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Biddip



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Newsletter of the Toodyay Friends of the River

Volume 16, Issue 3



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We gratefully acknowledge the Ballardong, Yued and Whadjuk Peoples as the traditional custodians of this land and duly respect a deep and unbroken connection to their cultural, physical and spiritual existence. We pay respect to their Elders, both past and present, and emerging.

Presidents message by Robyn Taylor

Here we are already in December and its almost Christmas! I'm sure many of our members are looking forward to a well-earned break after a particularly busy and, at times, trying year. Apart from the disruptive effects of COVID still being with us, there have been the ongoing environmental and conservation issues that we have chosen to be part of through our support of other groups such as the Julimar Conservation and Forest Alliance. Currently we are working on a joint submission with the latter group, the Toodyay Naturalists Club and the Toodyay Historical Society on the Draft Forest Management Plan 2024-33. The Plan includes the Northern Jarrah Forests that are partly within our Shire and subject to mining exploration.

For this year's Toodyay Agricultural Show the Wheatbelt Avon Bird Group joined us and the Toodyay Naturalists Club in the Environment Matters marquee. The Bird Group has been undertaking surveys in the Julimar forest as part of joint efforts to record existing flora and fauna in the forest. A large excellent map on display revealed the waterways that flow through the Julimar which in turn feed into the Avon and Swan Rivers.

Work has continued on our regular projects such as the Bilya Walk Track. A great addition has been the installation of wheelchair and pram access at Millards Pool from the carpark. As this part of the Track is sealed, and a good stretch for walking and enjoying views of the Avon, it has been much appreciated by those who may find the bush tracks challenging. There has also been the installation of a hidden track counter to record the number of walkers, **and setting up another bat box. [yes?]**

The West Toodyay Wander track is well underway and will be a great addition to the town's walking tracks. These will have their starting point at the Hub, currently in the design stage in collaboration with the Noongar Kaartidijin Aboriginal Corporation.

We had a good turn up at our end of year Celebration Breakfast and AGM in Duidgee Park in November. President Robyn decided not to renominate, and the role has now been placed in the very capable hands of former Vice President Jenny White. Jenny took over to conduct the General Meeting that followed and the planning session for 2024. It promises to be another exciting and rewarding year.

In closing I want to extend my sincere thanks to all the members of the Committee for their dedication, commitment and good humour; with very special thanks to Bridget, Secretary Extraordinaire who made the role of President that much easier.

With best wishes to everyone for the festive season and may 2023 bring you joy, peace and happiness.

Preserving for Perpetuity

by Greg Warburton

COVENANTING for CONSERVATION

OCCASIONALLY, in life the stars line up and something exceptional happens. This was very much the case with the recently gazetted Shire Conservation Covenant.

In my role with the Shire of Toodyay I am responsible for the management of a range of different land tenures including Shire owned free hold land. This land consists mainly of smaller vacant blocks within the town area such as that adjoining River Hills Estate and the Sports & Recreation Centre.

The Shire owned Lot 108 Hibbertia Place however is over 120 hectares and covers the rugged terrain between the Golf Course and the boundaries of Majestic Height properties (see map).

Historically, this lot was owned by a brick making company who had acquired it for its clay extraction prospectively. At some point this company relinquished ownership and it was acquired by the Shire as a free hold title.

The terrain restricted access and prohibited any subdivision or building development. The only visitors it seemed were intrepid bush walkers and nature enthusiasts.

Then in 2009, on a catastrophic fire rating day the infamous “Toodyay Bushfire” tore through much of this land. Lot 108 was a scene of intensive fire response and protracted suppression and mop up operations.

...cont Page 4



Left. Map of Shire of Toodyay Reserve that has been approved for a 'Conservation Covenant'. Within this reserve can be found one of the 'natural wonders of Toodyay'.

Preserving for Perpetuity ... cont.

With the loss of vegetation on the upper slopes subsequent rainfall events caused severe water erosion. This unimpeded water run off cut through the golf course fairways creating huge ruts and causing serious safety hazards.

