

RESTORING THREATENED LOWLAND HABITATS IN THE BRUNSWICK VALLEY

overview of the project

By adopting a strategic approach to catchment rehabilitation, Brunswick Valley Landcare Group restored 12.3 kilometres of riparian zone and 8.9 hectares of wildlife corridor throughout the Brunswick Valley. The group has developed a strong catchment-wide rehabilitation program by building the capacity of a number of smaller Landcare Groups and consolidating them under one umbrella.

Clearing of native vegetation along the catchment's creeks and rivers had resulted in many of the watercourses being affected by erosion, sedimentation, declining water quality and encroaching weeds. Brunswick Valley Landcare recognised there was a need to consolidate and enhance the work of a number of small groups working in close proximity to each other. The resulting model has a united and strategic approach to rehabilitation while allowing small groups access to equipment, expertise and qualified labour for their projects.



Rainforest restoration site

how the project was carried out

At least three sites were selected for restoration each year, with 10 sites covered during the three year project. The locations targeted for rehabilitation were chosen to provide connectivity between existing sites and enhanced benefits for the catchment as a whole. Action plans were developed for each site by qualified bush regenerators to provide direction for future work. Site stabilisation and primary rehabilitation work was completed at each site by bush regenerators before training local groups.



Planting day at Heritage Park

A project officer was employed one day a week during the first year of the grant, and this was extended to two days a week for the second and third years. The project officer worked to expand the activities of the Landcare Group, facilitate a monthly training program and consolidate local groups under the Brunswick Valley Landcare umbrella.

Through the monthly training, bush regenerators worked with over 700 volunteers to develop skills in best practice bush regeneration, working with threatened species, weed control, native plant identification, corridor and riparian restoration issues and project management. Monitoring and evaluation programs were established at each site and volunteers were trained in how to continue monitoring their achievements.

outcomes now and in the future

The major outcome has been the development of a well-planned rehabilitation program for the Brunswick catchment with achievable goals and access to a skilled labour force. Two endangered ecological communities were improved and the enhancement of habitat for nineteen threatened flora and three threatened fauna species resulted. Over three years, 2,632 young trees and shrubs were planted to complement natural regeneration.

Brunswick Valley Landcare now has 20 local groups working under its umbrella, including previously existing smaller Landcare

groups and newly formed groups. The skill levels of these groups has been increased through monthly training workshops, the opportunity to work with professional bush regenerators, and though the distribution of training manuals to all volunteers.

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

The contribution of professional bush regenerators has been an important part of this project, however Brunswick Valley Landcare has found that it is becoming more difficult to access qualified regenerators. The rising demand for bush regenerators has increased hourly charge out rates resulting in a reduction to the amount of on-ground work that can be achieved.

The overarching Landcare group has learned there are significant advantages in maintaining a close working relationship with other stakeholders, such as Byron Shire Council and Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority. The group has aligned its work with strategic plans such as the Council's Biodiversity Strategy and the Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority Strategic Plan. The project officer was invited to become a member of Council's Biodiversity Strategy Working Group, which allows Brunswick Valley Landcare to contribute to strategy development, provide community feedback and gain Council's assistance with work sites and community education. The project has helped in achieving several of the biodiversity targets in the Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority Catchment Action Plan, and by partnering with Council and adjacent Landcare groups Brunswick Valley Landcare has successfully gained contracts for Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority vegetation projects.

As a result of this project Brunswick Valley Landcare has transformed itself from a fledgling group with limited skills and resources into a professional group that is now a major partner with Byron Shire Council in implementing catchment wide restoration and community education projects.