care turned its attention to the environment. Around a quarter of our subscribers also became members of the Far South Coast Land Care Association (FSCLA), signing up to the Land Care charter and forming the Wallaga Lake Heights Land Care group. Over the next three years the group booked some impressive wins:

- Three small environmental grants from the Bega Valley Shire Council (BVSC);
- Purchasing plants, tools and materials;
- Hiring mechanical plant (with operator) for major weed removal;
- A census of the flora and fauna on the foreshore
- The services of qualified and experienced help for weed spraying where absolutely necessary;
- Better informing ourselves about the status, management and health of our lake– who knew they lived beside a classic example of an Intermittently Closed & Open Lake or Lagoon - an *ICOLL*.

The results have impressed FSCLA, BVSC and visitors. Invasive species have been replaced with mostly low-growing plants indigenous to the lake foreshore. Several dozen locals and visitors attended seminars on lake health and the indigenous history of the area. A web site www.heightscare.org.au has been produced.

The Land Care group plans to continue its excellent work, as part of Heights Care, of weeding, planting and now watering. In so far as removing weeds can reduce fire load it will continue with this work. But it cannot and should not become involved in the issues around bushfire protection.

The Land Care group will welcome new members with open arms. Meet behind 27 Lake View Drive, just north of the public right of way at 8 am on Thursdays in the summer. For more details please email admin@heightscare.org.au .

What happened to the bushfire threat?

In spring 2023 the fire risk on the RFS board at the northern entrance to Bermagui shifted, for the first time in three years, from a position off the bottom of the scale to **Green, MODERATE, – Plan and Prepare**. A few days later, in hot dry northerly winds that brought back memories of 2019/20, it rose briefly to **Yellow, HIGH – Be Ready to Act**. As flagged in Newsletter 27, a hot, dry summer is just around the corner.

Without being complacent, we need to be realistic about the relatively low fire risk in Wallaga Lake Heights. Recent development applications in the area have rated fire risk as 'LOW'. The RFS web site categorises Lake View Drive as "... *not identified as Bush Fire prone however you could still be affected by a bush fire*". This was confirmed by the Brigade in their 2020 visits, where they said that the main risk would be spot fires.

It is essential that we keep alert.

What is Heights Care's role?

Early Heights Care meetings raised concerns about fire load, both along the lake foreshore and on individual properties. Heights Care raised these with both the council and Bermagui Brigade - the latter advised that dead vegetation is less of a hazard on the ground. However as a volunteer group or simply as concerned citizens we must leave timber -whether living or dead - where it stands or lies. And we cannot do any kind of hot or 'cool' burn.

None of us is expert enough to advise on fire – that is rightly the responsibility of the RFS. However there is a mechanism for concerned individuals or groups to report concerns to local fire brigade, anonymously and confidentially,

<https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/plan-and-prepare/know-your-risk/Bush-fire-hazards-and-your-property/reporting-a-bush-fire-hazard2>

The Bermagui Rural Fire Brigade has accepted an invitation to meet with Heights Care, brief us on fire risks, advise on preparing personal bushfire plans, answering our questions and sharing a friendly cuppa. There will be an opportunity to share experiences and fire plans and, if people wish, arrange further community meetings

Please let us know if you would be interested in attending a session with the Bermagui Brigade and, if so, what days of the week and times of the day would suit you best.

We hope this is helpful and are always on the look-out for new members. If you or anyone you know would like to join, have any comments or queries please contact us at admin@heightscare.org.au .

Best wishes, Heights Care steering group,

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