These high velocity flows carried sediment loads off the hills, across private land into Harper Brook and the Avon River. Gradually, re-growth stabilized the slopes but rain water still sheds from these slopes.

One of the effects of this erosion was to widen and expose a remarkable gully of Toodyay Stone. Although trekking in is difficult the beautiful colours, sheer rock walls and waterholes make a visit well worth the effort.



Left: A bulldozer restoring the fire access tracks through the reserve

The steep eroded gullies and natural stone-lined waterways in winter would be most spectacular.

Photo: Greg Warburton

The erosion required the re-establishment and extension of fire breaks and accesses of Lot 108. It was no easy task, necessitating deft bulldozer operation precise erosion control work. Thanks to Fire Mitigation Services Ltd. this work was expertly completed.

I had become increasingly familiar with Lot 108 during my on-foot surveys. I'd gaze out in wonder at the stately Powder bark Wandooos that covered the Laterite breakaways and think, "This place should be a Nature Reserve"

Then, a couple of years ago during an application process for clearing permits intended for Shire road widening works, I discovered that Lot 108 qualified to be a conservation covenant!

I put forward a proposal which was supported by the Environmental Advisory Committee and Council. Hugo deVos the Shire Planner was able to engage a specialist legal firm and the wheels were put in motion.

Preserving for Perpetuity ... cont.



Above: Some of the bushland within this magnificent Shire asset.

Photo: Greg Warburton

It was an extensive process requiring wide-ranging communication, correspondence and consultation but ultimately resulted in Lot 108 converting to a:

“Covenant to retain and protect native vegetation in perpetuity, being set aside for the protection and management of vegetation under section 30B of the Soil and Conservation Act 1945”

Personally, it has been a proud accomplishment to achieve such an enduring benefit for the environment and community. Certainly, it is a feather in the cap for the Shire as few local governments could boast such an outstanding conservation asset. For here, ancient landforms, spectacular views and wildflower blooms abound. Most importantly, critical habitat for wildlife will be preserved and protected forever.

Editor’s Note on this article:

The Part played by Greg Warburton in the vesting of this Conservation Covenant can’t be underestimated. Congratulations Greg on helping to protect our waterways at their source - in the catchment.

“FOCUS on FRIENDS”

The Toodyay Friends of the River

Background

THE Avon River is the longest river in southern WA. Its catchment drains some 120,000 square kilometres, roughly the size of Tasmania. This watercourse is sometimes referred to it as a “back-to-front river” because its catchment is predominately flat. Whereas the downstream end cuts its way through the great, granite barrier of the Darling Ranges. Confined by this ravine the flow can become a violent torrent with churning rapids that are a magnet for white water enthusiasts. From here, the river empties into the calm waters of the Swan River Estuary.

The sub catchments of the Avon system are mostly formed by chains of salt lakes and clay pans and include the Mortlock and Lockhart Rivers and the Yilgarn River extending eastwards to the goldfields. During significant rain events these tributaries can link-up sending flood waters down the Avon River. This river has a history of flooding, the highest recorded level was in 1872 and is regarded as a one in 100 year event. The effect of regular flooding caused early Toodyay settlements to relocate to higher ground.

The Avon catchment is dominated by broad scale agricultural production namely cropping and grazing. Most of this land was cleared during the years following Second World War. The effect of removing the extensive woodlands caused water tables to rise and bring salt to the surface rendering vast areas unproductive. In addition, increasing erosion, weed invasion and dramatic declines in biodiversity have resulted.

From the early days of European settlement in the Toodyay district livestock grazed along the banks of the River and its tributaries. Until comparatively recent times, industrial waste and sewerage was pumped into the river. Locals considered the river was a convenient place to discard rubbish and abandon cars. Farmers would dump unwanted machinery, chemical drums and fencing materials and Councils located their landfill sites on the river banks.

