

WILLOW MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE WOLLEMI WILDERNESS/NATIONAL PARK

overview of the project

The Wollemi Wilderness is an unspoilt 600,000 hectare section of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. The free-flowing and relatively unpolluted Colo River, running for 60 kilometres through the Wollemi, is of great significance to the ecological integrity of the whole area. After a bushwalker sighted willows along the river, the Friends of the Colo embarked on a plan to eradicate these weeds and to map possible sources of reinfestation. They prepared a strategic plan to ensure ongoing control of willows and conducted a Willow Awareness campaign in the community. With the enthusiastic help of the National Parks and Wildlife Service and many volunteers, the group has made substantial progress in eradicating this aggressive weed, removing over 12,000 willows from a 190 kilometre stretch of the river and its tributaries. It has also provided valuable training for many people in Landcare.

how the project was carried out

The species causing the most concern for the group was the black willow, an extremely invasive species spread by fine wind-borne seeds. Early intervention was considered vital to prevent an unmanageable infestation from developing. The group tackled the problem by making five multi-day trips into the National Park, using helicopters, boats and rafts to gain access to difficult terrain. Privately owned areas outside the park were easier to reach, and team members visited these sites once a month for two years. They treated the willows by injecting herbicide into freshly made gashes in the trunks.



Treating small willows

The project promoted Willow Awareness, a campaign to inform landholders and the wider community about the benefits of willow eradication. This was achieved using a combination of communication methods including a fact sheet, print and televised media coverage, signs and two Friends of the Colo websites.

outcomes now and in the future

The three most important outcomes from the project were the substantial treatment of the willow problem, the establishment of an ongoing management and monitoring program, and development of a pool of resources and contacts for future work. The team mapped 120-130 kilometres of river and treated most of this. A core of eight volunteers has formed a group called the Willow Warriors. This energetic group has expanded its actions, taking willow control further to other rivers. They have started treatment on the Grose River, which will eliminate a source of reinfestation for the Colo River. They also help to train new volunteers. The

enthusiasm of the many volunteers will ensure ongoing success in keeping willows and other weeds out of the Colo River system. Regular monitoring programs will continue, with all areas along the Colo and its sub-catchments thoroughly examined until there is no reinfestation occurring.

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

With the exception of three properties, the group has successfully eradicated willows in the Colo catchment. Individuals and the group as a whole have received numerous awards for their work in eradicating this threat to the Wollemi wilderness area. Recognition has come from councils, NSW Landcare and the National Weeds Conference of 2003, and the NSW Department of Agriculture has used the program in case studies on weed management. The Willow Awareness program has been particularly successful in building relationships that will provide advice and expertise to benefit future work.

The group met some challenges arising from the ambitious scale of the project. There were problems finding appropriate and reasonably priced insurance for the activities on private land. However, this will not be a problem in the future as the



Using rafts to access remote areas in the National Park

Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Management Authority will organise their insurance. Problems occasionally arose in gaining easy access to private land, with two owners denying access. Most owners, however, have been happy to participate.