2002 Protecting Our Places Grant $19,800

ARAKWAL LAND RESTORATION PROJECT

overview of the project

In the Arakwal Land Restoration Project, a weed-choked site in Byron Bay was cleared and revegetated. Known as the Ironbark site, it is an area of about 2 hectares owned by the Arakwal Clan, and is the birthplace of several Elders. The project succeeded in eradicating many significant weeds, as well as providing valuable training for three grandchildren of Elder 'Aunties' Lorna Kelly, Linda Vidler and Dulcie Nichols.

Working on the site

The site was originally a forest of Swamp Mahogany and Ironbark that had become degraded over the past 50 years. It had been used as an unofficial dump for household rubbish and garden waste. This neglect had introduced and encouraged many weeds. As well as the practical aims to eradicate weeds and restore the site, this project has brought an increased cultural awareness to the young Arakwal people and has reconnected them with their land.

how the project was carried out

The work was carried out by three young Arakwal descendents with the aid of a bush regeneration expert. The three men undertook courses in occupational health and safety, first aid, machinery use and seed collection and propagation to gain skills to undertake the project.

Approximately 12 species of weeds were targeted, each being treated according to best practice methods for eradication. Privet, for example, was cut low and painted with undiluted herbicide. The scale of the rubbish problem was revealed to be extensive once the land clearing started. The project manager negotiated with the Council and National Parks for help with the rubbish removal. Two signs to encourage respect for the site and to prevent vandalism and further rubbish dumping were designed and installed.

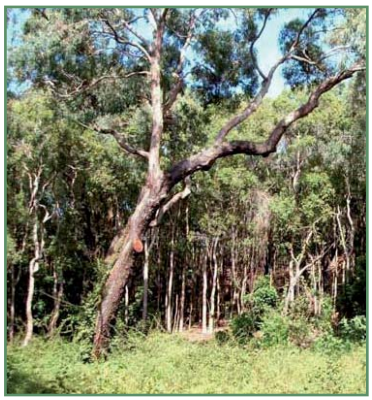
outcomes now and in the future

Good progress was made in eliminating a number of species of weeds such as Coral Trees, Madiera Vine, Winter Senna, Bamboo and Lantana from the Ironbark site. The Arakwal Corporation is committed to continuing the weed removal work, as some are impossible to completely eradicate in the short term. Seed reserves, Bamboo runners and fern fragments will continue to cause infestation into the future. The Corporation will also seek to have a boundary fence built, which should help prevent rubbish encroaching on the site.

Since the project ended, the group have met at the site every six months to assess work needed and carry out maintenance weeding. They have conducted a further clean-up day with the help of National Parks, to remove large amounts of problematic rubbish such as old car bodies, bathtubs and sinks.

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

This has been a successful restoration project that has also had a positive impact on the local community. The participants have received praise from Elders and officials for the transformation of an overgrown, hostile site to what is now an open and welcoming environment. The three young men who worked on the project have acquired valuable skills for their future lives and are now employed locally.



The rehabilitated site

There were minimal difficulties implementing the project. One problem arose with determining the boundaries of the site. Long term neglect had left the boundaries unclear and there was a dispute with a neighbour. This was resolved by employing a surveyor. The scale of the accumulated rubbish was an unexpected challenge for the team, as it had remained hidden under soil and weeds for many years. The excess rubbish caused a delay in clearing the site as the amount was too much for the small team to handle unaided within the project timeframe. The team was able to negotiate help from the Council and National Parks and the rubbish was removed.

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