But these environmentally destructive activities would escalate with the commencement of the so-called River Training Scheme (RTS) of the 1950's and 60's. This was to be a tragic example of the consequences of poor environmental decision making, comparing in its folly to the introduction of the Cane Toad. The then State government sanctioned this ill-conceived plan in order to reduce the effects of flooding. Almost the entire length of the river was bulldozed and ripped over a 20 year period but no appreciable flood mitigation was achieved. Instead, it caused the mobilization of sediments that filled in the chain of previously deep, permanent river pools.

Erosion, loss of habitat, salinization of river water and invasion of weeds were other consequences. Chemical and fertiliser run off has reduced the water quality of the Avon to an “unusable” condition. Many had warned of the environmental and social costs of this program especially the late Jim Masters OAM who tirelessly campaigned to protect the river from the RTS. Adding to the heartbreak, no heed at all was paid to the significance of the river to the Ballardong people through whose land the river flowed. They call it *Gulgulgar Bilya* and it is sacred to them.

Genesis

By the 1980's however, amid rising awareness and concern for the natural environment communities along the Avon River began to ask what could be done to stop the decline. There was a strong desire to restore the ecological and cultural values of the Avon River.

The Avon River Management Authority (ARMA) was constituted under the 'Waterways Conservation Act 1976' with responsibility and authority to manage the River. It was required to work towards developing a Management Plan and had varying roles and powers, including a pollution control agency.

The then Regional Manager of the Waterways Commission suggested to Wayne Clarke, a member of ARMA, to look at developing a ‘friends’ group in the Toodyay area. Advertisements in the local community news paper resulted in an inaugural meeting of three community members in Toodyay's Duidgee Park on 10th December 1994. These founding members, Wayne and Desrae Clarke and Bob Frayne continue their active roles to this day.

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“FOCUS on FRIENDS” ... cont.

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The specific aim of this initiative was to involve the community in the rehabilitation of the River and its tributaries. The process would include the control of feral plants, the rehabilitation of the foreshores and floodplain by endemic plantings and the removal of rubbish within the riverine environment. With further advertising the group expanded in membership and consolidated its management structure achieving incorporation four years later.

Since then the group has gone from strength to strength consistently achieving successful conservation and community engagement outcomes. A large part of this fruitful journey has been the dedication of its membership. At the helm is a strong Management Committee which includes a Project Officer and a media position. incorporation a strong Management Committee which includes a Project Officer and a media position.

Engagement

TFOR has long understood the benefits of effective community engagement and does this in a number of ways. The group works hand in glove with the Shire and local heritage focussed organisations with cross membership being common. A sub-group of TFOR is the Seed Orchard Group where volunteers lead by former Landcare Officer, Bethan Lloyd gather providence seed and propagate thousands of seedlings annually for local revegetation and rehabilitation projects.

Traditionally, a monthly article in the local newspaper was (and still is) an effective way of informing local residents and members of planned activities, meeting times and dates etc. Nowadays, a website and social media is where many go for information. The group also produce a newsletter called “Biddip” that is available in electronic form and hard copy. Articles and photos are contributed by members. These issues not only disseminate information but also chart the history of the Club.

Every year Toodyay stages its ever popular Agricultural Show and local conservation groups band together to present an “Environmental Matters” display. During the day hundreds of people pass through providing an exceptional opportunity for TFOR to engage with the public.

Winter tree planting is always on the annual program and community members including school children are invited to participate in these events. Fund raising activities provide a valuable contribution to the Club’s running costs and also raise its public profile.

Apart from close associations with local community groups the TFOR participates with other agencies and committees. The Avon Descent organisers call on TFOR to assist with logistics, river access points and parking etc. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services consult with TFOR during their seasonal bush fire mitigation work along the river. The formation of a local Aboriginal Corporation, Noongar Kaartdijin Aboriginal Corporation (NKAC) and the adoption of a Shire Reconciliation Program has seen TFOR become a key player in the interpretation and care of significant sites along the River.

However, it was the group’s association with the Department of Water’s Northam Office over many years that provided great impetus and legacy. Projects and activities implemented by the Department included “Rivercare” workshops, revegetation, erosion control and river pool dredging. This Department is no longer based in the region but the River Recovery Plans they published and the expertise, support and dedication of the staff from that time have left a lasting legacy. The Department also hosted the Avon Waterways Committee. Now replaced by a community initiative under the name CARE (Conserving the Avon River Environment) which currently provides representation and a forum for groups and stakeholders throughout the catchment.

Projects

Over the years TFOR has embarked upon numerous specific projects. Some have been funded externally, many were sustained by the Department of Water. Local sponsors have contributed and the Shire Council recognises the value of supporting the group’s activities.

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“FOCUS on FRIENDS” ... cont.

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In 2003 TFOR successfully negotiated a management agreement on 6 hectares of river side land transferred from the Lloyd Family to the State of WA. Named Lloyd Reserve it now serves as a useful location to show case TFOR’s river care and amenity improvements.

TFOR has taken advantage of Greencorp, Green Army and prisoner work crews to assist with the bigger tasks. A good example has been the ongoing and gargantuan task of removing Tamarisk *Tamarix parviflora* infestations.

TFOR has installed monitoring points and these are used as strategic reference locations for members to record and report riparian and river conditions.

Winter tree and sedge planting is locked into the yearly program and encompasses not only new sites but infill plantings, ground preparation and weed control.

Specific seasonal water bird surveys are conducted often in conjunction with Birdlife Australia. Sectional surveys and inspections have been carried out by members who “adopt” a part of the river. Recording problems or threats to the river like the presence of invasive weeds such as Bridal Creeper *Asparagus asparagoides* and Castor Oil *Ricinus communis* plant provides invaluable data.

Storm water runoff from the town catchment into the river has long been a concern for TFOR. In 2020 the group secured funding to construct an impressive system of rock pitching, weirs and culverts below the outlet of the main town drain. Now, the previous ongoing erosion issues have been eliminated and a constructed wet land reduces the discharge of nutrients and pollutants into the river.

Work

Central to the TFOR ethos are the regular monthly working bees. These are scheduled for Sunday and Monday mornings and allow for more members to participate. The group is well equipped with a work trailer and a large range of tools. Equipment includes water quality testing apparatus, chainsaws, whipper snippers, augers, chemical spraying units and tree planters. All this is stored in a purpose built shed which is shared with the Seed Orchard Group. At the end of the physical task members often socialise and there is always a sense of achievement and enjoyment. General and Management Committee meetings are held on a regular basis.

Tracks

TFOR has long known the importance of connecting people to the river to raise awareness of its environmental and heritage value. One of the most effective ways to do this is through walk tracks. With funding from Lottery West and the Department Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries TFOR volunteers created the Bilya Walk Track. Starting at Duidgee Park it follows the river bank upstream 6 kilometres to the pioneer Cemetery at Nardie. Walkers can safely experience the riparian environment and various special sites along the way.

The track features interpretive signage, seating, rest stations, foot bridges, a picnic shelter, canoe ramp, a bird hide and memorials. A disabled access point to the track has been recently installed. Since its creation nearly 10 years ago the track has become increasingly popular with residents and visitors alike. A guide brochure was produced by TFOR and made available at the Visitors Centre. Walk Tracks are now core business for the TFOR with several other spur tracks and loops being developed. Currently, planning for a “Trail Hub” is underway where additional information and amenity will be provided for walkers. Recently, TFOR presented these initiatives and achievements at a successful community Walk Track Forum.

Future

TFOR now approaches 30 years since that very first meeting. Its long track record of achievement was recognized by the Shire at the Australia Days awards in 2022 with the presentation of the Community Group of the Year Award.

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“FOCUS on FRIENDS” ... cont.

...From Page 8

With the limited capacity of government agencies to manage our waterways and increasing pressures on our natural environment the role of TFOR and similar groups are more crucial than ever. Challenges lay ahead however, with increasing membership and recognition TFOR is in a strong position and looks ahead with confidence.

Reflection

An iconic location on the Avon River is a place known as “Cobbler Pool” named for the species of fish that were once caught there. Sadly, the Cobbler *Tandanus bostocki* have gone reminding us of the memories of former TFOR President, Gaven Donegan,

“I was born on the Avon River at Cobbler Pool in 1941. I enjoyed learning about the River, its moods and the creatures it supported. The River pools were wide, deep and beautiful. My Dad said to me “Always respect the River”.

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“FOCUS on FRIENDS” ... cont.



*Top: Monday Working Bee members at the Pelham Brook outlet, undertaking repairs.
Above: Monday Working Bee members Gary and John tackle Caster Oil plant (*Ricinus communis*) in riparian vegetation.*

*Top: Newly upgraded Pelham Brook outlet project standing up to the test.
Centre and bottom: Bilya Walk Track Harper Brook crossing under water during the 2017 flood (centre); after the flood (above).
Photos: Greg Warburton*

TFOR Responds to the Draft Forest Management Plan

by Bridget Leggett

In October the Department of Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) released its Draft Forest Management Plan 2024-2033 for public comment. The plan covers the area from Lancelin to Denmark and includes the Julimar Forest and Toodyay.



TFOR has sent in its own response to the plan, with Liz Kington doing quite a bit of the heavy lifting for that submission – thank you Liz. Our members have also been actively involved in writing individual responses and contributing to other submissions including ones from the Toodyay Naturalists' Club, the Toodyay Historical Society, the Julimar Conservation and Forest Alliance, and Conserving the Avon River Environment.

One of the most positive elements of the plan is the priority given – in the text at least – to follow through on commitments made in the previous two ten-year plans to upgrade protection of over 320,000 hectares of forest to National Park or Conservation Park status. If this priority is honoured in full, then Julimar State Forest would become Julimar Conservation Park. But given this 'priority' is not included in the strategic goals or in any of the Key Performance Indicators, many of us are not overly confident it will happen. We recommended DBCA:

'commit to having the new National Parks and Conservation Parks and other 2014-23 FMP commitments gazetted no later than the mid-term review of the FMP in 2028.'

and

'add a new strategic goal to permanently protect the CAR [Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative] reserve system and increase its size and connectivity.'

The TFOR submission detailed the failure of the plan to recognise the role of forests in protecting river health and potable water supplies. As we noted: 'Protection of intact forest ecosystems has been proven to be the only effective management for water resource protection.' We drew attention

to the impact of land clearing on water resources in WA, particularly the impacts of mass clearing of the Eucalypt woodlands in the Wheatbelt, citing the Avon River as an example.

We recommended that the final plan

'Include an independent section on potable water source (and their catchment protection). Include additional forest overlay mapping of all catchments, potable water sources (e.g. reservoirs), aquifers, rivers, streams, wetlands and water-bodies, with additional information relating to water quality and riparian health.'

The TFOR submission also responded to many specific issues covered in the plan, again making connections between suggested activities and their impacts of river systems and riparian zones, and arguing for these implications to be specifically recognised in the final Plan.

As the title suggests, this is a management plan so it treats the forest as a commodity. Sadly, it is not a forest protection plan, although many submissions including ours will be trying to edge the plan in that direction.

**Newsletter of the
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**WORKING FOR THE HEALTH OF THE
AVON RIVER**



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and to Wheatbelt NRM for publishing the Biddip news



**wheatbelt
natural resource
management**

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Drummond House Environment and History Centre display board project.

Over the preceding years the residence has had a variety of users including a haberdashery store, a mining office and a real estate premises.

A latter business had erected four chipboard display cabinets on outside walls of the building that had suffered severe weathering to become a safety hazard; the cabinets requiring replacement. The Shire was approached to allow replacement of the fittings with assistance offered from TNC, THS and TFOR.

The photo is of the 'thank you' to the Toodyay Op Shop Ladies by the Shire CEO, the Shire President, the Bendigo Bank Manager, and members and supporters of the three community groups.

Maurie Jackson (TFOR), Jenny White (TFOR), Robyn Taylor (TFOR, TNC & THS), John White (TFOR), Suzie Haslehurst (Shire CEO), Kirsten Barrack (Manager, Bendigo Bank), Rosemary Madasci (Shire president), (Op Shop ladies) Jenny Hildred, Jan Reeve, Bel Rowe.